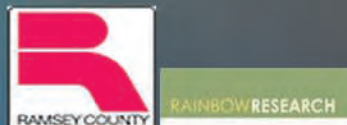


# RAMSEY COUNTY COMMUNITY HUMAN SERVICES

## TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS Foster and Adoptive Parents TO HELP YOUTH THRIVE



Made possible by:



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# INTRODUCTION

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Ramsey County Permanent Families Recruitment Project is a five-year demonstration project funded by the U.S. Children's Bureau. The project's overarching goal is to find a permanent home for every child. The project aims to improve permanency outcomes for African American, Latino, and older youth through diligent recruitment and system change efforts.

The purpose of the 2012 Youth Focus Groups was to:

- Collect information from foster and adoptive youth that can be used to provide feedback to key stakeholders (licensing workers, placement workers, child protection, and permanent connections staff) to improve the licensing, training, and placement process.
- Allow Ramsey County Children and Families Services Division to hear first-hand from youth about areas of strength and areas needing improvement.
- Identify tips that can assist staff in their work to make successful placements and achieve permanency for foster/adoptive youth.

## FOCUS GROUPS

- Focus groups were conducted in May and June 2012. The first focus group was conducted in May 2012. Rainbow Research, Inc. staff and Ramsey County Youth Advisory Group (YAG) youth worked closely planning the focus groups (discussing the interview guide and plans for the group) and recruiting youth participants. Subsequent groups were held with foster, waiting, adoptive youth including Latino youth.
- A total of seventeen Ramsey County youth participated in four focus groups: 1 group of foster, waiting, and adopted youth, 1 group of aged-out youth and 2 groups of Hispanic/Latino youth. Youth in relative and non-relative placements were represented.

- Selected YAG youth served as co-facilitators and were invited to attend a 3-hour training mid April 2012
- In addition, YAG youth played a central role in the review of focus group findings and development of the tips presented in this booklet. YAG youth and Rainbow Research staff reviewed a summary of the qualitative analysis, identified key themes, and developed tips for social workers and providers in this Tip Sheet.



## Participants

Youth participants included a mix of young people between the ages of 12-22 and participants represented different races and ethnicities. Below is a table that describes the background of participants.

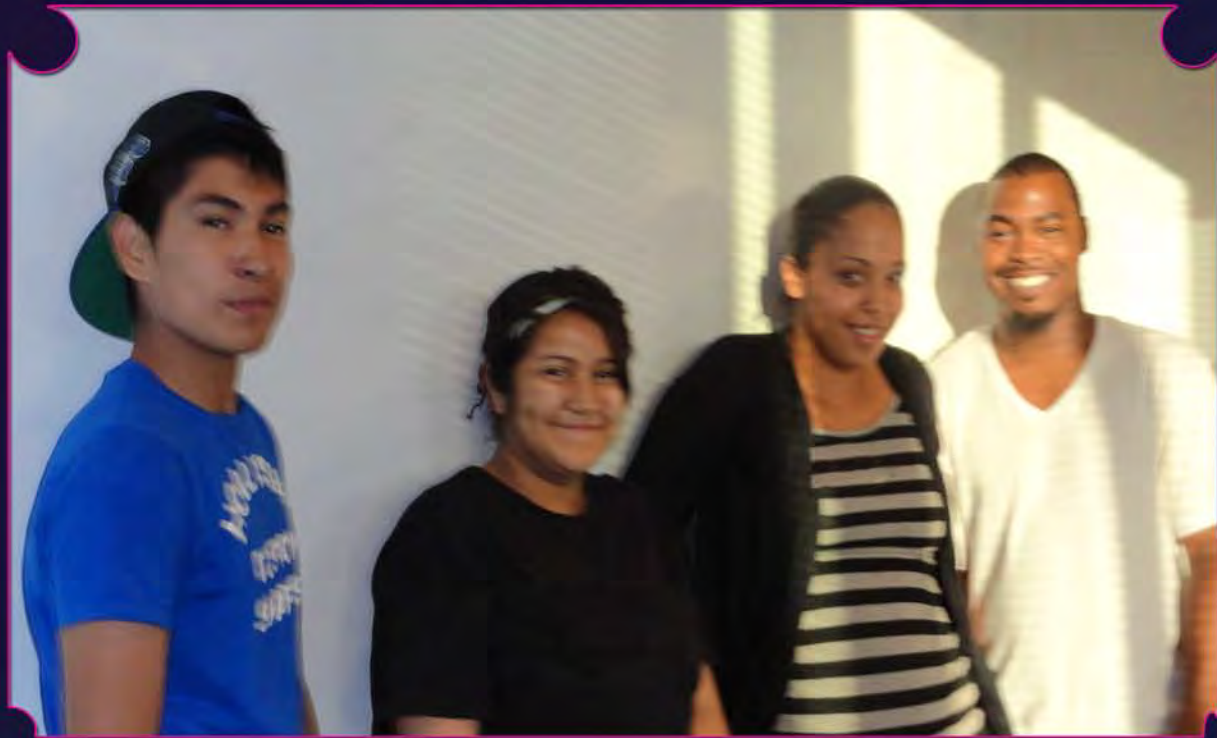
Gender	Race/Ethnicity
Male-9	African American-8
Female-8	Hispanic/Latino-5
	Caucasian-2
	Other-2
Age	Placement Status
(12-14)-5	Adopted-2
(15-17)-3	Foster Care-14
(18-20) -7	Waiting to be adopted-1
(21-older)-2	

