

Using family-finding models to achieve permanency: Key concepts and strategies

Tuesday, August 24, 2021

Getting started



This webinar will be recorded and shared with you.



Submit your questions via chat.



Please complete our survey at the end of the webinar.

Speakers

Bob Herne

National Project
Director, AdoptUSKids

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AdoptUSKids mission



Raise public awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families for children in the public child welfare system



Assist US states, territories, and tribes to recruit, engage, develop and support foster and adoptive families

Overview: Our replication efforts

- Purpose and goals of our family-finding replication work
- Supported by the Children's Bureau
- Replicating models of family finding along a continuum of approaches

Family-finding initiative replication models

Model / approach	Replication agency	Brief description
Extreme Family Finding (EFF)	FosterAdopt Connect	<i>Family finding:</i> Team of recruiters and private investigators work to find extended family to establish relational and legal permanency for youth for whom it is typically more difficult to find permanency
In-Depth Profiles (IDP)	Northwest Resource Associates	<i>Video profiles:</i> Creative storytelling and video projects that give older youth the lead voice in finding an adoptive family
I Belong Project (IBP)	America's Kids Belong	<i>Video profiles:</i> High quality videos developed to give youth waiting for permanency a face and voice
Family-engagement approach to permanency (NIPFC)	National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness	<i>Systems change:</i> Support and training to advance permanency for all children and youth, with family finding as a core strategy

Participating states and jurisdictions

Model / approach	Participating states and jurisdictions
Extreme Family Finding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption Rhode Island; Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families • Adoptions Together; Prince George’s County Department of Health and Human Services, MD • TRAC Services for Families; Allegheny County Department of Human Services, PA • FosterAdopt Connect; Kansas Department for Children and Families
In-Depth Profiles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange; Michigan Department of Health and Human Services • Oregon Adoption Resource Exchange; Oregon Department of Human Services
I Belong Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise the Future; Utah Department of Child and Family Services • Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services • Georgia Department of Human Services
Family-engagement approach to permanency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monterey County Family and Children Services, CA • Santa Cruz Probation Department, CA • Butte County Children’s Services Division, CA • San Luis Obispo County Child Welfare Services, CA



Program models

Hearing from each program on their strategies, guiding principles, and insights

Speakers

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Family Finding Is Network Building

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“Family finding” is network building

- There are an abundance of systemic challenges to this work, that are centered around a primary question: **How do we change a system designed to protect children from their families to one that supports families to keep their children safe and healthy?**
- This requires an examination of the values, practices, policies, and procedures that serve to support the continuation of a system designed to protect children from their families, in order to change the system for the better. These solutions cannot be limited to tinkering around the edges.

“Family finding” is network building

- Family finding to identify placements can be damaging and ineffective when continuing business-as-usual practice. Systemic changes are required to adapt to and integrate shift in practice.
- Ultimately, the goal of family-finding type approaches is to create a robust asset base of support for every young person and family touched by the child welfare system, and that the asset base is respectfully engaged, welcomed, and encouraged to participate in the support of the young person while developing and determining the plans for their future. This can be achieved for every child in danger of or entering the system, as well as for children languishing in the system.

Guiding principles and beliefs

Child welfare agencies and all systems partners adopt and consistently align to the values and principles that:

- Families, beginning with parents, are the primary asset needed for the health and safety of their children.
- Families, beginning with parents, are the foremost experts in their own lives, and the lives of their kin.
- Therefore, all decision-making about family must include those family experts, beginning but not limited to, parents.

Guiding principles and beliefs

At the leadership and executive levels of the child welfare agency and all partners, establishing and consistently holding an unwavering shared agreement and accountability to these core values is essential to changing systems. When systems are not aligned with regard to these principles, families are harmed. Avoiding or ignoring the lack of alignment to these principles is to knowingly participate in the continuation of the harm that unnecessary separation and isolation inflicts.

Guiding principles and beliefs

By examining the experience that families face (**and** including partners and those with lived experience in that examination), leaders can learn:

- What practices, policies, routine decision-making, and operations currently support the involvement of families.
- What interferes with or deters family involvement.
- Process-mapping and like activities will promote a clear picture of what is currently occurring, which can lead to understanding the design of what can and must be done to alter unwelcoming paths to engagement.

Guiding principles and beliefs

- Abolishing (internally and with partners) obsolete practice theories and models which separate and isolate family members and limit or prevent communication between them.
- Finally, as a child welfare system, we need to determine what we will do to hold ourselves accountable for the historic racial inequality and disproportionality that has impacted families, communities and tribes, and then to take the necessary action to reverse these outcomes. After all, the social work code of ethics requires us to do no harm. We should aspire to far more and settle for nothing less. Ensuring that families are essential participants in all child welfare decisions and actions would be a significant step to changing systems.

Key strategies

- Alignment is at the core of all strategies—staff can perform family-finding/network building tasks to high fidelity with little impact if there is insufficient alignment within the social service agency and between partners.
- We work with each organization to help them define what success would look like in terms of more inclusive and engaging practices, conformity to legal requirements, and addressing systems via an implementation science approach to support the sustainability of practice changes to better the outcomes for children and family served.

Key strategies

We teach a variety of engagement and involvement strategies to broaden the number of people known to child welfare agencies and effectively build more trusting relationships that encourage family involvement. We teach tools, strategies, and activities in an experiential manner so that participants have the opportunity to observe, rehearse, and discuss what they are learning; practice the taught skills in between sessions; and receive/provide peer and instructor coaching in the following session to promote integration of the new information.

