Partners for Forever Families:
A Public-Private-University Initiative and Neighborhood-Based Approach\(^1\)
Final Report
Year 5
2012-2013

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In collaboration with project partners from Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS), Beech Brook, Adoption Network Cleveland and the Neighborhood Agencies (East End Neighborhood house, Harvard Community Services Center, Murtis Taylor Human Services System, & University Settlement). We are indebted to Gary O’Rourke from CCDCFS for his assistance with the administrative data for this evaluation. Also, the following CCDCFS employees provided data or other resources in helping us evaluate the project this year: Jacqueline McCray, Mary Mitchell, Bev Torres, Lisa Stevens-Cutner, Trista Piccola, & Melanie Zabukovec.

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I. Executive Summary

*Partners for Forever Families* was a 5 year Adoption Opportunity Grant from the Children’s Bureau of the Department of Health and Human Services, designed to focus on permanency for older children and sibling groups. Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services was one of eleven in a national cohort awarded the grant proposed to improve CFSR outcomes through the diligent recruitment of relatives and for siblings to meet federal performance expectations. We expected to: (1) increase the percent of children who exit for adoption in less than 24 months from 25.1% to match the state’s percent of 37.2% or higher; (2) reduce the median length of stay from 41.5 months to less than 27.3 months; and, (3) increase the number of children who are teens who have permanency and who have been in care for 24 months from the current 21.9% to 29.1% or higher.

To accomplish these objectives, we planned to: (a) recruit, support, approve and stabilize relatives/kin as resource families from the time children enter temporary care; (b) recruit, support, approve and stabilize resource families for sibling groups; (c) develop a protocol to resolve sibling issues early to promote keeping siblings together; and, (d) return to kin for children who are 17 and older for whom no permanency resource has been found.

We planned a comprehensive multi-faceted recruitment and service program within the first year of funding during Phase 1. In Phase 2 we implemented a multi-faceted resource family recruitment and service program. The cooperative agreement with the Children’s Bureau emphasized a focus on many systemic issues that generated several changes in practice and policy during the course of the grant.

The interventions used in this grant were demonstrations of different types of recruitment, focused on the diligent recruitment in communities where high numbers of children
were coming into care. The types of recruitment--general, child-centered, and targeted--were conducted with an array of partners and within a geographical design that allowed us to compare our targeted region to another comparable region in the county. Several large-scale activities, such as a legal symposium for judges, attorneys and social workers, were offered each year of the grant. This was balanced by neighborhood-based recruitment events that included gospel fests, church dinners, and a reward program for foster families recruiting other foster families. The neighborhood collaborative agencies were coached in developing recruitment plans and they gained tools in evaluating their efforts by counting the numbers who attended events and the number of inquiries that resulted in families moving through the foster/adoption process. At the grant’s end, the partnership of public, private and neighborhood agencies was evident in those still meeting monthly and working on issues together.

Each year, the grant was evaluated. In Years 1-4, the grant evaluation focused on process evaluation. One major finding from the quantitative evaluation was that community-based recruitment efforts do have an effect; more children exited the child welfare system for adoption in the targeted (intervention) neighborhoods than in the comparison, non-targeted neighborhoods. The major finding from the qualitative evaluation, looking at emancipated children served by the project, is that even with assistance prior to emancipation the early outcomes are not positive. The findings support previous evidence for expanding foster care beyond the age of 18.

The targets specified in the proposal were not met. Specifically, for the target to increase the percent of children who exit for adoption in less than 24 months from 25.1% (in 2007) to match the state’s percent of 37.2% or higher, we did not achieve. The percent in Cuyahoga County remained from 20% to 25% throughout the life of the grant. In regards to reducing the
median length of stay from 41.5 months to less than 27.3 months (data from 2007), median lengths of stay went from 1129 days (37.6 months) in 2008 to 1191 days (39.7 months) in 2012. We did not reach the target and by the last year data were available, median length of time had increased although average (mean) length of time has decreased from 2007. Our third target, to increase the number of children who are teens that have permanency and that have been in care for 24 months from the 21.9% to 29.1%, was not met. Although in some months the percent was close to the target, overall yearly targets remained around 22%.

While targets were not met, significant accomplishments were achieved in taking promising practices developed during the grant and sustaining them after the grant ends. System change efforts at the agency included policy development, special work groups to address topical issues, and strategic planning to ensure the sustainability of the focus on diligent recruitment for the special populations identified. Family Search and Engagement practice was implemented during the grant; it is supported through several policies, new worker training, and with the financial support of Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, and a private local foundations that helped to hire family search and engagement staff. One of the cultural changes was that family search and engagement moved from being a strategy that was employed at the end of a child’s time in custody, in the permanent custody units, to the front where it is vital to engage and keep track of family finding. An example of this is that family trees/family genograms are required on all cases from the beginning of their time with the agency.

Youth engagement strategies were employed during the course of this grant and will be sustained after the grant ends. This includes a panel of teenagers who routinely present during the pre-service training of prospective foster and adoptive parents so that they consider the
placement of teenagers in their homes. Youth Speak Out training was offered to over forty teenagers, and youth who participated in the training had ample opportunities throughout the course of the grant to present in the community, to professionals, at the legal symposium and at large community forums.

This demonstration grant incorporated systemic changes to make the conditions at the Division of Children and Family Services and in the community prepared for engaging families to care for older youth and sibling groups. Additionally, many of the practice strategies that were tried during the course of the grant are being sustained after the grant with changes to contracts with the Neighborhood Collaborative Agencies.
Overview of the Community, Population and Needs

Cleveland is Ohio's second largest city. It is an ore port and a Great Lakes shipping point. In spite of a dramatic decline in manufacturing, Cleveland remains dependent on heavy industry, including steel milling and manufacturing. The health care industry is the biggest and fastest growing segment of Cleveland's economy, largely because of the presence of the Cleveland Clinic, University Hospitals of Cleveland and MetroHealth Medical Center.

Cleveland grew rapidly after the opening of the first section of the Ohio and Erie Canal in 1827 and the arrival of the railroad in 1851. With its factories it attracted large numbers of 19th-century immigrants from Western and Eastern Europe. The different ethnic groups settled into distinct neighborhoods. Neighborhood Settlement houses developed in specific neighborhoods over one hundred years ago and remain today. The Neighborhood Settlement Houses are the forerunners of current community based agencies located in the various neighborhoods (referred to in this report and commonly known as the Neighborhood Community Collaborative Agencies). The inner city neighborhoods changed over time and are now comprised of mostly African-Americans, although several neighborhoods are home to new immigrant groups from mostly Latin American countries.

The city was overwhelmed during the 1960s by racial riots, especially in the Hough and Glenville sections. As industry rapidly declined after the 1960s, the city went through a period of Rust Belt decay; numerous factories shut down and people and businesses moved to the suburbs. Cleveland's population has declined by almost 50% since 1950. In 1979, the city declared bankruptcy. In the 1980s Cleveland attracted investment downtown and revitalized some sections (see Benton (1976) and Thompson (1987) for a more detailed history).
Even with some positive developments, the city of Cleveland has been plagued by persistent and pervasive poverty. Cleveland has a poverty rate of 35%, the second highest in the US (www.cleveland.com/datacentral/index.ssf/2010/09/clevelands_poverty_is_second_a.html). Poverty disproportionately affects families of colors and, like many public child welfare systems in the US, children of color are disproportionately represented in the foster care systems (Crampton & Jackson, 2007).

Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (http://cfs.cuyahogacounty.us/) is a state supervised, county administered public child welfare agency located in Northeast Ohio; it encompasses the City of Cleveland as well as 56 inner ring and outer ring suburbs. At the time this grant was developed, the overall population of children in foster care had been reduced from approximately 6000 children in the year 2000, to the current population of children in custody which is 1600 children. The children who remained in care were older and had the more complicated histories, requiring new methods for recruitment of permanent families.

Specifically, through the Partners for Forever Families (PFFF), we expected to: (1) increase the percent of children who exited for adoption in less than 24 months from 25.1% to match the state’s percent of 37.2% or higher; (2) reduce the median length of stay from 41.5 months to at least approximate the federal performance expectation of less than 27.3 months; and, (3) increase the number of teens who had permanency and who had been in care for 24 months from the 21.9% to approximate the federal performance expectation of 29.1% or higher. To accomplish these objectives, we proposed to: (a) recruit, support, approve and stabilize relatives/kin as resource families from the time children enter temporary care; (b) recruit, support, approve and stabilize resource families for sibling groups; (c) develop a protocol to
resolve sibling issues early once they come to the attention to DCFS to promote keeping siblings together unless compelling reasons exist to separate them, as well as promoting sibling placements when children enter the public system sequentially (i.e., siblings are placed in foster care and birth mom has a new child that enters care at a later point); and, (d) return to kin families, including the birth family, for children who were 17 and older for whom no permanency resource has been found. To accomplish our objectives, we focused our innovations in specific geographical areas of Cuyahoga County and compared our efforts to similar geographical areas of the County not receiving the intervention.

We initially selected 5 geographical areas representing specific neighborhoods (treatment) for intervention. These neighborhoods had a high concentration of children in public care as well as high concentrations of kin and foster families. To test for whether our efforts had the effect we wanted, we also identified neighborhoods not receiving the interventions (our comparison group). The following map shows the treatment and comparison group.
In Year 3, the Hough neighborhood was added to the intervention group and removed from the comparison group.

The project was initiated at a time of two major community destabilizing events. One such event was the subprime mortgage lending crisis. Cuyahoga County was one of the most affected counties in the nation, whereby many homes were foreclosed in Cleveland central and inner ring suburbs. Neighborhoods already beset with persistent poverty saw a decline in the stable housing and the population of working poor.

The second of the contextual factors for the project was the investigation and subsequent conviction of approximately 60 government employees or contractors in Federal Court in Cuyahoga County. One of the three commissioners is now in prison. The changes that resulted from this historical criminal investigation included a new county charter that specified the end of
a three commissioner board and the establishment of a county executive with an independent county council board.

This project was initiated in 2008. In 2008, there were 214 finalizations with 1340 average days to finalization. In 2009, there were 153 finalizations with 1246 average days to finalization. In 2010, there were 129 finalizations with 1228 days to finalization. In 2011, there were 125 finalizations with 1290 average days to finalization. In 2012, there were 93 finalizations with 1265 average days to finalization. On a positive note, there has been a decrease in the average days to finalizations from 2008 to 2012. At the same time, the total number of adoptions has declined.

A review of the context in Cuyahoga County helps to identify those obstacles that were not ameliorated by the grants’ activities or inputs. As documented in the annual reports from year 1-4 reports, the project was beset by challenges. These challenges and their status at Year 5 are summarized below:

- Initially the SACWIS data system could not count or track siblings. By the project end, with the addition of ROM reports (ad-hoc data gathering), some data related to the separation of sibling groups has been created. The capacity to pull data in this area was developed only at the grant’s end, but is specific enough where one can identify units with higher rates of separated siblings than other units in the Division of Children and Family Services; these will eventually allow management to continue to target strategies towards where improvement is needed.

- There was a breakdown of information in knowing the exact percent of children diverted from entering the system into kinship care. This was not resolved by project end. This was also made somewhat obscure by changing definitions of
permanency. An example of this is using legal custody to relatives as a permanency option. Other permanency options are adoption, and the most preferred option, reunification with the birth family.

- Several high profile child deaths occurred in Year 2 of the grant. The ensuing media criticism resulted in much of the agency energy spent responding to the criticism. On the one hand, a Blue Ribbon Panel (faculty for the project served on the panel) looked at policies and practices that needed to be improved to try to prevent future tragedies; the public agency responded in a productive way to community concerns. On the other hand, while staff were responding to requests by the Blue Ribbon Panel or trying to manage their relationship with the media, there was less focus was on project outcomes. This changed by Year 5.

