



# Fast Track to a Family Evaluation Report



# CONNECTIONS MATTER

Submitted to

ANU FAMILY SERVICES

Prepared by

THE BUTLER INSTITUTE FOR FAMILIES  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK  
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER



UNIVERSITY *of*  
DENVER

BUTLER INSTITUTE FOR FAMILIES  
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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2008, there has been a national trend within the public child welfare system to prioritize kinship placements for children who are removed from their homes. In 2008, the [Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act \(P.L. 110-351\)](#) required states who remove a child from their home due to child abuse or neglect to identify and provide notice to kin within 30 days of the child's entry into state custody. The intention of this legislation was to strengthen programs for youth in transition, get youth permanently connected, and improve existing systems of care for children. When the legislation was implemented in 2008, the number of foster children placed with relatives was 24% and has since (as of 2016) increased to 32% according to the [2017 AFCARS Annual Report](#).

Family Finding programs such as Anu Family Services' Fast Track to a Family (FT2F) in Minnesota offer strategies for identifying and engaging kin in order to strengthen family connections for children in out-of-home care, decrease placement moves, and increase permanency for children and youth. The FT2F program began in 2016 and by late 2017 had served a total of 22 children (from 13 families) in Chisago and Ramsey counties. This report presents findings from the Butler Institute's evaluation of FT2F. The evaluation included interviews with key stakeholders as well as a review of the literature, program documentation, program data, and state data. Through review of program documentation and interviews, Butler was able to establish core program components and assess the extent to which families and county caseworkers in Ramsey and Chisago counties found FT2F helpful. The data were used to explore the extent to which FT2F results in the identification of a greater number of kin / fictive kin than do services as usual and allowed a visual comparison of placement and permanency rates for FT2F clients in relation to those of Ramsey and Chisago counties as well as other similar counties.

As a result of FT2F's family-finding process, the known number of relatives for a child increased from an average of eight per family at intake to an average of 82 relatives. Across the 13 families, FT2F staff were able to identify a total of 14 viable placement options (about one per family), taking an average of 26 days for the first placement option to be identified. Although FT2F's placement rate was lower and average time to placement longer than the average for Ramsey county, it should be noted that some of the case situations taken on by FT2F were more challenging than typical. Results also indicated that Chisago's and Ramsey's placement and permanency outcomes generally met or exceeded performance standards and were similar to comparable counties, with some evidence of improvements in relative placements and placement stability over time, though Butler was unable to establish whether FT2F influenced those outcomes. Based on interviews with families and



caseworkers, themes that emerged regarding strengths of the FT2F program included the interpersonal skills of the Specialist, the material supports provided (such as documentation, briefs, and genograms), guidance provided to families and caseworkers, responsiveness, and time available to engage kin and support workers. Families, in particular, indicated they felt respected and heard.

Recommendations from Butler include continuing to operate the program from a neutral community-based setting and hiring and retaining dedicated and knowledgeable staff who take a strengths-based and family-centered approach to family finding. Additionally, it is recommended that in the future FT2F seek access to Social Services Information System child- and parent-level data to allow for more comprehensive and effective service provision and tracking of continuous quality improvements in programming. Finally, due to the importance of children having a family network of connections and support, it is recommended that Anu, in collaboration with other stakeholders, pursue statewide funding to make kinship search and placement services more accessible, thereby increasing chances of improved well-being for all Minnesota children placed in out-of-home care.





# INTRODUCTION

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For nearly 25 years, Anu Family Services (Anu) has led the way in providing innovative solutions to help create permanence, safety, and well-being for children and their families in Wisconsin and Minnesota. Anu was an early founder and provider of the treatment foster care model, committed to the belief that children reach their best potential in family-based settings rather than institutions.

Historically, Anu programs have focused on child permanency at the end of the youth's time in out-of-home care. However, Anu prides itself on implementing innovative practices, so in 2016, the organization set out to expand efforts to include work at the beginning of a child permanency case. The (FT2F) program was created to assist with finding and engaging the relatives and kin of a child at the time of his or her entry into out-of-home care. The FT2F program is provided to children placed in out-of-home care by the county child welfare agency and is a county contracted service.

