



## Fact Sheet Three: Making Families for Life and Permanence a Priority

Family permanence for all older children and youth in foster care is possible, it is powerful, and it must become a priority.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has compiled evidence showing that family permanence is achievable for older children and youth in foster care. This position is based on the work of Casey Family Services, its direct service agency; its many Family to Family sites across the nation; the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative; and the efforts of Foundation grantees and partners nationwide. Specifically, this “on the ground” work and research suggests that the following strategies are critical to system reform efforts that prioritize family permanence:

### Expand and improve front-end services and engage community partners to prevent older children and youth from entering the child welfare system whenever possible.

- Like several other states, Indiana, North Carolina, and Oregon have secured waivers of federal regulations and used the funding flexibility to enhance their family preservation and reunification programs. A recent study found “a statistically significant positive association” between these waiver programs and reduced entries into foster care.<sup>1</sup>
- Beginning in 1997, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, tripled its budget for neglect and abuse prevention and doubled spending on family preservation. Since then, the county has reduced its foster care population by 30 percent, enabled more than half of all children requiring foster care to be placed with relatives, and kept 80 percent of foster children together with their siblings.

### Examine state and local child welfare systems for racial bias, and develop new strategies to eliminate disparate treatment of children and families of color.

- In 2004, the State of Michigan convened a task force to study the overrepresentation of minority children in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. After consulting national experts and nearly 1,000 stakeholders, the task force proposed 11 recommendations to reduce disproportionality.<sup>2</sup>
- In 2006, Casey Family Programs launched a “Breakthrough Series Collaborative” on reducing overrepresentation of children of color in child welfare.

### Eliminate or reduce the use of “long-term foster care” or “emancipation” as case goals for adolescents in the foster care system.

- The Cleveland Family to Family Initiative (cited above) reduced the percentage of older children with long-term foster care as their case goal from 26 percent in 1995 to 8 percent in 2000.<sup>3</sup>
- From 2000 to 2003, New York City reduced the number of youth with independent living as their goal from 1,584 to 843, while increasing the adoption rate for older foster youth.<sup>4</sup>

- More -

### Undertake intensive, creative planning for permanency that is individualized to the circumstance of each youth and grants young people a central role in planning their own futures.

- The Family to Family Initiative's Team Decision Making model involves youth, their parents, other supporting adults (neighbors and faith leaders, for example), and community partners in meetings with child welfare professionals to make decisions about whether a child should be placed in foster care, or moved from one placement to another once in care. The model, which is currently employed in over 60 sites in 17 states, has helped reduce the number of children unnecessarily placed into foster care and the number of times children are moved once in care.
- Considered a national model, the Lifelong Family Connections for Adolescents project in Massachusetts partners with youth to create a "family team" – including family members, service providers, and other caring adults in a young person's life – and then works with the team to identify permanent placement opportunities and relationships.

### Conduct greater outreach to relatives and make subsidies more readily available for kin willing to care for foster children.

- Research shows that children in foster care placed with relatives experience less disruption in their placements and are more emotionally healthy than children placed with strangers.<sup>5</sup>
- Many relatives are willing to adopt when children cannot return home to their birth parents. In fact, one-fourth of all adoptions of foster children involve relatives.<sup>6</sup> Again, research shows that adoption placements with relatives are disrupted two and one-half times less often than adoptions involving caregivers unrelated to the child.<sup>7</sup>

### Make extensive use of subsidized guardianship as a permanency option for older children.

- From 1997 through 2002, Illinois' subsidized guardianship demonstration program created permanent homes for more than 7,000 foster children, increasing the overall permanence rate by as much as 12 percent, and saving taxpayers \$25 million in ongoing foster care costs.
- Overall, 36 states and the District of Columbia provide some form of subsidized guardianship, allowing children who cannot return home or be adopted to live permanently with relatives or other caregivers who are willing to make a permanent commitment to their safety and well-being.

### Strengthen efforts to recruit and support foster and adoptive resource families for older children.

- Through a congregate care bed reduction project for older foster children, New York City enabled 50 percent of targeted youth to exit group home facilities and enter family-based care – either returning to their own families or moving to live with relatives or non-related foster families.<sup>8</sup>

- End -

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. Synthesis of Findings: Title IV-E Flexible Funding Child Welfare Waiver Demonstrations (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2005).

2. *Moving Toward Better Outcomes for All of Michigan's Children: Report from the Michigan Advisory Committee on the Overrepresentation of Children of Color in Child Welfare*, March 2006.

3. *A Family for Every Child: Strategies to Achieve Permanence for Older Foster Children and Youth*, North American Council on Adoptable Children (paper for AECF's Family to Family Tools for Rebuilding Foster Care), August 2005, p.24.

4. *Ibid*, p.18.

5. *A Family for Every Child: Strategies to Achieve Permanence for Older Foster Children and Youth*, North American Council on Adoptable Children (paper for AECF's Family to Family Tools for Rebuilding Foster Care), August 2005, p.34.

6. AFCARS Report #10, published April 2005, downloaded from [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats\\_research/index.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/index.htm) on July 12, 2006.

7. *A Family for Every Child: Strategies to Achieve Permanence for Older Foster Children and Youth*, North American Council on Adoptable Children (paper for AECF's Family to Family Tools for Rebuilding Foster Care), August 2005, p.34.

8. *A Family for Every Child: Strategies to Achieve Permanence for Older Foster Children and Youth*, North American Council on Adoptable Children (paper for AECF's Family to Family Tools for Rebuilding Foster Care), August 2005, p.50.