- Within a year of funding, many local government challenges took place prompting the arrest and conviction of over sixty County officials for corruption/betraying the public trust. Cuyahoga County voters decided in 2009 that a new form of county government was necessary. As Year 2 was coming to a close, a new Executive and new County Board were elected. By Year 4, the political issues had settled. While new processes for contracting and procurement were developed and implemented by Year 4, the transition period affected how we had planned to partner with the Neighborhood Collaborative agencies. The change in processes for the contracting and procurement caused confusion between the Collaborative Agencies in the targeted neighborhoods and Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services (CCDCFS) that resulted in delayed communication from CCDCFS to the agencies, difficulty obtaining relevant data about the children connected to specific
neighborhoods, and confusion about what is funded and not funded through this grant. However, partners remained engaged for the full five years and there was cooperation.

- During this period, CCDCFS moved towards enforcement of deliverables for the Collaborative Agencies existing contracts. This represented a major change; historically there were few consequences for failing to meet contract deliverables. This change added a complexity to cooperation; to achieve performance benchmarks, the Collaborative Agencies needed to make sure their activity was recorded by CCDCFS. Since the accountability for contracting was new for both entities, many issues emerged around communication, tracking, MIS systems, and data sharing. These issues emerged in Year 3 of the grant. Issues continued in Years 4 and 5 although the nature of the difficulties changed. Improvements in data sharing between the Recruitment department and the collaborative partners were achieved by the project end.

- Cuyahoga County voters elected a County Executive in Year 3 of the grant. This new government had the challenge of restoring public faith in government services after the aforementioned arrest and conviction of many county employees, including county leadership. Though not involved in the county scandal, in Year 3 the Administrator of the Division of Children and Family Services was relieved of her duties, after having been a lame duck administrator for the months preceding the election of new County Executive. The high profile child deaths and subsequent media focus were seen as the impetus of her removal. The attention to the types of changes proposed in the grant went into hiatus during this time period while the
County Administrator conducted a search for the new administrator. It wasn’t until the end of Year 3 that a new Administrator for the Division of Children and Family Services was hired. Her hiring brought stability to the project for the remaining years of the grant.

While the grant period did not meet projected targets, there have been developments towards systemic change. One, the new Director of CCDCFS set up a workgroup regarding siblings to establish a baseline of how CCDCFS was doing, something that was needed in the first year of the grant so strategies could have documented impact. By Year 5, a sibling work group was under the leadership of a staff person as part of her field work in completing her master-level social degree. Second, there were several early Strategic Planning Groups (ESP) regarding relatives and older youth adoption that resulted in some lasting changes at the Division. One ESP group addressed the notification of relatives, a Fostering Connections mandate, trained all staff on the use of the family tree, and informed staff on the importance of relatives in providing permanency. As a result, the numbers of child-specific (primarily kin) applications for the dual foster care license and adoption approval more than doubled in the last two years of the grant. Three, another ESP was established regarding older youth adoption; the Director established a work group to address broader issues regarding older youth. This work group reports directly to her. Four, a new Performance Management Administrator was hired. She has provided assistance in helping the agency use data to inform decisions. This hire is a doctoral level person with extensive experience in public child welfare.
Overview of the Program Model & Collaborators

This was a multi-faceted approach to the diligent recruitment of families for teens, sibling groups, and an approach to support permanency with kin. There was programming aimed at these populations, as well as internal efforts to help the system support these programmatic efforts. The programming in the grant spawned general recruitment, targeted recruitment and child-centered/child-specific recruitment strategies for the project. Each programmatic intervention is discussed below along with the collaborators. The correlating systemic change efforts will be discussed within these programmatic areas. Many of the systemic change desired outcomes were outlined in the grants cooperative agreement.

**General recruitment**

General recruitment involves reaching everyone in the community through advertising and outreach activities. General recruitment raises community consciousness about the continuing need for foster and adoptive families. General Recruitment allows the agency to make its public appeal for resource families. It is known nationally and experienced locally by CCDCFS the same inverted pyramid from calls inquiring about fostering or adoption to an actual placement; that is, CCDCFS often get hundreds of calls but only about 5% yield for families who make it through the system to have placement.

An agencies readiness to conduct general recruitment is tied to its knowledge about the types of children and youth that are in need of families that the agency serves. This review of the data of the population needing permanency was supported throughout the grant period by the state of Ohio’s Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS). The materials for general
recruitment already reflected sibling groups and older youth as the population for whom the agency was trying to find permanent families.

General Recruitment strategies over the course of the grant included the use of the arts, use of learning communities and structured learning opportunities to impact the larger community and get the message out about the permanency needs of youth in foster care. As a result of these specific strategies, within the CCDCFS, permanency has been elevated and is as important as safety and well-being.

The data revealed that many of the youth coming into the CCDCFS’S custody were older when they came into care. A practice was occurring whereby the court remanded custody to CCDCFS of an older youth on a dependency basis and not on a child in need of assistance (CAN) basis. Some of the CCDCFS’S efforts have been to work very closely with the court on these decisions, in one case even filing an appeal.

The two legal symposiums held during the course of the grant brought together judges, attorneys for parents, attorneys for children, and public defenders with child welfare staff, community collaborative agencies, foster and adoptive families, and youth in foster care. Youth in care and recently aged out of foster care were enlisted as part of the forum to help teach participants about the importance of listening to the voices of youth and the need for permanency for youth in foster care. The planning for the symposia was collaboration between the court, CCDCFS, and partners from the grant.

The first big event was a kickoff of the Mobile Heart Gallery at Cleveland’s Botanical Garden. This coincided with the enlistment of a gospel recording artist who performed a song written especially in honor of adoption (and more specifically of his adopted sister). The reception and performance was then enhanced by the singer’s ability to get on the stage at Wade
Oval Wednesdays (a weekly summer gathering in University Circle, attended by approximately 1500 people who enjoy dinner and music).

The Heart Gallery opening was then succeeded by a gospel fest at a local church in the community, where skits about siblings being adopted together and older youth wanting a family were intermingled with original gospel music. The aim of the event was raise consciousness about the need for permanency for older youth and sibling groups.

This event was followed by a community forum with Congresswoman Marcia Fudge. This forum focused on kinship care. The kinship forum was followed by the original play, Sometimes Hope is Enough. This was an original play written at The Karamu House. It was based on focus groups he conducted with youth in foster care or recently aged out of care. The play was seen by approximately 1000 people and sent a message of need for permanent families and support for siblings to stay together. It was positively reviewed in the Plain Dealer with the headline “Partners for Forever Families helps bring foster children’s plight to the stage,”(April 22, 2012).

As part of general recruitment, each year, we had planned to collaborate with the Adoption Coalition, which was a public-private partnership of agencies and individuals promoting adoption and the improvement of adoption services and processes/policies in the region. The first year the Coalition offered a day of training that focused on kinship care, with Jennifer Miller, a national expert, from Child Focus. In Year 2, many agencies previously involved in adoption had halted services due to contracts with the CCDCFS. The Adoption Coalition went into hiatus, but members of the coalition (all private providers) were invited throughout the grant period to attend the two learning communities that were established to focus on the issues of older youth, siblings and kinship care. The learning communities covered the
adoption of older youth, adoption of siblings together, trauma informed practice, and finally family search and engagement practices. The adoption community is vibrant and has participated in the alternative educational offerings that the grant provided. Approximately 50 professionals have attended the learning communities. Contracts for adoption resumed in the third year of the grant with partial funding being restored by ODJFS.

During the time period Partners for Forever Families, there were other efforts at strengthening the Coalition Members ability to deliver adoption competent practice throughout the entire child serving agencies. A local agency, Guidestone, took the lead on delivering adoption curriculum that was developed by Victor Groza, PhD, LISW-S and Zoe Breen-wood, PhD, MSW, so that it could be shared with all of child serving agencies, especially those professionals who served public child welfare clients affected by adoption. Approximately 30 professionals at the private agencies were trained during the course of the grant.

The public appeal for help through General Recruitment techniques is only as good as the ability to support, train, and develop those resource families that are the “successes” of the general recruitment campaign. A key to increasing the number of families who adopt or foster from the public system is friendly and responsive customer service, followed up by the predictability about the adoption/fostering process, and support during the waiting process from home study to placement. One effort to systemically impact customer service at the CCDCFS included a group of master’s degree students funded by a grant to Case Western Reserve University through the National Child Welfare Workforce Initiative who worked on a Customer Service project as part of their field work. This project involved working with consultants from Adopt US Kids to bring customer service principles into the child welfare workplace. In Year 3, the new Administrator requested that customer service standards be integrated into the
performance evaluation of staff. The Performance Management Unit at CCDCFS assumed the Customer Relations Unit. Through an administrative reorganization, the Performance Management Unit incorporated customer service principles and developed a staff training module that was shared with all of the departments. These same customer service standards are now incorporated into the strategic plan going forward. A pamphlet describing the customer service standards is in the print shop at the time of the grant ending.

The department that licenses and approves resource homes has instituted a regular survey with resource families that leave the agency, and have looked for ways to incorporate customer service principles into their departmental strategic plan. They are using data to improve the way they interact with resource families. An evaluation of the home study process was conducted by evaluators in Year 3 of the grant (http://msass.case.edu/downloads/vgroza/Year_3_Evaluation_Report.pdf). This evaluation resulted in strategies to better support resource families going through the foster/adoptive process with the use of collaborative agency supports and Adoption Network Cleveland’s navigator program.

The goal of general recruitment was to recruit 40 relatives and 60 resource families by grant end. The target was for placement of 30 children per year beginning in Year 3 and forward as a result of general recruitment efforts. The trend that was evident by Year 4 of the grant was that the relatives who applied to be licensed foster care givers/approved for adoption increased from 21% in Year 3 to 37% and 35% respectively in Year 4 and Year 5. That trend suggests that the efforts to increase relative participation are achievable. Figure 1 presents the trend in foster care applicants who are applying for a specific child. Many of these applicants are relatives. The trend is an increase over time.
Targeted Recruitment

In contrast to general recruitment, targeted marketing means focusing efforts to find the families that are similar to other successful foster and adoptive families. For Partners for Forever Families, it included targeting specific geographical neighborhoods.

Each of the partners on the grant had a role in targeted recruitment activities. Adoption Network Cleveland (ANC) was expected to champion foster-to-adoption in the targeted neighborhoods. They were involved in both helping kin make a permanent commitment to their relations as well as removing barriers for the foster families to move to adoptive families. ANC, in part, were barrier busters in their role of targeted recruiter. Some funds are available for ANC to access if such funds removed barriers to adoption or permanence. ANC gave families information, emotional support, and logistical assistance.

The targeted recruitment campaign for the intervention group had as one of its key components using community agencies in the targeted neighborhoods as well as community
partners from churches as well as barber and beauty shops in African American communities. In a previous Minority Adoption Project (Walker, Boxley, Harris & Groza, 1997), this was a successful strategy in the African-American community, building on personal contacts and informal gathering places. These shops are social places in the urban African-American community as well as places to get hair and nails styled. The community partners (Neighborhood Collaborative Agencies and Adoption Network-Cleveland) organized recruitment events in the targeted neighborhoods. Each year of the grant starting in Year 2 they held Ambassador Breakfasts in the community where music, spoken word, and youth testimony helped to shape a call to action. Information cards were gathered on families indicating an interest in foster care or adoption; the original cards were given to CCDCFS. Once potential families were identified, they were referred to an Adoption Navigator at ANC. The Adoption Navigator gave families information, emotional support, and logistical assistance as they moved from considering adoption or fostering to becoming an adoptive parent, foster parent or relative caregiver. Adoption Navigators are paraprofessionals, many of whom have personal experience with adoption, who provide guidance throughout the adoption process, from initial inquiry through home study, placement, finalization, and beyond.

In addition, CCDCFS had been delivering the message to all their partners that “recruitment was everyone’s business.” As such, the Neighborhood Collaborative Agencies were expected to recruit families to foster and adopt in the neighborhoods they served. There was mixed reactions to this suggestion which promoted the small group of targeted neighborhoods to develop “Out of the Box” strategies in Year 3 and Year 4. While some agencies recruited, other agencies felt that their neighborhoods were “tapped out” and the economic situation would thwart finding appropriate families. One such Neighborhood
Collaborative developed a recruitment plan to more fully support their resource families and provide incentives for the foster and adoptive parents to recruit other families within their own social networks.