# TIP SHEET DEVELOPMENT

As part of the Permanent Families Recruitment Project implemented in Ramsey County, Minnesota, foster care youth participated in focus group discussions about their experiences.

This focus group project was designed, led, and implemented by youth leaders who are part of the Ramsey County Youth Advisory Group, a group of foster care/adopted youth who advise the county on policies and practices.

After reviewing what the youth said about their experiences and their ideas for improving the system, YAG youth developed tips for Ramsey County social workers and staff. It is their sincere hope that social workers will find these tips helpful in their work of helping youth achieve permanency.





“We want our lives to be better”

TIP

1

## FAMILIES THAT PLAY TOGETHER... STAY TOGETHER...

- Set aside time together as a family to do activities and be active
- Incorporate constructive time for activities with high needs kids

TIP

2

## HELP US UNDERSTAND YOUR EXPECTATIONS OF US...

- Be clear and firm about house rules
- Communication must be clear and honest
- State your expectations of us and be clear about them

TIP

3

## RESPECT OUR BIRTH FAMILY AND DON'T HOLD OUR PAST AGAINST US...

- Negative remarks about birth parents can cause problems and hinder the growth of the child
- If the kid is acting out, don't bring up the birth family situation
- Don't talk about why we entered the system-don't hold our past against us
- Things should be kept between foster parents and birth family, don't drag the kid into it



“Help us  
to live our  
best lives”

TIP

#### 4 Help us be independent...

- Teach life skills and independence
- Be directly involved in the process
- Teach responsibility and independence by letting them do it and be part of the process

TIP

#### 5 Help us to create safe spaces for ourselves

- Kids need their own private spaces to feel safe
- Private spaces help kids calm down and cool off

TIP

#### 6 Don't impose who you are on us, but understand our needs and encourage us to be ourselves...

- Respect children's beliefs -Don't impose your family values and beliefs
- Learn about the child's religion and ways to accommodate it
- Understand the child's mental health situation, get educated about what is okay to talk about and what's not



“Let us be part of your family”

TIP

7

MAKE US FEEL LIKE PART OF THE FAMILY - TREAT US LIKE YOUR OWN...

- Make us feel like part of the family
- Let us have the freedom and access to things that your own kids have
- Don't have separate rules for us
- Treat us like your own kids

TIP

8

DON'T MAKE IT ABOUT THE MONEY, BUT RATHER ABOUT US!