In 2018, Anu contracted with Butler to help identify and articulate core program components, to examine program effectiveness for identifying kin or fictive kin families, to understand the experiences those kin have once identified by FT2F, and to explore permanency outcomes of FT2F youth in light of general county- or state-level permanency outcomes. Here, Butler presents a review of the literature on family-finding programs, a description of FT2F's program components and processes, our evaluation methods (for establishing effectiveness and family experience), and the results and discussion of all efforts.

# REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON FAMILY-FINDING PROGRAMS

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The 2005 National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being found that when children who are removed from their home for child abuse or neglect are placed with relatives within 30 days of removal, they are at lower risk for future behavior problems ([Conway & Hutson, 2007](#)). Further research suggests that children placed into kinship care have fewer behavioral problems three years after placement than do children who were placed into foster care ([Rubin et al., 2008](#)). These studies highlight the importance of increasing efforts to place children with willing and available kin when they enter out-of-home care.

In 2008, the preference for kinship care was codified into federal law as the [Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act \(P.L. 110-351\)](#). The law enables and reimburses states to provide support to kinship care providers that was previously only given to traditional foster care providers, such as guardianship assistance payments, Medicaid eligibility, and guardianship trainings. Since the law also requires child welfare agencies operating a Title IV-E program to notify kin (all grandparents and other adult relatives of the child) within 30 days if a child is removed from the home due to abuse or neglect, federal grants are awarded to agencies to conduct Family Finding services—the process of identifying and engaging kin. Initially developed to find kin of children that were in traditional foster care for an extended period of time, Family Finding has now become part of the beginning stages of child removal processes. Family Finding frames kin engagement as critical to child well-being and improved child welfare processes. According to the [Children’s Bureau \(2018b\)](#), Family Finding also promotes family reunification.

## NATIONAL TRENDS

Over the past decade, child welfare agencies throughout the country have shifted from prioritizing placement of children in traditional non-relative foster care to prioritizing kinship care. Unlike traditional foster care, which places children who have experienced maltreatment into designated non-relative foster homes, kinship care places children in the care of family members or close family friends ([Children’s Bureau, 2018b](#)). Nationally, children placed in kinship care increased from 24% in 2006 to 32% in 2016, while placements in traditional foster care remained around 45% ([Children’s](#)

[Bureau, 2018a](#)). Already at a relatively high rate of placing children with kin, kinship care placements in Minnesota increased substantially from 40.4% in 2014 to 56.1% in 2017 ([MDHS, 2018](#)).

## FAMILY FINDING: PLACEMENT AND PERMANENCY

Research on Family Finding programs has generally focused on legal outcomes like placement stability and permanency and has generally produced inconclusive or lackluster results. Placement stability means that a child removed from the home is not moving from one caregiver to the next during their time in out-of-home care. Permanency refers to achieving legal status regarding guardianship, adoption, or family reunification for children who have been removed from the home. In 2015, [Vandivere and Malm](#) conducted a systematic review of thirteen Family Findings programs across the country. Contrary to expectations, their review found that there was not sufficient evidence to associate Family Finding programs with improved placement or permanency outcomes. They suggested that the lack of evidence may have been due to inconsistent program implementation and study parameters. Two years later, from 2008–2011, they carried out a randomized control trial of Family Finding programs in North Carolina and also did not find improved permanency outcomes for older youth in foster care ([Vandivere et al., 2017](#)). [Koh and Testa \(2008\)](#) studied the placement stability of children and youth in traditional foster care versus kinship care in Illinois and found no significant difference in placement rates. Similarly, a study of a Cook County Illinois Family Finding program did not find significant differences in placement rates or permanency outcomes ([Leon, Saucedo, & Jachymiak, 2016](#)).