The goal of targeted recruitment was to recruit 20 relative and 32 resource families for siblings or older children. It was projected that the kin and sibling resource families would be a permanent resource for at least 60 children. Given data difficulties, we could not adequately ascertain whether these numbers were met; the best evidence available suggests that they were not met.

**Child-Centered/Child-Specific Recruitment**

Child-centered or child-specific recruitment refers to the methodology of finding a permanent resource or permanent resources for a specific child. The four areas of system readiness to set the stage for child centered recruitment are the focus of PFFF’s system work.

1) *Policy development:* We identified the policy, legal, community, birth family and adoptive family barriers to permanency planning, both initially and over time. We challenged procedures and protocols for re-engaging birth family members, fictive kin, and teens in permanency planning. Barrier busting funds were developed when policy or procedures could not be waived or challenged. A guide was developed to inform this process and is included in the Appendix.

2) *Enhanced Family Finding strategies:* Parent/kin locator services and practice of routinely searching and engaging families on behalf of youth in care is essential. A Family Engagement Unit was developed and staff have been trained in searching and engaging birth
and kinship families. Software was purchased to assist in family findings activities; staff was trained to use the software.

3) **Case Reviews:** Case Review is the unit at CCDCFS with 15 trained facilitators that practice Family Group Decision-Making/Team Decision Making. Case review is a pivotal agency structure that will support concurrent planning and, in turn, child-centered recruitment practices. In this department, concurrent planning is emphasized through ongoing training with the facilitators regarding file mining for those children who have been in care more than two years, family finding/family assessment including family genograms for those entering care, and keeping permanency for Cuyahoga’s children on the agenda at all case reviews throughout the life of the case. This is also the agency structure that is well suited to prioritize sibling placements.

One child-centered recruitment approach was to develop a DVD with an older child that is used for virtual recruiting (called a Digital Me). Also, all waiting children were placed on the Adopt US Kids website because the Ohio Adoption Photo Listing program was defunded. Other media of waiting children was enhanced through the Heart Gallery. The Heart Gallery displays professional photographs of waiting children that are blown up to poster size and are part of a display for recruiting families. The Heart Gallery was moved from location-to-location in the metropolitan area throughout the grant; the children in the Heart Gallery changed over time.

An additional child-centered recruitment approach targeted youth 16 and 17 (and older who) in the permanent custody of CCDCFS and for whom no permanency connections had been identified. Thorough Beech Brook, a grant partner, PFFF began working with the youth before the child aged out of the system. As part of the permanency planning process, the teen specialist
from Beech Brook worked with current supports in the youth’s life to form a permanency planning team. Team members included foster parents; foster care networks and/or group home and residential staff; Neighborhood Agencies; CCDCFS staff; educators; coaches; friends and their families; and, other people important in the teen’s life as identified by the teen. The team’s role was to support the youth and birth family members in planning for the future as the youth emancipated from foster care. Team meetings were planned but virtually impossible to execute. It became apparent over time that the emancipating youth needed more resources than the project anticipated. Also, having concerned individuals meet as a team did not happen; it was a rare occasion for this to occur. Even rarer was the ability to engage birth family members.

The initial goal was to work with 25% of youth who emancipate each year (approximately 38 out of 150) and work with a relative resource family before they leave care for a total of 152 youth. Less than 24 youth were served by the project. The goal of child-centered recruitment was to recruit 20 relative and 20 resource families for siblings as well as provide enough resources to support, approve and stabilize at least 50% of recruiting relative and resource families. We expected the kin and sibling resource families for be a permanent resource for at least 36 youth. It is unlikely these targets were met.

Summary of Recruitment

Table 1 summarizes the recruitment strategies by the organizations involved in the strategy. Partners for Forever Families was successful in getting CCDCFS staff and community agencies to embrace all these types of recruitment. These activities are both best practices and emerging practices, having been demonstrated to have some effect in improving the changes for permanency for children in the systems. Our inability to measure their impact in no way
diminishes their importance as recruitment strategies. Rather, it highlights the need for more and different types of data systems that can be used to monitor and inform recruitment practices.

Table 1: General Recruitment, Child Specific Recruitment and Targeted Recruitment Activities

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<td>Heart Gallery Website</td>
<td>Links digital me’s to adoptuskids website, CCR unit, Barrier funding</td>
<td>Neighborhood collaborative contracts, System efforts for teens (LAH), System efforts to siblings (CCDCFS master student)</td>
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<td>Adoption month</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Neighborhood Collaboratives</strong></td>
<td>Participation in events</td>
<td>Adopting a teen for Christmas, training for them regarding recruiting for specific teens, giving them names of youth in need of permanency</td>
<td>Events in the neighborhood: Gospel fests, Dinner on Us, Mentoring training, Play, Foster Parent recruitment support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advisory Board</td>
<td>Supporting foster families, potential adoptive families, advocacy for barrier elimination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Community events partnership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Out of the box implementation</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership Team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adoption Network Cleveland</strong></td>
<td>Heart Gallery Receptions</td>
<td>Digital Mes File Review</td>
<td>Ambassadors Program Adoption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legal Symposium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Diversity**

One essential component of family engagement is staff competence at engaging diverse racial, cultural and economic communities who are reflective of the children and youth in care. Diversity training happened in the first year of the grant with the upper level management and then the middle management. The contract with Dr. Willliams from Cleveland State University was not renewed in Year 2. In Year 3 of the grant when the new Administrator at CCDCFS was hired, the work was re-focused on racial disparities and disporportionality. A consultant was hired to help the agency both evaluate racial disparities and plan strategies to address these issues. Focus groups and community forums on racial disparity have kept attention on this important issue.

In addition, the practice issues around diversity were incorporated into the Family Engagement and Customer Service work. Helping CCDCFS identify how the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program (OCWTP) supports the effort to create a culturally competent workforce led to a focus on what curriculum exists to support culturally competent family
engagement. Additionally, the customer service work with setting standards (in Year 3) incorporated cultural competence as a basic skill that is key to this practice. The essence here is that culturally competency is wedded to family engagement and as the agency focuses on skill building in family engagement, any strategies to promote family engagement include the basic tenet of cultural competence.

In Year 4 and Year 5, the strategic planning has an objective of “enhancing the organization’s culture to be more visibly welcoming, positive, respectful and strengths based both to inside colleagues and to the outside world.” The recommended strategy to accomplish this (through a work group) will be to incorporate the core customer service standards and to develop the standards for teamwork at the agency. Teamwork standards will create expectations around the behavior of the staff towards each other, also incorporating the tenets of cultural competence.

**Sustainability**

The general theme of Partners for Forever Families, the permanency focus of practice for older children and siblings, is one that will be a focus for the immediate years to come through the strategic planning process. Some specific activities of the grant will remain and some are not going to continue. First, the neighborhood collaborative agencies that existed prior to the grant will continue and will be asked to diligently recruit in their neighborhoods for foster and adoptive families, using some of the strategies that were employed during the grant. The specifications of the new contracts for 2014 includes the use of the Ambassador Concept, now called “Forever Family Ambassadors.” Appendix A has the specific contract language that
ensures the sustainability of the diligent recruitment efforts in the neighborhood collaborative agencies.

The sustainability of family search and engagement strategies is evident in a couple of areas at the agency. A learning community with a regional focus is launched, and new worker training includes a segment on the importance of family search and engagement. A policy on relative notification and a policy on the family tree with review of these activities in the performance review unit are mechanisms to sustain the work in this area. Several other areas will be sustained as summarized below.

**Youth Speak Out**

Adoption Network has agreed to continue to train youth in public speaking and CCDCFS will support teen presenters at pre-service training. Alignment of the youth speakers with both recruitment and training departments has been made by focusing on the Teen Advocate Group internally at CCDCFS and enlisting the youth advisor in helping to identify youth for the ANC trainings. The speaking engagements will predominantly be through pre-service training for foster and adoptive parents and through the Neighborhood Collaborative Agencies who are (through their contracts) asked to host community recruitment events.

**Sibling practice**

This area is the subject of a newly formed workgroup and one of the Child Welfare Fellows field project (from Case Western Reserve University). An instructive memo, a policy and new tracking forms ensure the sustainability of the focus of this area of work. Most exciting is dedicated staff to provide new sibling related data reports will support this workgroup.

**Older Youth**
Older youth efforts will continue to be addressed in several different areas. One is the agency work group called Lending a Hand where a multidisciplinary group is working to identify resources and resource gaps for this population. The other ongoing “inputs” into this area are the new initiative with the Jim Casey Foundation, community foundation support for the aged out youth, and intervention at the Independent Living Unit. Permanency for youth in Independent Living has been put back into the expectations of staff in this area. The permanency needs of older youth will not be ignored or glossed over.
Evaluation

This was a quasi-experimental design to test the impact of several interventions. It is quasi-experimental because neighborhood sites were not randomly chosen (and could not be randomly chosen). Rather, neighborhoods were designated into treatment and control groups. Both treatment and control groups were contiguous neighborhoods (see Figure 1 with map). The treatment group received the intervention (targeted and child-specific recruitment) while the control group received services as usual (general recruitment). The treatment group became part of the monthly Partners for Forever Families meetings. Quasi-experimental designs are natural experiments, minimizing threats to external validity (Shadish, Cook, & Cambell. 200; Dinardo, 2008).

Quasi-experiments are subject to concerns regarding internal validity, because the treatment and control groups may not be comparable at baseline. With random assignment, study participants have the same chance of being assigned to the intervention group or the comparison group. As a result, the treatment group will be statistically identical to the control group, on both observed and unobserved characteristics, at baseline (provided that the study has adequate sample size). Any change in characteristics post-intervention is due, therefore, to the intervention alone. With quasi-experimental studies, it may not be possible to convincingly demonstrate a causal link between the treatment condition and observed outcomes. This is particularly true if there are confounding variables that cannot be controlled or accounted for.

The project used a monitoring design, using yearly data to monitor benchmarks. We used qualitative and quantitative data to conduct process evaluations. Each year a report was created for the project and the yearly report resulted in creating addition small studies within the core evaluation. For example, in Year 2, to better understand the path from contact to home study,
Adoption Network Navigators ANC followed up individuals who contacted the DCFS recruitment line over a 6 month period and who lived in our targeted neighborhoods. One hundred and fifty eight individuals were on the list to be contacted. Only 32 (20%) could be successfully contacted after 3 or more attempts; this lead to a dialog about the importance of timeliness in responding, verifying contact information and obtaining several methods for contacting potentially interested families. It also lead to a workgroup on customer service. Years 3 and 4 added additional projects related to the key outcomes of finding permanency for older youth and sibling groups as well as increasing the number of adoptive/foster-to-adopt/kinship families. Human Subjects approval for the project was obtained every year of the project through the Institutional Review Board at Case Western Reserve University.

A. Process Evaluation Results

For comprehensive process evaluation reports for Years 2-4, the reader should consult this website (http://msass.case.edu/faculty/vgroza/reports.html). This report updates select elements of these reports.

B. Outcome Evaluation Results

The following figure presents the percent of adoptions from 2001-2012 as a ratio of total adoptions per year/number of children in permanent custody. The general trend is a decrease in the percent of adoptions over time. This is not positive as the total number of children in permanent custody had decreased from 2000 in 2001 to 607 in 2012. This means that with fewer children even fewer adoptions are occurring. In looking at adoptions overall, besides an initial increase the second year of the project (2009), there is little evidence that PFFF had an impact on increasing adoptions overall. The next series of analysis examines adoption trends
in more detail in the treatment and comparison groups. Entry and exit cohort data was used in this analysis.