Key strategies

- We teach practice that supports the mattering of families to increase the likelihood of their involvement with their kin impacted by the child welfare system, and to increase the identification and involvement of fathers and their relatives into the lives of children and youth in care.
- We teach a broadened and thickened practice of strengths identification and utilization to bolster iterations of “strengths-based” practice, so that the strengths can consistently be incorporated into planning and support the voice of youth to be present in all decisions that impact them.

Key strategies

- We teach a planning model that supports identification of the underlying unmet needs of young people in care, so plans families develop will be meet those needs of their young people.
- We profess the unequivocal need for each and every young person to have a lifelong network, for free and forever, to support them now and long after government intervention is no longer needed or available.

Sustainability

Identifying core values that staff hold, in context of dept core values and strategic plan. Identifying practices in which the values are apparent, and practices where the values are more opaque. Where can the value-rich practices be replicated/spread, and what can be done to amplify values in practices where they are less apparent?

Sustainability

Engaging staff in units and asking questions such as:

- What can be done to significantly increase the family member participation in the initial (within the first 60 days) Child and Family Team meetings, and in all Child and Family Team meetings subsequently, so that the family experts are welcomed to develop plans and make decisions for their kin?
- What steps/actions are necessary to improve alignment within the social services agency and between agency partners to the core values of family centered practice?
- What can supervisors and managers do to assist in accomplishing this goal?

Sustainability

- Participating in process mapping
- Reviewing procedures that direct children to out-of-home or residential settings from the community, as well as returning them home.
- Providing training to improve engagement skills.
- Examining how existing searching for family practices and results can be more consistently utilized following transfers.
- Participating in court/attorney conversations to strengthen alignment and common understanding of the practices, while working to meet legal mandates and intent of laws and regulations.

IN-DEPTH PROFILES

Empowering · Authentic · Youth Driven

In-Depth Profiles

- What do you want to share with potential families?
- How do you want to share it?

In-Depth Profiles

- Started in collaboration with DCYF in WA in 2017.
- Concurrent goals of engagement, empowerment, and permanency.
- Family finding expansion efforts included pilot sites in Michigan and Oregon.

In-Depth Profile process



- Identify potential youth

- Engage youth

- Create with youth

- Review with youth

- Share and respond to families

Core principles of IDPs

- The first goal of any youth involvement should be their engagement and empowerment in the process – not just once, but ongoing.
- When youth are presented with opportunities they want to say “yes” to – and given time and space – they are more ready to engage.

Core principles of IDPs

- Youth deserve a seat at the table, making decisions about their own future.
- Adults are on the same team to collaborate and are speaking the same language re: permanency.
- If we don't talk to youth about permanency and recruitment, they'll (at best) have misconceptions about what's going on, or (at worst) think nothing is going on at all.

Replication efforts

- Family finding initiative allowed for pilot sites in MI and OR.
- Engagement and collaborative work with youth was fully remote.
- NWAEE staff partnered with existing recruitment entities (MARE and OARE) to build capacity for continued IDP work.

Replication results

- Average age of youth served: 15 in MI and 13 in OR.
- Inquiries on youth increased by over 200%.
- In MI participating youth had been receiving recruitment services for an average of 33.4 months.
- Within 6 months of completing the pilot in MI, 55% of youth who completed an IDP had either been matched with or identified an adoptive family.

Successful paradigm shifts

- Increased focus on involving youth in the approval and review processes.
- Demonstrated effectiveness in involving youth in terms of inquiries and outcomes.
- Learned that engagement is still possible in exceptionally difficult situations.

“I want to show who I am.
Having a voice means it’s actually true,
and not other people saying it for you.
People can know who you are,
not by the past you’ve created.”

- Recent teen In-Depth Profile

Extreme Family Finding

Key concepts and beliefs

- Childhood is short!
- Every child has a right to connections with family and deserves a permanency loving home.
- Define “family” broadly.
- Every person in the child's life CAN offer assistance. This includes sharing family information!

Key concepts and beliefs

- Understanding is built on genuine empathy and care.
- People can change, they want to succeed, and they do the best they can with what they have:
 - Behaviors have a purpose and are often the symptom of unmet needs.
 - Children heal in families.

Strategies

1. Private investigators
2. Case mining
3. Interviews
4. Social media

Strategies

5. Working with urgency
6. Going the distance
7. Advocacy
8. The bulk of the work is in ongoing, meaningful engagement and support.

Successes

- A collective 2,399 relatives on cohort genograms
- 40 reconnections
- 38 matches
- 1 adoption with dozens more in process
- 2 reunifications with increased family support

Setting the stage for replication

- Does your agency support relative connections, placement, and permanency?
- Is your agency committed to 100% implementation? This includes leadership!
- Are there positive and reciprocal relationships between your agency and area stakeholders?
- Is your agency willing to be an agent of change?
- Does your agency support workers in working with urgency without sacrificing quality?



Implementation and sustainability

Additional thoughts and tips



**Questions
& answers**

Contact information

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- Tyler Helbach: thelbach@nwresource.org
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Resources

- [“I Belong Project Gives Children a Face and a Voice”](#)
- [“Going to the Extreme to Find Children’s Families”](#)
- [“Engaging Youth in Writing Photolisting Narratives”](#)
- First webinar on family-finding and engagement: [Using family-finding models to achieve permanency](#)

Wrapping up

- Read more on our website: professionals.adoptuskids.org/
- Complete our evaluation survey
- Upcoming webinar on August 26: [Best Practice 101: Photolisting & Inquiry Response Systems](#)





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