## KINSHIP CARE AND CHILD WELL-BEING

Although there currently is not sufficient evidence to suggest Family Finding improves placement, reentry, or permanency outcomes, evidence does suggest children in kinship care show greater well-being compared to children placed in traditional foster care. Child well-being is strongly tied to stability, particularly in the home environment. Preventing children's reentry into out-of-home care is important for providing the increased stability necessary for optimal child well-being ([Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2013](#)). Compared to standard child welfare services, Family Finding significantly increases kin engagement in terms of number of kin identified and meetings attended to discuss care plans and placement options ([Landsman, Boel-Studt & Malone, 2013](#); Atkinson, 2017). It is believed that having more kin engaged with the process may increase the child's social support network. One study found that 68% of children in foster care change placements four or more times, which may mean four different schools, four different social settings, or four different caregivers over the course of important developmental stages for the child ([Pecora et al., 2005](#)). [Perry \(2006\)](#) found that the instability caused by multiple placement changes disrupts a child's social supports and leads to significantly higher rates of anxiety and depression than the general population. The presence of a



larger social support network buffers that impact somewhat and is associated with decreased depressive symptoms in children removed from the home due to child abuse or neglect ([Salazar, Keller, & Courtney, 2011](#)). Compared to children in group homes or traditional foster care, children placed in kinship care have stronger ties to their biological families and are less likely to experience depression or anxiety (Perry, 2006). Additionally, older children placed in kinship care demonstrated a significant decrease in externalizing behavior over time, such as aggression and noncompliance, in comparison to their peers in traditional foster care ([Wu, White, & Coleman, 2015](#)).

## FAMILY FINDING MODELS

Summaries of different Family Finding models can be found at the [California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare](#). In 1999, [Kevin Campbell \(2005\)](#) and [Catholic Community Services of Western Washington \(2008\)](#) adapted the methods used by international first aid organizations to trace kin separated by war or natural disasters to foster care. Many Family Finding programs have been established since then: Missouri's [30 Days to Family \(2011\)](#); Oregon's [A Family for Every Child](#); [Children's Home Society of North Carolina](#); Iowa's [Four Oaks Family](#) and Children's Services; and Florida's [Kids Central](#). Comparing programs can be difficult because few programs make their detailed materials publicly available. However, most programs follow the core Family Finding stages originally developed by Kevin Campbell and use the corresponding practice guide ([Louisell, 2005](#)):

- Identify 40 or more kin,
- Engage supportive kin in the child welfare process,
- Develop a plan for the child with kin,
- Involve kin in decision-making and evaluation of plans, and
- Provide follow-up support for the child and kin.

Since the development of Family Finding in 1999, there have been changes in focus and implementation. Over time, programs started using Family Finding at the beginning of the removal process and to bolster follow-up services. For instance, in 2008 the Foster and Adoptive Care Coalition in Missouri initially only used their Family Finding model, known as [Extreme Recruitment](#), for kin search efforts for children who had been in foster care for a long time. In 2011, Missouri incorporated support services for kin and front-end Family Finding while removal is being considered, developing it into the *30 Days to Family®* program used today. Table 1 summarizes key information about three of the Family Finding programs.

**TABLE 1.** Overview of three Family Finding programs.

<b>Organization</b>	<i><a href="#">A Family For Every Child</a></i>	<i><a href="#">Catholic Community Services of Western Washington</a></i>	<i><a href="#">Foster &amp; Adoptive Care Coalition</a></i>
	<b>Oregon</b>	<b>Washington</b>	<b>Missouri</b>
<b>Program</b>	Family in 30 Days	Family Search & Engagement	30 Days to Family
<b>Model</b>	Kevin Campbell  Extreme Recruitment	Kevin Campbell  Family Search & Engagement	Extreme Recruitment
<b>Goal</b>	When a referral is made by the child welfare agency to the program, identify 40 kin and engage some as potential placements	Engaging and sustaining 40 kin connections for youth in foster care	Within the first 30 days of a child entering foster care, identify 80 kin and engage at least 2 as potential placements
<b>Stages</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Setting the Stage</li> <li>2. Discovery</li> <li>3. Engagement</li> <li>4. Exploration &amp; Planning</li> <li>5. Decision-Making &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>6. Sustaining the Relationships</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Setting the Stage</li> <li>2. Discovery</li> <li>3. Review of Discovery Information</li> <li>4. Engaging Family Members &amp; Natural Supports</li> <li>5. Preparation for Initial Meetings That Will Include Youth</li> <li>6. Building Relationships</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Family Search</li> <li>2. Family Engagement</li> <li>3. Case Support</li> <li>4. Family Decision-Making</li> <li>5. Team Decision-Making</li> <li>6. Preparing Family for Licensure</li> <li>7. Case Closure</li> </ol>