Table 2 presents the age distribution of youth within the target and comparison neighborhoods during Year 5 of the project. The number of youth who were 6 years of age and older were the majority of children in the public child welfare system waiting for permanency. Children over the age of 6 made up 86.0% of the target and 83.4% of the comparison group. There were no significant differences between the target and comparison neighborhoods related to children’s current age in foster care for Year 5.
Entry Cohort Data

Table 2

Current Age of Youth in Foster Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 1</td>
<td>Target: 3.10% (4)</td>
<td>Comparison: 6.60% (8)</td>
<td>Target: 3.50% (9)</td>
<td>Target: 3.10% (9)</td>
<td>Target: 2.70% (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>25.0% (32)</td>
<td>20.8% (54)</td>
<td>23.5% (69)</td>
<td>18.9% (28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Target: 14.8% (19)</td>
<td>Comparison: 26.4% (32)</td>
<td>Target: 19.3% (50)</td>
<td>Target: 19.1% (56)</td>
<td>Target: 23.0% (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>28.9% (37)</td>
<td>32.7% (85)</td>
<td>31.1% (91)</td>
<td>27.0% (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>28.1% (36)</td>
<td>23.8% (62)</td>
<td>23.2% (68)</td>
<td>28.4% (42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16 and over</td>
<td>28.1% (36)</td>
<td>23.8% (62)</td>
<td>23.2% (68)</td>
<td>28.4% (42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>Fisher's Exact Test, p = .101</td>
<td>Fisher's Exact Test, p = .048</td>
<td>Fisher's Exact Test, p = .027</td>
<td>Fisher's Exact Test, p = .092</td>
<td>Fisher's Exact Test, p = .950</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

†Values in parentheses equal actual number of children in category
*Significant p < .05; † Approaching significance

Table 3 presents the ages that youth in the target and comparison neighborhoods entered the public child welfare system. Year 5 results indicated that children were entering care at much younger ages than in the previous four years of the project. For example, the three youngest groups of children for both the target and comparison neighborhoods increased from Year 4 to Year 5 (target “under 1 year” of age Δ = 15.1% and comparison Δ = 9.10%; target ages “1 – 5 years” Δ = 8.20% and comparison Δ = 7.20%; and target ages “6 – 10 years” Δ = 9.60% and comparison Δ = 25.2%).
Table 3
Age of Youth When Episode Began

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 and over</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 1</td>
<td>3.10% (4)</td>
<td>6.60% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>25.0% (32)</td>
<td>21.5% (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>14.8% (19)</td>
<td>26.4% (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>28.9% (37)</td>
<td>21.5% (26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 and over</td>
<td>28.1% (36)</td>
<td>11.6% (29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 and over</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson Chi-Square, *Fisher’s Exact Test, p = .924*

*Significant p < .05*

Table 4 indicates no significant differences between the target and comparison neighborhoods related to the number of months in placement under versus over 24. During Year 5, the majority of youth were in care for over 24 months (target = 93.0%; comparison = 89.7%).

Table 4
Months of Youth in Placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 and over</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24 or under</td>
<td>6.30% (8)</td>
<td>16.5% (20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 and over</td>
<td>93.8% (120)</td>
<td>83.5% (101)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson Chi-Square, *Fisher’s Exact Test, p = .010*

*Significant p < .01*

Table 5 presents the gender of youth in foster care in the target and comparison neighborhoods. When comparing percentages of males (51.2%) to females (48.8%), results
indicate that they were quite comparable (2.40% difference). There were no significant differences found between groups related to gender.

Table 5  
Gender of Youth in Foster Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>45.3% (71)</td>
<td>42.1% (45)</td>
<td>45.0% (117)</td>
<td>43.3% (91)</td>
<td>47.8% (140)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>41.7% (73)</td>
<td>45.9% (68)</td>
<td>45.8% (63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>46.7% (35)</td>
<td>48.8% (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>54.7% (79)</td>
<td>57.9% (75)</td>
<td>55.0% (143)</td>
<td>56.7% (119)</td>
<td>52.2% (153)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>58.3% (102)</td>
<td>54.1% (80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>53.3% (40)</td>
<td>51.2% (66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>56.4% (44)</td>
<td>56.5% (44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>175</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>75</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Chi-Square</td>
<td>Fisher’s Exact Test, p = .615</td>
<td>Fisher’s Exact Test, p = .718</td>
<td>Fisher’s Exact Test, p = .202</td>
<td>Fisher’s Exact Test, p = .919</td>
<td>Fisher’s Exact Test, p = .732</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values in parentheses equal actual number of children in category

Table 6 presents data on siblings in foster care. In order to identify siblings, youth with the same case number were assumed to be siblings; however, there may be additional siblings that were not assigned the same case number because they entered the system during different times and/or siblings did not share the same last names—often resulting in them not being reported as siblings. Although there were no significant differences found between the target and comparison groups for Year 5, it is noteworthy that in Year 5 versus Year 4, the target neighborhoods had had a 9.10% decrease in the percentages of children with siblings in the public child welfare system.
Table 6
Siblings in Foster Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Siblings</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Target</th>
<th>Comparison</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>36.7% (47)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>36.4% (44)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>34.6% (68)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>32.4% (193)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>65.9% (64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>63.3% (81)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>63.6% (77)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>65.4% (120)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>67.6% (142)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>34.1% (108)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td>Fisher's Exact Test = .003, p = 0.954</td>
<td>Fisher's Exact Test = 0.260, p = 0.610</td>
<td>Fisher's Exact Test = 0.825, p = 0.364</td>
<td>Fisher's Exact Test = 2.63, p = 0.105</td>
<td>Fisher's Exact Test = .013, p = .909</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Values in parentheses equal actual number of children in category

Table 7 indicates that there were mostly African-American youths in care during Year 5; this trend is similar to the first four years of the PFFFF project. Significant differences were found between the target and comparison neighborhoods in Year 5 (p = .019); a Bonferroni correction indicated that the target neighborhoods (14.0%) served significantly more White children than did the comparison neighborhoods (3.80%); there was also a higher percentage of African-American youths served in the comparison neighborhoods (94.9%) than in the target neighborhoods (79.8%).

Table 7
Race and Ethnicity of Youth in Foster Care by Target & Comparison Neighborhoods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black/African-American</td>
<td>85.2% (109)</td>
<td>91.7% (111)</td>
<td>83.1% (216)</td>
<td>95.2% (200)</td>
<td>80.9% (237)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-ethnic</td>
<td>4.70% (6)</td>
<td>1.70% (2)</td>
<td>4.60% (12)</td>
<td>1.00% (2)</td>
<td>4.80% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>9.40% (12)</td>
<td>6.60% (8)</td>
<td>11.9% (31)</td>
<td>3.80% (8)</td>
<td>13.5% (40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Fisher’s Exact Test = 3.45, p = 0.153</td>
<td>Fisher’s Exact Test = 17.64, p = .001</td>
<td>Fisher’s Exact Test = 20.94, p = .001</td>
<td>*Fisher’s Exact Test = 9.95, p = .05</td>
<td>*Fisher’s Exact Test = 8.90, p = .019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Values in parentheses equal actual number of children in category

*Significant p < .05; ***Significant p < .001
Termination or Exit Cohort Data

In Year 5, Table 8 indicates that the majority of youth who exited the public child welfare system had entered foster care when they were less than 10 years old (86.7% in target neighborhoods; 77.7% in comparison neighborhoods). A Bonferroni post hoc analysis indicated that the target neighborhoods had significantly greater percentages of children who entered care when they were less than one year of age when compared to children residing in the comparison neighborhoods.

Table 8
Ages of Children when Initially Placed in Foster Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Year 1 January 2009 – August 2009</th>
<th>Year 2 January 2010- January 2011</th>
<th>Year 3 July 2010- July 2011</th>
<th>Year 4 August 2011- August 2012</th>
<th>Year 5 July 2012- July 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 1</td>
<td>40.4% (19)</td>
<td>60.0% (21)</td>
<td>30.0% (3)</td>
<td>75.0% (6)</td>
<td>50.0% (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>19.1% (9)</td>
<td>17.1% (6)</td>
<td>30.0% (3)</td>
<td>12.5% (1)</td>
<td>25.0% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>25.5% (12)</td>
<td>11.4% (4)</td>
<td>20.0% (2)</td>
<td>12.5% (1)</td>
<td>25.0% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>14.9% (7)</td>
<td>11.4% (4)</td>
<td>20.0% (2)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 and over</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson Chi-Square
Fisher’s Exact Test = 3.77, \( p = .285 \)
Fisher’s Exact Test = 3.74, \( p = .080 \)
Fisher’s Exact Test = 2.43, \( p = 0.623 \)
Fisher’s Exact Test = 3.10, \( p = 0.386 \)
**Fisher’s Exact Test = 8.58, \( p = .003 \)**

1 Values in parentheses equal actual number of children in category
***Significant \( p < .001 \)

Table 9 provides the age that youth exited care. In Year 5, 71.8% of those children exiting the system from the target neighborhood were under the age of 11 years (comparison neighborhoods = 50.0%). There were no significant differences between children in the target and comparison neighborhoods related to ages of when they existed care.
### Table 9
Ages of Children when Exiting Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 1</td>
<td>Target 6.40% (3)</td>
<td>Comparison 17.1% (6)</td>
<td>Target 10.0% (1)</td>
<td>Target 16.7% (2)</td>
<td>Target 5.10% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>25.5% (12)</td>
<td>37.1% (8)</td>
<td>20.0% (2)</td>
<td>25.0% (2)</td>
<td>46.2% (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>23.4% (11)</td>
<td>28.6% (10)</td>
<td>20.0% (2)</td>
<td>12.5% (1)</td>
<td>20.5% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>31.9% (15)</td>
<td>11.4% (4)</td>
<td>10.0% (1)</td>
<td>12.5% (1)</td>
<td>7.70% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 and</td>
<td>12.8% (6)</td>
<td>5.70% (2)</td>
<td>40.0% (4)</td>
<td>0.00% (0)</td>
<td>20.5% (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>over</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson Chi-Square $\chi^2(1) = 2.248$, $p = .134$

Values in parentheses equal actual number of children in category.

*Significant $p < .05$; † Approaching significance

Table 10 presents the gender of the youth leaving foster care. Although there were no statistically significant differences reported between children in the target (56.6%) and comparison (51.9%) neighborhoods for Year 5, higher percentages of female children left foster care when compared to male children.

### Table 10
Gender of Youth Leaving Foster Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Target 40.4% (19)</td>
<td>Comparison 57.1% (20)</td>
<td>Target 20.0% (2)</td>
<td>Target 50.0% (6)</td>
<td>Target 53.8% (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>59.6% (28)</td>
<td>42.9% (15)</td>
<td>80.0% (8)</td>
<td>50.0% (6)</td>
<td>46.2% (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson Chi-Square $X^2(1) = 2.248$, $p = .134$

Values in parentheses equal actual number of children in category.
Table 11 indicates the number of youth exiting care who have siblings; it is unknown whether the siblings have been placed together or left siblings still within care. Results indicated an approaching significant difference \((p = .056)\) between the target and comparison neighborhoods. Significantly greater numbers of children left care who had siblings in the public child welfare system from the target (32.1\%) versus comparison neighborhoods (11.1\%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 11</th>
<th>Youth Leaving Foster Care who have Siblings within System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year 1 January 2009 – August 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Siblings</td>
<td>Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>29.8% (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>70.2% (33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(X^2(1) = .014, p = .905)</td>
<td>Fisher’s Exact Test, (p = 1.00)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Values in parentheses equal actual number of children in category  
\(^*\) Approaching significance

Table 12 indicates that in Year 5, the majority of youth exiting the public child welfare system were African-American (target = 71.7\%; comparison = 96.3\%) or white (target = 24.5\%; comparison = 3.70\%). There were significant differences between target and comparison neighborhoods related to race; a post hoc analysis (Bonferroni correction) indicated that there were significantly greater white children leaving care from the target neighborhood versus the comparison neighborhoods.
Table 12
Race and Ethnicity of Youth Leaving Foster Care by Target & Comparison Neighborhoods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race &amp; Ethnicity</th>
<th>Year 1 January 2009 – August 2009</th>
<th>Year 2 January 2010- January 2011</th>
<th>Year 3 July 2010- July 2011</th>
<th>Year 4 August 2011- August 2012</th>
<th>Year 5 July 2012- July 2013</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Target</td>
<td>Comparison</td>
<td>Target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/ African-American</td>
<td>70.2%  (33)</td>
<td>85.7%  (30)</td>
<td>100%  (10)</td>
<td>87.5%  (7)</td>
<td>75.0%  (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-racial</td>
<td>2.10%  (1)</td>
<td>2.90%  (1)</td>
<td>0.00%  (0)</td>
<td>0.00%  (0)</td>
<td>25.0%  (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>27.7%  (13)</td>
<td>11.4%  (4)</td>
<td>12.5%  (1)</td>
<td>0.00%  (0)</td>
<td>16.7%  (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pearson Chi-Square  
Fisher’s Exact Test  
\[ P = .153 \]

1 Values in parentheses equal actual number of children in category  
*Significant \( p < .05 \)

Evaluation Discussion

We had excellent support and assistance in data collection from all the staff at CCDCFS. The strength of using administrative data is that it was easily available and had key variables of which we were interested. Administrative data has been used for many years in social science research. Of course, there are limits to the use of administrative data. Not all the variables we would have liked to study were in the dataset. Also, we could not determine from the data cause-effect from any specific intervention. We could only surmise that the targeted neighborhoods had different outcomes, likely due to the interventions. Throughout the project we supplemented the use of administrative data by collecting survey data as we sought to better understand the processes key to implementation of the project.