- Don't make the motivation or incentive be about the foster care money but rather about the passion
- Treat us with respect and show that you care about us and not the money

# YOUTH ILLUSTRATIONS OF “FAMILY”

The illustrations in this booklet are drawings and stories from foster and adopted youth who participated in youth focus groups for the Permanent Families Recruitment Project.

During each focus group, youth participants were asked to draw or write down words that described their ideal foster or adoptive home. Youth were asked to add the qualities of a good parent or provider and what kind of experiences they would like to have in a home. Paper and pens were provided.

There are four pictures that capture different youth perspectives about their foster care placement experiences. Below each photo is a description of the picture offered by the youth who drew the picture.

These illustrations were created by a graphic artist. The artist enhanced the focus group participant’s hand-drawn illustrations by adding color and replacing handwritten words with type face in different fonts. The intention of the artist was to maintain the original integrity of each drawing.

These illustrations were drawn by youth who have different experiences in the foster care system – pre adoptive, long term foster care, and those aged out of foster care.





## I Describe My Family As...



"I just think of [foster care] as being with somebody you don't know and it might not be what you want and being with your family is different. Since I got [taken] away from my family, I realize how much more important it is to be with family. "

**-Foster youth, 16**

**OUR FAMILY IS A ZOO... HAPPY AND PERMANENT, FOREVER**

LOADING  
SWAG

CRAFTS  
CHERISH  
FLOURISH  
GARDEN  
CRAZY

MONTANA FISHING  
OUTDOORS FOREVER  
PETS EXPERIENCE  
CREATE

HAPPY UNIQUE  
FAMILY FOOTRUBS  
FOREVER LOVE

Love or hate me  
but I promise you won't  
make or break me



forever



BLACK SWAN



"I drew my mom because she makes me happy. We like to garden a lot, fish, and just basically be outside whenever we can. I basically drew my mom and all of the pets we have, which is a lot, some of them I cannot even put on the page. I got the pictures of the 2 cats, one of them, I was like Noel older evil cat because it is really grumpy and it tries to bite me all of the time And then there is my dog Mocha, and then my 2 hermit crabs, my 16 fish which I could not fit on there, and my 2 snails. Like our family is a zoo. Happy, like permanent, forever." - **Waiting youth, 13**

# Family Is Everything



"This is my picture and it is all a bunch of words about what I feel like my family should be and what my family is. So like some of the words are like happy, loyalty, loving, careless, we stick together, we feel safe around each other, we are caring, we are crazy that is what my family is. And like I want my family to be like, I get a chance to meet all of my brothers and sisters and go out to dinner with them, not meet like because I actually met them but actually sit down with all of us and like talk about what their life has been in foster care or adoption, whatever they went through because I don't know. And like we should have faith in each other, we should feel safe around each other and we should trust each other."

**-Foster youth, 16**

# HOME

A smile on my face about time they came  
To release all the visuals negative images and pain  
Struggled too long day in and day out  
Massacre in my mind, living in doubt  
They told me I wouldn't amount to anything at all  
That just like my parents eventually I'd fall  
Until that day that they finally came  
I knew it was fate, me they came to save  
A smile on my face the tears kept on coming  
Like a bird in the air all you hear is humming  
A mom, dad , brother, sister  
Hope they keep me long and that I won't be a bother  
Give me hope and the ability  
To achieve all my goals and successfully succeed  
Hold me real tight like a child of your own  
Make me feel welcome like this is my last home

HEART

GOOD EDUCATION  
STRONG  
LOVED

CONFUSED  
MISUSED  
ABUSED  
ACCUSED

PLEASE BURY MY PAST,  
HELP ME START MY FUTURE

BE  
THERE  
FOR ME

HAPPY  
DEDICATED  
FULFILLED  
HOPEFUL

-Aged out youth, 20

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