7. Sustaining Life-Long Connections

<b>Collaboration with child welfare agency</b>	After stages 1–3	Stage 1	Stage 1
<b>Activities beyond search &amp; engagement</b>	Relationship building	Relationship building	Home safety checks  Prepare family for licensure
<b>Follow-up</b>	As needed	Unknown	Participation in 60-day follow-up meeting & contacting caseworker at 3, 6, and 12 months

## IMPLEMENTATION

Family Finding can be carried out by outside organizations or integrated in the work of state, county, or tribal public child welfare agencies. Unfortunately, few programs complete all the recommended stages of the Family Finding process. In particular, the final steps—evaluation of plans with kin and follow-up support services—are not consistently implemented (Lin, 2013; Vandivere & Malm, 2015). Many factors contribute to incomplete or inconsistent implementation of Family Finding programs. Vandivere and Malm (2015) identified five factors that inhibit full implementation: lack of stakeholder buy-in, child welfare agency biases against kin, limited capacity, and difficult cross-organizational communication and relationships. For example, stakeholder buy-in may be difficult to achieve because parents may not want other family members to learn about their involvement in the child welfare system, and caseworkers might not see the benefit of involving an outside Family Finding agency in the process. Cross-organizational communication is especially important to address if the Family Finding program is separate from the child welfare agency.

Some factors that were cited as beneficial to the Family Finding process included: education of child welfare workers and families on Family Finding goals and benefits, establishing service coordination teams, having facilitators between Family Finding program and child welfare agency if they are separate entities, and soliciting input from all stakeholders (Vandivere & Malm, 2015). It should be noted that factors that contribute to a child being removed from the home, such as poverty, may



impact kin as well. Consequently, follow-up support is important to enable and sustain the ability of kin to support children in their care. For instance, [Littlewood \(2014\)](#) identified transportation and dental care as some supports needed by kin to provide adequate care for the child and found significant improvement in the ability of kin to support children in their care through the use of the Kinship Services Network in Florida. In sum, cross-organizational communication, family and child welfare agency buy-in, and service coordination teams may help with successful full implementation of Family Finding programs.

## **COST**

Very few studies have incorporated cost outcomes in their reviews of Family Finding or kinship care. However, cost savings related to Family Finding and kinship care are thought to be related to placement stability due to fewer moves, less service utilization, or less department time spent on a case. The Kinship Support Network study by Littlewood (2014) estimated the services provided by the Kinship Support Network were six times less expensive than traditional foster care and twenty-one times less expensive than group home care. Atkinson (2017) found a cost savings of \$10,412 per child in Missouri's *30 Days to Family®* program due to fewer days spent in out-of-home care.





# FT2F EVALUATION PURPOSE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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The goal of this evaluation is to examine the extent to which the FT2F program successfully identifies and utilizes kin or fictive kin as a placement alternative to foster care. The following four evaluation questions guided the overarching evaluation goal:

1. What are the key components of the FT2F service? Components include, but are not limited to: referral process, outreach, screening and program acceptance, service implementation steps, and closure.
2. To what extent does FT2F result in identification of viable kin or fictive kin families?
3. To what degree are permanency outcomes achieved for the youth being placed with kin or fictive kin who utilize the FT2F service as compared to federal and state permanency indicators?
4. What are the experiences of kin or fictive kin who are involved with the FT2F services? Experiences include program participation, coordination of services, and overall identified successes and challenges.