The Voice of Children Served by the Project

The following case studies explored the post-emancipation outcomes of six young adults participated in PFFF, specially with the project partner that assisted them through their transition.

2 Cindy Kaufman, MSSA, joined the research team for this part of the evaluation.
from foster care to adulthood. The case study methodology was an ideal way to give voice to the experience of what it is like to be a newly emancipated foster youth. It also provided a vehicle in which to relay the rich retrospective accounts shared by interviewees’ about what it was like to prepare for emancipation, grow up in in the public child welfare system, and experience their removal from or relinquishment by birth families. Names and identifiable information have been changed to assure confidentiality of the participants.

**Jason.** Jason is a 20 year old, African-American male who entered the public child welfare system at the age of 10 due to parental neglect. He reports experiencing nine placements over the years including foster homes, group homes, residential treatment centers, supervised independent living, and most recently a scattered site independent living placement. Despite many struggles, Jason graduated from high school and emancipated from foster care. He reports being determined to attend college and give it his best effort even though he knows it will be extremely challenging for him academically. Unfortunately, Jason was not able to start college when he first planned due to scheduling barriers. His college entrance exam scores were not high enough for him to qualify under a general admission; he was required to first take remedial courses in subject areas where his scores were deficient. These courses had quickly filled with earlier registrants before he could sign up, requiring him to begin the next semester. Jason has made some effort to look for a job and has had little success.

Jason reports feeling like a strong leader through his volunteer activities in a teen advocacy group. He and other members speak on behalf of youth in foster care at community events. Jason utilized the services provided by the Teen Specialist to plan and prepare for his emancipation from care. His plan was to attend community college, live independently, and use the money from his College Bound program and Ohio ETV for rent, transportation, phone,
books, and personal needs. Through working with the Teen Specialist, Jason was able to access services through a program that provides government subsidized housing for adults with diagnosed mental health issues; through these services, he was sharing an apartment with two other men. His housing situation has become problematic, resulting in an eviction notice by the public housing authority. Jason currently has no idea where he will live next, but reports that he is looking to rent a room or share an apartment. However, he has very limited resources. Due to the fact that he is currently not enrolled in school, Jason is not receiving money from the College Bound program that he was planning to use to support himself.

Jason has very few social supports outside of the people that he met through the foster care system while growing up. He has very limited contact with his biological mother and older siblings; one of his older brothers was killed while Jason was in foster care. He does not know who is his birth father and is not able to rely on his paternal family for support. The few times Jason has attempted contact with his biological family, they have financially taken advantage of him. He has a sporadic relationship with one former foster family and reportedly feels like it is always him who initiates contact with them. However, he notes that these foster parents are receptive to his calls and sometimes invite him to join them on holidays.

Denise. Denise is a 19 year old African-American female who formally entered the foster care system at age five. She reunified with her birth mother and siblings for a number of years but had to re-enter the system at age 16 due to parental neglect. Denise and her twin brother are the youngest of ten children; they all share the same mother, but have several different fathers. By age 16, Denise developed behavioral and emotional problems in response to her chaotic family life and lack of a safe, nurturing, home environment. At this time, she also gave birth to her eldest son with whom she eventually shared a foster care placement for a short time period.
Following, she gave birth to her second child and they eventually moved into an independent living program where she maintained her own apartment with financial and case management support.

Denise utilized the Teen Specialist for support and guidance in preparing for her emancipation from the public child welfare system. She completed high school and employment training through Job Corps. The Teen Specialist assisted her in enrolling in community college, completing financial aid applications, and helped her build connections with community resources (i.e., neighborhood community centers, food banks, government-subsidized day care, food stamps, and cash assistance). Her permanency plan was to live independently with her two sons that are now four and two years old. Her youngest child’s father contributes financially for the care of his son. Denise had planned to use her College Bound money and Ohio ETV to support her and her children while utilizing food stamps and day care subsidies. Denise recently moved to a different apartment. She missed a lot of school this past semester due to experiencing child care issues, court hearings, financial stress, and problems with transportation. She wants to be a nurse and continue with her education.

Denise’s large biological family lives nearby and she is very involved with her mother and siblings on a daily basis. However, they are all struggling to support themselves, so they are unable to provide her with any consistent help or support. In many ways, Denise is more stable than they are. She has never known her father but is open to a relationship with him; she knows his name but his whereabouts are unknown, despite completing several searches.

Michelle. Michelle is an 18 year old, African-American female who came into the custody of the public child welfare system at the age of 12 following a disrupted adoption. She had behavior and emotional problems that she reports her adoptive mother was unable to handle.
Her adoptive mother was a friend of her biological mother. Michelle’s biological mother had mental health problems that prevented her from providing a stable, safe, home. As a result, Michelle’s biological mother was going to lose custody of her, so the friend offered to be an adoptive parent. This adoption was legalized when Michelle was five years old. Michelle’s biological mother dropped out of the picture; she now considers her adoptive mother as her “mom” and has maintained contact with her throughout her time in foster care.

Michelle reports staying in 20 different placements while in care including foster homes, respite homes, and an independent living program. She was already working with the Teen Specialist at that time and felt strongly about getting prepared for emancipation and independent living. Shortly after her 18th birthday Michelle decided to leave her independent living placement without notice (AWOL) to live with her boyfriend’s family. Michelle remained connected to the Teen Specialist and continued working with her after she moved in with her boyfriend’s family.

The Teen Specialist helped Michelle establish a stronger relationship with her adoptive mother and to re-connect with two adult siblings who were adopted by the same family when Michelle was just a baby. She also used the services provided by the Teen Specialist to enroll in an on-line high school program, apply for food stamps, and apply for jobs. The Teen Specialist referred Michelle to the Connect-the-Dots program; this program provides mentoring, educational supports, and work readiness training for foster care youth.

Michelle recently moved in with the adoptive parents of her adult siblings. They lived very close to her boyfriend’s family; through reconnecting with her siblings, she has become close with their adoptive parents. Her sister and brother are in their early 20’s but still live at home as well. Michelle is now reunited with her biological siblings and has a family that is
helping her. She still has contact with her adoptive mom as well, attends high school, and has a part-time job.

**Derrick.** Derrick is a 21 year old African-American male who came into foster care due to neglect when he was 12 years old. He was first placed in an emergency foster home. Derrick then had three other short placements before one of his teachers agreed to foster him; he remained there throughout junior high and high school. This foster family became his family, as both of his parents are now deceased. He has two older biological siblings; he has occasional contact with them but they are unable to provide any kind of consistent support.

Derrick worked with the Teen Specialist to develop a permanency/emancipation plan for after high school. His foster parents agreed that he could remain with them through his first year of college for continued support. The Teen Specialist assisted Derrick in applying for financial aid and college, has provided guidance and support to his foster mom, and has helped Derrick in managing some of his mental health and behavioral issues by referring him to adult community resources.

The Teen Specialist continued to provide services to Derrick through most of his first year of college, linking him to resources such as Connect-the-Dots, the counseling center at his community college, and tutoring programs. Despite these services, Derrick had a difficult adjustment to college life and ended up on academic probation. He feels that he learned from his mistakes and seems determined to do better this year. Derrick has moved out of his former foster home and is living with friends with whom he attended college. His main permanency resource is his former foster family with who he remains in close contact.

**Monica.** Monica is a 20 year old African-American female who entered foster care when she was eight years old with her younger sister and brother; two older sisters were placed
separately. Monica’s birth mother lost custody of them due to parental neglect. She has had multiple foster placements. Even though she was initially placed with her younger siblings, over time they became separated. She was able to have visits with them through DCFS. Monica had very occasional contact with her birth parents and older siblings. Her birth mother and sisters live locally; her father lives in California.

Monica had one significant early foster placement that lasted for several years. It disrupted for a period of time; however, Monica maintained contact with this family and eventually was placed with them for a second time during her high school years. She remained there until she graduated from high school and emancipated.

Monica used the Teen Specialist’s services to make a permanency/emancipation plan and to re-connect with her adult siblings. The Teen Specialist also assisted Monica in applying for financial aid and college. She has remained involved with her through Monica’s first year of college, providing additional support and guidance. The Teen Specialist also assisted Monica in finding a job and developing a plan for her summer break from school when she was unable to remain in the college dorm. At first, Monica had no place to live. After a great deal of discussion and a search for housing options, Monica’s former foster mother agreed to have Monica return to her home for one last summer, with the agreement that she would receive some type of stipend for rent and food from DCFS. Through advocacy from the Teen Specialist, this was able to be arranged.

Monica had a difficult adjustment to college and struggled academically throughout her first year. Although she did fairly well in high school, she did not have the academic or study skills needed to succeed in her courses. She reports that she did poorly and is on academic
probation. Monica is considering transferring from her four year university to attend a two year community college.

Monica recently moved out of her dorm and is sharing an apartment with some friends. Although she still has phone contact with her former foster family, they have told her that she cannot come back to stay with them anymore. Monica does not have any other permanency resources.

**Trevor.** Trevor is a 22 year old African-American male who entered the public child welfare system at the age of seven due to parental neglect and alleged abuse. He is the second of six children; all children were removed and placed into care at the same time. Trevor reports being reunified with his biological parents twice, once at the age of nine and again at the age of 12. Trevor remained with his biological parents between being 9 and 10 years of age followed by him being placed back into care. He was reunified for four additional months when he was 12; after that attempt failed, their parental rights were permanently terminated. After being in permanent custody of the DCFS, there were no further visitations between Trevor and his birth parents which he reported having taken a huge emotional toll on him. He reports missing his family very much, especially his mother, grandparents, and younger siblings. Trevor and his older brother aged out of separate foster homes. His four younger siblings were adopted by several different relatives. Trevor also has many half siblings. Trevor’s parents divorced while he was in care and they had children with other partners.

Trevor was referred to the Teen Specialist at the time he was a senior in high school. Through work with the Teen Specialist, Trevor was able to strengthen his relationship with his biological family. He started having occasional contact with his mother and his father as his last foster home was within walking distance of his father’s house. The Teen Specialist assisted
Trevor in improving these relationships and maintaining regular contact; she provided transportation to visits with parents and siblings as well as informal support and guidance to Trevor’s mother when she agreed to have him live with her following his emancipation from custody.

The Teen Specialist assisted Trevor in applying to college, applying for financial aid and food stamps. Trevor was connected with a teen advocacy program at DCFS and reports developing leadership skills through his participation. Through his work with the teen advocacy group, Trevor has had the opportunity to speak about his experience in the foster care system at several community events. Trevor identifies his community talks and presentations as a part of the advocacy group as one of his biggest successes post-emancipation.

The Teen Specialist referred Trevor to community agencies for adult mental health and medical services. Trevor has had fragile health since the age of 11. The teen specialist assisted Trevor in obtaining his Medicaid card so that he could access the necessary health services.

While in foster care, Trevor reported having had seven different foster home placements. At the time of the referral to the Teen Specialist, his foster father agreed to be a part of his emancipation permanency plan. However, this placement disrupted around the time that Trevor graduated from high school. As a result, contact with this foster family was severed. The Teen Specialist helped Trevor re-establish close relationships with two former foster families, both of whom agreed to be a part of his emancipation permanency plan. Since his emancipation from custody, Trevor has lived with his biological mother, his biological father, and both of his former foster families for periods of time. He reports having had interpersonal difficulties with family members in each of the homes; however, he has remained in contact with all of them. Trevor
currently lives with his biological father, is working part-time, and is a full-time student attending a community college.

**Summary from case studies**

The respondents were asked specific questions about different outcomes that have been linked to the experience of emancipating from the foster care system. These outcomes included the following: access to medical care, drug and alcohol use, mental health, sex and pregnancy, education, employment, criminal justice involvement, and post-emancipation stability. The participants were also asked about their future expectations.

**Access to Medical Care:** In order to understand whether or not the young adults had access to health care post-emancipation, the respondents were asked if they were provided with a copy of their Medicaid card, original birth certificate, social security card, and immunization/shot records when they emancipated. Only one of the six respondents was provided with all four of these documents at emancipation.

The teen specialist aided the other youth in obtaining their missing documents once she began working with them. Not emancipating with all of their cards proved problematic for some of the respondents. For example, one of the respondents stated

*I have diabetes. I didn’t have any records showing that I had any insurance and I didn’t know none of that. The first two times they (the hospital) denied me and then (the teen specialist) came along and helped me get my card and took me to my appointments.*

This youth reported not being able to access medical care or medications for four months until he began working with the Teen Specialist.

**Drugs and Alcohol:** Respondents were asked how often they used street drugs (medications not prescribed by a doctor) or alcohol since emancipation. One respondent chose not to answer the question. Of the five participants who answered the question, only one reported
never using drugs or alcohol; four reported using alcohol (< three times/ month) and two reported using drugs (< three times/ month). Overall, the respondents reported occasional use of alcohol and drugs at social events and college parties.

**Mental Health:** Mental health in this study was limited to an understanding of whether respondents felt lonely and depressed since emancipating. Half of the respondents reported “never feeling lonely” since emancipating, and the other half reported “feeling lonely often”. Three of the respondents reported feeling depressed sometimes with one feeling depressed very often.

**Sex and Pregnancy:** Only one of the respondents is currently parenting. Three of the other five respondents report using various methods of birth control including condoms. Two of the respondents are not currently using any method of birth control.

**Education:** The participants were asked if they were currently enrolled in school, and to note the highest grade level that they completed. At the time of the interview one of the respondents had just graduated from high school, four respondents were college students, and one respondent was in an on-line high school program. The Teen Specialist aided all of the students in applying for school as well as for financial aid. All respondents that were in college at the time of being interviewed each reported that they were struggling with their academics and were on academic probation. The Teen Specialist aided them in identifying tutoring resources.

**Employment:** Two of the respondents were unemployed but looking for jobs. One worked a seasonal job over the summer but was unemployed during the fall and spring school semesters. One respondent works part-time and the other two were employed full time.

**Criminal justice involvement:** The participants were asked whether or not they have been in trouble with the law. Four of the six respondents reported being charged with crimes. One of
the respondents stated that the charges against him were dropped because he acted in self-defense. Two of the other respondents stated that they were in trouble with the law once, received probation for those actions, and have never been in trouble with the law again. Only one of the respondents reported repeated incidents with law enforcement. This respondent reported spending time in jail for both domestic violence and for videotaping one of his friends assaulting someone. Charges were not pressed against him so he was released from jail after two weeks.

He summed this experience by stating,

*Then one day, I got happy cause they gave me a card. I didn’t know what it said. One of the other dudes in jail who had been there a long time, said “you going home”. Guard said, “Pack your shit”. No bus ticket or anything... It was a good experience, anyway. Figured out that wasn’t what I wanted. Like the time when the guards came in when I was in the shower, made me get down on the ground. Not good.*

He reported that going to jail for the assault was a good experience for him because it was a bad experience and it helped him figure out that jail wasn’t where he wanted to be.

**Post-emancipation placement stability:** Respondents were asked how many places they have stayed since emancipation, if they have ever not had a place to stay overnight, and if they have ever had to go to a homeless shelter since emancipating. None of the respondents reported going to a homeless shelter but one of the respondents did report not having a place to stay overnight. He did not want to go to a homeless shelter, so this respondent slept in airport lobbies for two and a half weeks. The respondent stated,

*“I was supposed to get my own place, but that didn’t work out. So, for about two and a half weeks I was kind of staying at airports. That’s where I was staying at. I went to*
Cleveland’s airport, and then I was downtown for a while. I was in Shaker. Just places I could lay down for a while. Wasn’t a long stay. Just overnight here, overnight there”.

This respondent has not experienced placement stability post-emancipation. He stated that “I went back and forth between my mom and dad a little bit, and then I went to 4 or 5 other foster parents”. The other respondents have all experienced two placements post-emancipation.

Future expectations: When asked about their plans for the future all of the respondents reported that they intended to continue their education and they planned to have successful careers. Four of the six respondents had specific career goals. The five non-parenting respondents reported not wanting to have children until after they were married. All of the non-parenting respondents also stated that they would like to be foster or adoptive parents in the future. When asked to rate how successful they felt they were on a scale of 1 (extremely unsuccessful) to 10 (extremely successful), the respondents had a mean rating of 6.6, where scores ranged from five to eight. The respondents reported believing that they are on the right track to success but that they were not where they wanted to be at the time of the interview. One respondent noted, “I’m not completely where I want to be yet. I’ve started, but I’m approaching it, but I’m not there yet”.

In addition to being asked about their access to medical care, their drug and alcohol use, their mental health, education, and employment the participants were asked about their thoughts on their biological families, how their lives would be different had they never came into foster care, and how important they think it is for children to reunified with their biological families or adopted into new families. Several themes emerged from their responses to these questions. These themes are discussed in detail below.
“I think foster care really saved me”. The first theme to emerge from the interviews was the belief that foster care was a positive intervention for them, given their biological family circumstances. When asked how they felt their life would have been different if they never been placed in foster care, all of the respondents expressed that they would have been less successful. The respondents expressed that experiencing foster care gave them a different perspective on life and helped them to set positive goals for themselves. Two of the respondents specifically talked about how foster care saved them from a life of crime. One respondent stated

*I think foster care really saved me for real. Because without that I would have went into the streets trying to be, I don’t know a follower basically. Trying to do what everybody else was doing. I’m glad I got into foster care actually*. Another respondent stated *“probably would have been a real thug. In jail for good at 20."

The respondents believed that being taken away from their biological families and put in a different situation changed their life for the better, and they were ultimately happy that they entered foster care when they did. One respondent stated *“I’m glad it happened when it did. It got me to go through school”*. 

**Reunification is important if the family fixes the issues that caused their children to be placed in foster care.** In addition to believing that foster care was a positive intervention in their lives, the respondents expressed that reunification with birth parents as only important if parents bettered their situation. One respondent stated that reunification is important *“if they (parents) have the issue fixed. If the reasons behind the child being in care are fixed. If not then they shouldn’t go back”*. The respondents did not believe that all children should be returned to their birth families, noting that children are taken out of their biological homes for a reason and they should not simply be returned to their parents because they are their biological children.

**Children should always maintain contact with their birth families.** Although the respondents did not feel that children should always be returned to their biological parents, they
felt that it was very important for children to remain in contact with their parents and maintain a relationship with their biological siblings. One respondent relayed the following:

*Some people come in care because their families don’t have money and can’t take care of them and another family can, but they shouldn’t lose contact with their family. Stay connected. Like for me I liked seeing my family twice a month and kicking it and talking, but I was looking forward to going back into care because they (the foster care system) did take care of me.*

“As I got older I realized it wasn’t a good environment for me to be in”. The young adults expressed that when they were younger and when they first came into foster care they wanted to be reunified with their biological families. However, the older they got and the more they learned about their family situations, the more they realized that foster care was a better environment for them. In response to whether or not he wanted to be reunified with his family, one respondent stated “*In my younger days. Used to run away from foster home to be with her (biological mother). Now I see the big picture*”. In response to the same question, another respondent stated, “*When I was young yes, but when I got older not so much. I had high hopes for it and as I got older I realized it wasn’t a good environment for me to be in*”.

**Gave up on adoption after let downs.** In addition to being asked about their perceptions on reunification, the respondents were asked about their perception on adoption and if they wanted to be adopted while they were in care. Four of the respondents gave up on their own desire to be adopted after being let down several times. One respondent had a disrupted adoption and had no interest in being adopted again. The other three respondents had been in pre-adoptive homes and/or lived with foster families who discussed the possibility of adoption with them. After never being adopted they gave up wanting to be adopted. One respondent summed up her
experiences with the following statement: “I felt like nobody was interested in me. The foster home I was in was an emotional rollercoaster. One minute she wanted to adopt me and one minute she didn’t care anymore. It was annoying so I stopped caring”. Although these youth expressed that they stopped caring and stopped wanting to be adopted, when they were asked how important on a scale of one (not at all important) to 10 (extremely important) was it to you to be adopted by another family they respondents on average rated the importance an 8.5, with a range of six to 10.

“A family to call your own”. In addition to rating adoption as important, the respondents who rely on their former foster parents for support and still have contact with their former foster families felt like they didn’t have a family to call their own. One youth stated that “at the end of the day when you’re in foster care you don’t have a family to call your own”. These youth felt that although they were treated like family they ultimately were not. The youth identified that their current life situation would not have been any different if they would have been adopted. One respondent stated that the only thing that would change if she was adopted would be her last name. That small change and being a legal part of a family was important to these respondents.

Collaborations

The grant was awarded to the Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services but was proposed and implemented as a public-private-university partnership. The model incorporated both the systems change required of the cooperative agreement and practice demonstrations that were carried out primarily by the contracted providers on the grant (Beech Brook, Adoption Network Cleveland, the Neighborhood Collaborative agencies and Case Western Reserve University). The partners with CCDCFS were dependent upon the Division for referrals in several of the activities. The youth specialist from Beech Brook was essentially an
adjunct worker to those youth who were approximately one year away from emancipating from foster care. She worked collaboratively with the Independent Living program referrals were a continuing problem. This problem was addressed by the program staff attending supervisory unit meetings to share the proposed intervention with the teens, to solicit support and cooperation from staff, and contacting Independent Living staff and supervisors for additional referrals. No prior relationships existed in this department with a teen specialist from a private agency.

Adoption Network Cleveland, another grant partner, had a pre-existing relationship with the CCDCFS and some of the service they offered existed before Partners for Forever Families was funded. However, the agency was asked to concentrate Navigation Services to the targeted neighborhoods of the grant and not deliver them county-wide. They, too, were dependent upon CCDCFS for referrals. As part of the collaboration, ANC was able to attend the pre-service training for prospective adoptive and foster parents to share information about their services. They were able to receive referrals from CCDCFS from the pre-service training but also accepted self-referrals from those who sought out advice and guidance from a well-known community agency.

Other services were contracted from ANC. A staff person from ANC coordinated file reviews for children without a permanent resource, targeting those youth being served by the teen specialist from Beech Brook. This also required referrals and assistance from CCDCFS to be able to come into the agency and research the files of these teens. Also ANC took the lead on Youth Speak Out program. This program received referrals from both CCDCFS’s Youth Engagement Specialist who ran the Teen Advocate Group but drew participants from a pre-existing a support group called “Get Real.” “Get Real” was a support group that also acted as a child preparation group for older youth in foster care awaiting permanent homes.
ANC took the lead on developing the Ambassador program in the targeted neighborhoods, utilizing the faith based community and the hair salons. They collaborated with both CCDCFS and the Neighborhood Collaborative Agencies to connect Ambassadors to neighborhood programs.

ANC’s partnership was crucial to the effectiveness of the two legal symposiums. Their previous experience in hosting several National conferences and previous planning experience with the court were invaluable in this collaboration. They have sought private funding from a local foundation to keep the legal symposium going after the grant ends.

Finally, ANC was also responsible for pulling together the advisory committee for the grant. This was structured to bring the Neighborhood Collaborative Agencies’ staff together with ANC, CCDCFS staff and foster parents to plan community Advisory Breakfasts. This organizing body promoted the sharing of resources so that if ANC recruited a hair salon to be an ambassador for foster parent recruitment, those contacts were shared back with the Neighborhood Collaborative Agencies. This was to promote the sustainability of the Ambassador idea.

The Neighborhood Collaborative Agencies in the targeted neighborhoods also received referrals from CCDCFS for those people in pre-service who were in their communities that could use extra support going through the process of becoming a foster or adoptive parent. They also were notified when a youth emancipated from foster care and were returning to or living in the neighborhood served by the agency.

Predominantly the Neighborhood Collaborative Agencies participating in the grant were charged with planning and implementing out-of-the-box recruitment strategies in their neighborhoods. The Neighborhood Collaborative Agencies had pre-existing contracts with the
CCDCFS around recruitment deliverables. They were able (and required) to use existing contract dollars to conduct the out-of-the-box recruitment activities. As this was not what was planned originally as the Neighborhood Collaborative Agencies expected to be able to obtain additional resources, tensions arose and needed to be worked out. The fact that all of the partners were still around the leadership planning table at the grants end, and that they were very collaborative in participating in all of the big events and Ambassador Breakfasts, was a sign of positive collaboration.

Case Western Reserve was charged with both the evaluation of the grant but also housed the program manager for the project. There were other parts of the university that were engaged throughout the course of the grant, such as the Schubert Center, which took on the expense of hosting the play on campus (Sometimes Hope is Enough). They also were able to engage the university president and key leaders in Cuyahoga County government who spoke at the event of the play performance.

At CCDCFS itself, the program manager was charged with engaging distinct service units to take on customer service, family search and engagement, and the policy and planning components of the grant. Many of the systemic issues were areas that needed to be addressed for both Fostering Connections mandates, ODJFS requirements, and or pre-existing strategic planning efforts.

The Leadership Meeting, held monthly, enabled all the contractors and agency participants to come together to work out issues related to referrals, systemic issues, and real life issues that kept the meetings based in current and pressing issues. The teen specialist from Beech Brook shared monthly the struggles of the youth on the verge of emancipating and those who had recently emancipated. The Neighborhood Collaborative Agencies and ANC reported
about successes and frustrations. CWRU documented the meeting and kept the focus on evaluation as well as outcomes.

**Conclusions**

The project did not meet its stated goals of impacting the CFSR but did successfully demonstrate the development of many strategies to implementing community diligent recruitment programs. As the planning of the grant proceeded and activities were planned to fully respond to the cooperative agreement, there was a natural tension between what the CFSR measures were and the actual measures instituted to measure the progress of the grant. Resources had to be taken from the demonstration projects in order to fill the requirement of the cooperative agreement.

Some special evaluation efforts were developed. They were developed as issues arose in the monthly leadership meetings. This included the home study evaluation initiated in the third year and concluded in the fourth year that was recently accepted for publication. It also included follow-up interviews with participants from the legal symposium to understand the long term impact of such events.

The finding of youth leaving care for adoption significantly higher in the targeted neighborhood, which was approaching significance in Year 4 and significant in Year 5, was a positive outcome. However, the overall decline of the number and rate of adoptions at CCDCFS is of great concern.

The child welfare community has been positively impacted by Partners for Forever Families. Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services has been a leader in foster care reform for over 16 years through its affiliation with Annie E. Casey. Through the
course of the grant, the creative and community recruitment strategies were highlighted at a national conference and through a national webinar. Community recruitment strategies and the revision to the Neighborhood Collaborative Agencies contracts has provided CCDCFS with a path to fulfill the diligent recruitment of families for youth in care.

**Recommendations**

Communities matter in the recruitment of foster and adoptive families that are reflective of children in care. Recruitment requires multiple strategies. General recruitment is essential for keeping the needs of children forefront in the consciousness of the community. Targeted recruited that focuses on specific neighborhoods can result in positive outcomes. Child-centered/child-specific recruitment is essential for any child that has a special need—whether that need is being older, being part of a sibling group, or due to emotional/behavioral/educational/physical difficulties. Resources are required to successfully recruit, which means funding must be provided for all types of recruitment. Not only is funding required, developing staff and community expertise to recruit is essential. Funding must also be allocated for web-based recruitment as well as web-based applications. More and more families are using the internet; public agencies need to make their web presence more pronounced and more responsive.

Recruitment is not enough. Unless there are responsive staff and a system that values all potential families, recruitment will fail. While some professionals dislike the idea of customer service in child welfare, in fact the principles of both customer service and social work should be the guide for all interactions between the agency and the individual. This includes courteous and respectful behavior including responding to telephone calls; potential families have to feel
important. This means listening to what the person wants/starting where the client wants to start. They need to feel that they are not just tolerated but matter to the agency. Potential families should not feel that they are interrupting work—they are the work of the child welfare agency. Family engagement is not only about the birth family but every individual or family who expresses an interest in the health and welfare of any child. This way of approaching potential families represents a different way of conducting child welfare services.
References


Appendix A: Contract Language to Ensure Project Sustainability

Neighborhood Collaborative Contracts specific to Recruitment, Development and Support

The process of recruitment is not limited to identifying families; it also entails the concept of development and supports to foster/adoptive/kinship parents (AKA” resource families”) focusing on permanency. “Neighborhood-based recruitment” is defined as recruiting foster/adoptive homes in the community from which children are removed from their primary families. Recruitment events are those events dedicated to looking for foster/adoptive families and are publicized as such. Annual recruitment activities will be planned and conducted in partnership with DCFS.

1. The Provider will create a recruitment plan, in writing, to be submitted to DCFS no more than 90 days after the beginning of the new contract period. Recruitment plans will be approved by DCFS. The Provider will submit written progress reports regarding their recruitment plan every 90 days thereafter for approval by DCFS. The recruitment messaging and efforts will change with the needs of the children/youth in care. Each Provider will receive data annually from DCFS indicating the number and characteristics of children entering care from their service area. This data is to be used to inform the development of the recruitment plan. Each provider will plan a minimum of 4 recruitment events per year of the contract.

2. Each recruitment plan must include the identification and support of “Forever Families Ambassadors” (local businesses recruited for the purpose of assisting with foster parent recruitment in each geo area). A minimum of two ambassadors per collaborative must be identified per contract year, each of whom will be verified by DCFS. These ambassadors are to be utilized in the recruitment effort to assist with the identification of prospective foster/adoptive families. The ambassador duties will include hosting fosterware parties, assisting with informational meetings and displaying recruitment information.

3. The Provider will jointly plan with DCFS a total of three community informational events per year of the contract. This will include attendance at and assistance with the yearly foster parent conference and with foster/adoptive parent month events and planning.

4. The Provider is required to attend all Recruitment Management Team Meetings (RMT) held quarterly with DCFS to review rules, policies and procedures, as well as recruitment issues, strategies, and event planning.

5. The Provider will host or sponsor a site for the Moving Heart Gallery photos two (2) times per contract year. Provider will also assist with locating sites for the Heart Gallery photo shoots.

Support of neighborhood residents in the foster/adoptive home-study process

1. The Provider will support and advocate for families as they navigate the home-study process. The Provider will assist in finding or providing assistance to overcome barriers to licensure such as minor housing violations, specialized programming for children, and obtaining documents or identifying other resources to assist prospective foster parents.
2. The Provider staff will attend the second session of all pre-service trainings to inform participants of county-wide and neighborhood-specific services on an ongoing basis throughout each year of the contract. DCFS will develop a schedule for the Provider agency to attend these meetings by May 1st of each contract year. In addition, the Provider will develop and update one-page information sheets annually. The one-page information sheets will be used in pre-service training, to inform foster parents of collab services, highlighting the services offered to assist foster parents.

3. The Provider working in their assigned clusters are required to recruit and support a minimum of 3 families thru the completion of pre-service and application submission. The Provider will communicate by mail or phone with identified families going through the home-study process using the list of pre-service attendees provided by DCFS. This will take place no later than the 4th pre-service session. The Provider will offer support and linkage to community resources, if appropriate, for families involved in pre-service and the home-study process.

4. Training related to the home-study process will be provided by DCFS staff for Provider staff to keep abreast of changes around licensure. Provider staff must attended the “Foster Parent 101” training within the first year of employment.

Foster/ Kinship Parent Cluster Meetings

1. Cluster groups are DCFS approved meetings used to support families providing care for children in the custody of DCFS. The cluster consists of up to four (4) Provider agencies. Cluster meetings are facilitated by the Provider staff and an appointed foster/adoptive parent with the assistance of DCFS. DCFS will establish cluster groups among the Provider agencies to develop and support Foster/ Kinship Parent Cluster groups. The Provider cluster groups will develop and update a one-page information sheet for the cluster that gives dates, times, locations of meetings, and describes the services offered to foster/kinship families.

2. The Provider will support the foster/kinship parent cluster group by sharing information through mailings, conducting recreational activities, and problem-solving individual foster/kinship parent barriers/issues with DCFS and other child-serving agencies.

3. The Provider will co-facilitate the cluster meeting with the assistance of the foster/kinship parents and DCFS staff. The Provider will continuously update foster families on available resources in their neighborhoods.

4. The Provider staff from each of the designated DCFS Cluster Groups will work together to host one Life Book Workshop during each contract year as requested by DCFS. The Provider will assist with two Adoption Mixers each contract year as requested by DCFS.

5. Each Cluster will host ten monthly sessions of both foster parent and kinship parent groups per year. The break schedule is determined by each Cluster team and must be provided to DCFS.
PARTNERS FOR FOREVER FAMILIES

A Public-Private-University Initiative and Neighborhood-Based Approach

Guide for Family Finding with Older Youth

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Summit County Children Services
Problem

Cuyahoga County is located in Northeast Ohio and encompasses the City of Cleveland as well as numerous inner ring and outer ring suburbs. While from 2001-2011 the overall population of children in foster care had reduced, the children who remained in care were older and had the more complicated histories and difficulties, requiring new methods to promote their need for permanency. The Partners for Forever Families project was initiated in 2008. In 2008, there were 710 children in permanent custody (pc); 272 (38.3%) had no adoption resource identified and there were 223 (31.4%) adoptive placements. In 2009, there were 708 children in pc; 221 (31.2%) had no adoption resource identified and there were 248 (34.9%) adoptive placements. As of July 2010, there were 649 children in pc; 203 (31.3%) had no adoption resource identified but the goal is 270 (41.6%) adoptive placements (108 adoptions had occurred so far). As of 2011, there were 604 children in pc; 211 (24.9%) had no adoption resource identified and there have been 162 adoptive placements.

In addition to the number of children who have no adoption resource identified, as they age, and particularly if they have had a previous unsuccessful adoptive placement, the youth are more comfortable in remaining in their foster home, group home or residential treatment center than facing the prospects of an unsure outcome in an adoptive family. Not only the youth, but their workers are less inclined to push for an adoptive family is the youth is stable and seemingly happy. Of course, they then take as face value when the youth claims they don't want to be adopted. Finally, in addition to the youth and the worker, in Cuyahoga County at age 16 the youth are transferred to an Independent Living Unit where the emphasis is on obtaining skills to emancipate from foster care and not on locating a permanent adoptive family. This problem is not unique to Cuyahoga County. In a previous Children’s Bureau project (Groza, Alman, Garcia, Roberson, Fox, et al., 2010), teens were the target of intense family finding activities with successes that had not been thought possible.

National rhetoric seems to acknowledge the difficulty of finding an adoptive family for older youth. Yet, instead of focusing exclusively on finding adoptive families for teens, national language increasingly embraces an idea of “finding a permanent family connection”. The definition of a permanent family connection is vague; while adoption is part of this definition, so are families signing a Permanency Pact (www.nrcyd.ou.edu/publication-db/documents/permanency-pact.pdf) as well as former foster families, kin families or siblings who are willing to make any type of connection to the youth such as the youth able to call them if they are hungry or homeless. Less emphasis has been placed on reconnecting youth to birth parents whose rights were previously terminated. Increasingly, as the recognition that children aging out of foster care face negative outcomes, one strategy that has become used is returning to birth parent previously judged as unfit to parent and to the extended family who may have lost or never had a connection to a youth in foster care (see Getman & Christian, 2011).

The purpose of this guide is to give assistance to child welfare staff on what it means to re-engage birth parents and extended birth relatives as a possible resource for older youth, particularly those who are aging out of care for whom no permanent adoptive family has been
found. That is not to say that all youth are appropriate for this intervention nor are all birth/extended families good resources; however, there are situations where this might be part of planning for emancipating youth. It is a much better strategy to engage youth while they are still in care rather than let them engaged their birth family without supervision or support. Also, with the advent of Facebook and other social media, the youth and their birth parents/extended family are already engaging each other before they leave the child welfare system (Getman & Christian, 2011). It is a much better practice to engage the youth and their family while they are still in protective custody to help them all evaluate the nature and type of relationship that is reasonable.

Permanency Milestones

There are three permanency outcomes for children who enter the child welfare system; they are, in order of priority, reunification, legal custody or adoption. Each of these have a different case planning and legal process. Birhachek (2012) offers this definition of permanent connection:

A committed adult who provides a safe and enduring relationship, demonstrates love and commitment, offers the legal rights (short of adoption) and social status of full family membership, provides for the physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual well-being of the youth. A permanent connection helps to assure the youth of lifelong connections to siblings and extended family.

This is the first attempt to define what is meant by a permanent connection. It is considered a work-in-progress.

The Interventions/Strategies

Record Mining

The foundation of good practice for any child who is in permanent custody, but particularly for older teens in permanent care, is to read the record of the youth. One model of record mining is to read the child’s record and extract information from the record. One of the staff for the Partners for Forever Families offered this guidance on this first model of record mining.

Approaching the record

- Approach with a genuine curiosity
- Look at all facets of the record to locate information- including court records, narratives, visitation logs, psychological records… these all potentially contain useful information such as names, relationships, important dates, location information, etc.
- Be detailed oriented (and even a little OCD might be helpful 😊)
• there are often multiple copies of things that all look basically the same, but there might be key info hidden in one form but not the other;
• For example- there may be two copies of a Semi-Annual Review, or SAR, in the record. At first glance they are both the same document, one is just a copy of the original but a closer look reveals handwritten notes that someone jotted down that reveals a name or an address, phone number, social security number, etc…
  ▪ If possible, start with the earliest part of the record as this may contain information about people who were originally considered as resources
  ▪ Write down all names, even partial names, phone numbers, birth dates, social security numbers

Dos & Don’ts
  ▪ Don’t spend too much time mining the file
  ▪ Do utilize speed reading or skimming
  ▪ Don’t get caught up in the story; this is easier said than done. This takes practice but again, approaching the record by skimming or speed reading should help.

Length of Time
  ▪ Varies depending on how big or how small the record is as well as how long the youth has been in care.
  ▪ In general, records are significantly larger for a youth that has been in care at an early age (i.e. as a toddler)
  ▪ The caveat to the above statement is that there have been several records of youth that have been adopted previously and returned to care as teenagers; therefore the record is a lot smaller because it does not contain information about birth family

Barriers
  ▪ Getting caught up in the story
  ▪ Incomplete information in the record; i.e. incomplete names,
  ▪ Documents not in any order
  ▪ Illegible handwritten documents

A second model of Case Mining or record mining was first developed by Campbell (2005, 2010). The Campbell process also includes interviews with the youth, previous as well as current caregivers, professionals who have worked with or treated the youth, teachers and other interested individuals as identified by the youth. Though the identified people do not always lead to adoption or guardianship, they can help to build a network of support and connections. A critical component of the strategy is the involvement of the youth in the process.
Youth Involvement and Assessment

The foundation of evaluating any intervention is based on a good assessment. As part of the assessment, the youth should be 16 or older and have an IQ of normal (85 or higher). At the initial stage of assessment, it should be about building a good relationship with the youth. Be clear about the purpose of the interview with the youth. Be sure to explain who you are, what your role is, and the reason the interview is taking place. Give the child an idea of the things you will be talking about and how long the discussion will take place (Wilson & Powell, 2001). Tell them that the rule is that they can say, “I don’t know,” “I don’t understand,” and “I don’t want to talk about that topic.” Trust is the most important element to establish. The goal of the interview is to have youth relate their history and experiences accurately and completely.

Start by talking to youth about fact-based questions routines. They are usually good at it and you can get an assessment of their language and comprehension. Talk about where the youth spends time, his or her favorite music programs and television programs. Give the youth verbal reinforcers and cues to encourage talking and acknowledge that you are listening (Wilson & Powell, 2001).

**Example Questions for the Beginning Interview**

- Tell me your name and age
- Tell me about your exact birth date and where you were born, if you know it
- Tell me about yourself
- Where do you live now?
- How long have you lived where you are now?
- How do you like living there?

Questions that youth don’t understand will result in spurious answers. A youth assumes that if an adult asks a question, then the question is answerable. Also, no youth wants to look stupid or foolish. Anyone who interviews a youth needs to know about the youth and the level of a youth’s vocabulary and understanding before asking questions. Don't assume because a youth shakes their head in the affirmative that they understand the question. Gently check what the youth means when she or he uses sophisticated words and concepts (Wilson & Powell, 2001). You can expect less detail from older children the further back you ask them to remember.

The more specific the question, the more it should be saved until later in the interview. Poole and Lamb (1998) indicated that a “Cognitive Interview” has the best evidence as a protocol. They also discuss other types of interviewing which are called the Structured Interview and the Step-Wise Interview which work well for investigative interviews. The models have a great deal of overlap. They suggest that interview consist of the following five stages:

1) **Foundation** – Introduction and Rapport Building
2) **Narration** – Asking open-ended questions
3) **Probing** – Asking more sensitive questions, while keeping up with a narrative framework
4) **Review** – Summarizing the main points that have been discussed
5) **Closing** – Ending the interview and planning for the next steps.
Only after an initial review and when there is a relationship should the conversation move forward. It is important to remind the youth who you are, about the previous conversation and the rules for your conversation (they can say, “I don’t know,” “I don’t understand,” and “I don’t want to talk about that topic”).

The middle stage assessment questions are more personal and may be emotional for the youth. If a child becomes agitated, anxious or distressed during any part of the interview, stop the interview and talk about what is happening.
During this middle stage, it is a good time to do a family genogram (Hartman & Laird, 1993) a placement genogram (McMillen & Groze, 1994), and an ecomap (Harman & Laird, 1993) and/or the social network grid (Tracy & Whittaker, 1990). As you complete these tools, following are questions that can also be asked at this stage.

**Example Questions for the Middle Stage Interview**
- Who do you consider to be your family?
- How did you come to consider that they are your family?
- Who do you get along with best in your family?

**About the Birth Family**
- Do you know what the words birth mother and birth father mean? Can you tell me in your own words? If the child does not know, explain the words to him or her. Tell him or her that a birth mother is the biological mother; she is the one who gave birth to him or her. Likewise, tell him or her that a birth father is their biological father; the man who got his or her mother pregnant.
- When was the last time you saw or spoke to your birth mother? When was the last time you saw or spoke to your birth father?
- Do you have siblings (that is, brothers or sisters)? Tell me about your brothers, where are they and if you have contact with them? Tell me about your sisters, where are they and if you have contact with them?

**About Permanency**
- What does adoption mean to you?
- Have you talked to a anyone about adoption? If so, who was it? Can you tell me about that conversation?
- What are the (3) best things about being adopted?
- What are the (3) worst things about being adopted?
- Where are you in deciding about adoption? Can you tell me about your decision?
- What would it mean if you were not adopted?
- Who is your permanent family?

**Family Electronic Searches**
Concurrent with or following the youth interview, and after recording mining, an internet search of possible family contacts should be conducted. There are a number of commercial products that have been used by child support enforcement authorities that are helpful in this part of the process of identifying up to a third degree relative. Keep in mind that not everyone that shows up on a search is related to the youth; they potentially may be related to the youth but may have no relationship to the youth in care.

A general letter can be sent to all the people identified that is vague, mentioning that the public agency may have a child in care to whom they are related. They should be directed to a specific person is they know or suspect a child is in custody that is a relative. This can produce some leads but as often as not, there is little response from letters. Leaving telephone messages is also often less productive.

A better strategy is to triangulate the data from recording mining, the youth assessment and the electronic searches to identify those individuals who are the most likely related to the youth. Then, when feasible (and safe), make a visit to the relative to see if they can be engaged in a discussion about the youth.

Have a script

Reconnecting with the Birth Family

Paternity does not have to be established for the paternal family to be considered for permanency. A continuum of contact needs to be developed. The first task is to conduct an assessment.

Birth Family Assessment

- Background Check: Check county and city level both criminal and civil (so any cities they’ve lived in)
- Birth Family Assessment should include determining whether bio parents have or currently are parenting other children. If they are successfully parenting, this is a strength on which to build.
- Explore how the birth family views the youth and their role in removal. Some families blame the youth for CFS involvement, especially if the child disclosed information that resulted in the case being opened in the first place. The assessor needs to explore this with the birth family the youth is not set up for a poor experience if the bio family does not follow up or make contact.
- Don't dismiss the connection if placement can't occur. Be creative and devise other ways that connection can be a support. Letters and pictures sent once or twice a year or phone contact can mean a great deal to a child.
Legal and Guardian Ad Litem/CASA Concerns

*All parties associated with the case need to be kept 'in the loop' and on the same page.

*Education is essential with this topic and sometimes birth parents and other relatives have a stigma of being 'bad.'

*Including the CASA's in visits and in meetings is critical; make them your ally and not the enemy.

*With court personnel, the worker needs to be aware of the importance of including them in the process and explaining rationale for decisions. Sharing the wishes of the child and all contacts made by worker is critical when fostering the spirit of teamwork.

*CASA's have a lot of information from the past and should be interviewed and part of the records review.

Before the actual visit:

*Discuss with youth the actual plan and what the visit will look like, where it will occur, who will be there and how long the visit will last

*Discuss the expectations of the child and what they would like to see happen and what they expect to happen

*Ask the person(s) visiting to send some pictures and letters before the visit in order to 'break the ice' with the child

*Have conversation with relative their commitment level with the child prior to the first meeting so all expectations are clear (can everyone keep appointments, and follow up)

Role of Worker

*Transport child or family member to the designated area

*Supervise the visit

*Ensure family is prepared as well as the child

*Ensure comfort of child and if the child is not comfortable with going forward, that visit will not occur. Child needs to be in charge.
After the visit:

*Coordinate a 'Circle of Support' meeting to discuss the next steps for this child, the level of commitment and level of involvement with all members.

*Establish parameters for ongoing contact with all in agreement

*Child should be at this meeting to take an active role

Summary

This Guide organizes our experiences as part of the Partners for Forever Families program. It is by no means exhaustive but as this is a promising practice, we wanted to write our lessons learned. Those lessons were informed by others who have embraced the practice longer than this project. Such an approach is not a panacea for the youth aging out of care but is part of array of solutions for the children in the permanent custody of child welfare systems.
References