# METHOD

Evaluation methods were established collaboratively by Butler and Anu leadership, through a project “kick-off” meeting, and were revisited in regular meetings during the planning, data collection, and reporting process.

## PROGRAM COMPONENTS ASSESSMENT

Butler conducted a program components assessment to document key aspects of the FT2F services that distinguish it from typical child placement services. The purpose for this was twofold:

- First, understanding core program components is key to evaluating implementation because it helps establish which aspects of the program are expected to lead to stated goals and outcomes.
- Second, clarity around program components provides greater opportunity for program sustainability, replication, and expansion.

To assess FT2F program components, the Butler evaluation team examined the program manual and available records that guide program implementation. The team also conducted interviews with the FT2F Resource Recruitment Specialist (Specialist) to contextualize the program materials and obtain an in-depth understanding of how the program operates.

## SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

In addition to documenting program components, the Butler team analyzed secondary data to answer questions related to family finding, kinship care placements, and permanency outcomes. Data included Anu administrative data and performance statistics from the [Minnesota Department of Human Services \(2018\)](#). Key measures are described in Table 2.

**TABLE 2.** Measures used in secondary data analysis

Measure	Source
<b>Number of known relatives before and after FT2F</b>	Anu administrative data
<b>Number of viable placements identified by FT2F</b>	Interview with FT2F Specialist

<b>Relative placements: Percentage of days spent with a relative (of all days spent in foster care)</b>	Minnesota Department of Human Services
<b>Placement stability: Number of placement moves per 1,000 days spent in foster care (for all children who entered foster care in a given year)</b>	Minnesota Department of Human Services
<b>12-, 12–23-, and 24-month permanency: Of all children who enter foster care in the year, what percent are discharged to permanency within _____ months of entering foster care?</b>	Minnesota Department of Human Services
<b>Demographics and relative placement information for all continuous placements beginning between June 1, 2016, and December 31, 2017</b>	Ramsey County Child Protective Services

Secondary data were analyzed descriptively by county. Because de-identified child-level data from Ramsey and Chisago Counties were not available, it was not possible to create matched groups to compare outcomes between cases who received FT2F services and those who did not.

## KIN AND FICTIVE KIN INTERVIEWS

The Butler team interviewed three kin or fictive kin involved in the FT2F program. The interviews examined individual experiences and perspectives on accessibility of services, coordination and receipt of services, and overall identified successes and challenges based on their individual situations. Potential participants were identified and contacted by the FT2F Specialist, and a member of the Butler team conducted interviews via telephone. Participants received a \$25 gift card as incentive to participate. Analyses involved review of interview notes and audio recordings to identify themes and representative quotations.

## CASEWORKER INTERVIEWS

To obtain an understanding of how FT2F services are different from “programming as usual,” Butler also interviewed two caseworkers by phone regarding their kin-finding process. Analyses followed the same procedure as was described for kin and fictive kin interviews above.



# RESULTS: FAST TRACK TO A FAMILY PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND CORE COMPONENTS

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FT2F was modeled after the St. Louis Foster and Adoption Coalition's program titled *30 Days to Family*®, which was launched in 2011. The focus of *30 Days to Family*® is to assist in the search and engagement of a child's relatives and kin within 30 days of the child entering the foster care system. The first year of this program's implementation was promising, with 71.4% of the children placed with relatives/kin by case closure.

Here, Butler describes the key components of the FT2F service, including its goals, and a description of the program components that include staffing, eligibility and intake, the process of opening a case, finding and connecting with kin/fictive kin, and the follow-up that occurs once FT2F staff have completed the family finding efforts.

## GOALS OF FAST TRACK TO A FAMILY

FT2F developed a theory of change (see Figure 1 or p. 28 of the FT2F policy manual) that outlines the positive outcomes that may occur for both children and the child welfare system if kin placements are increased.



For each child referred to FT2F, staff aim to accomplish the following:

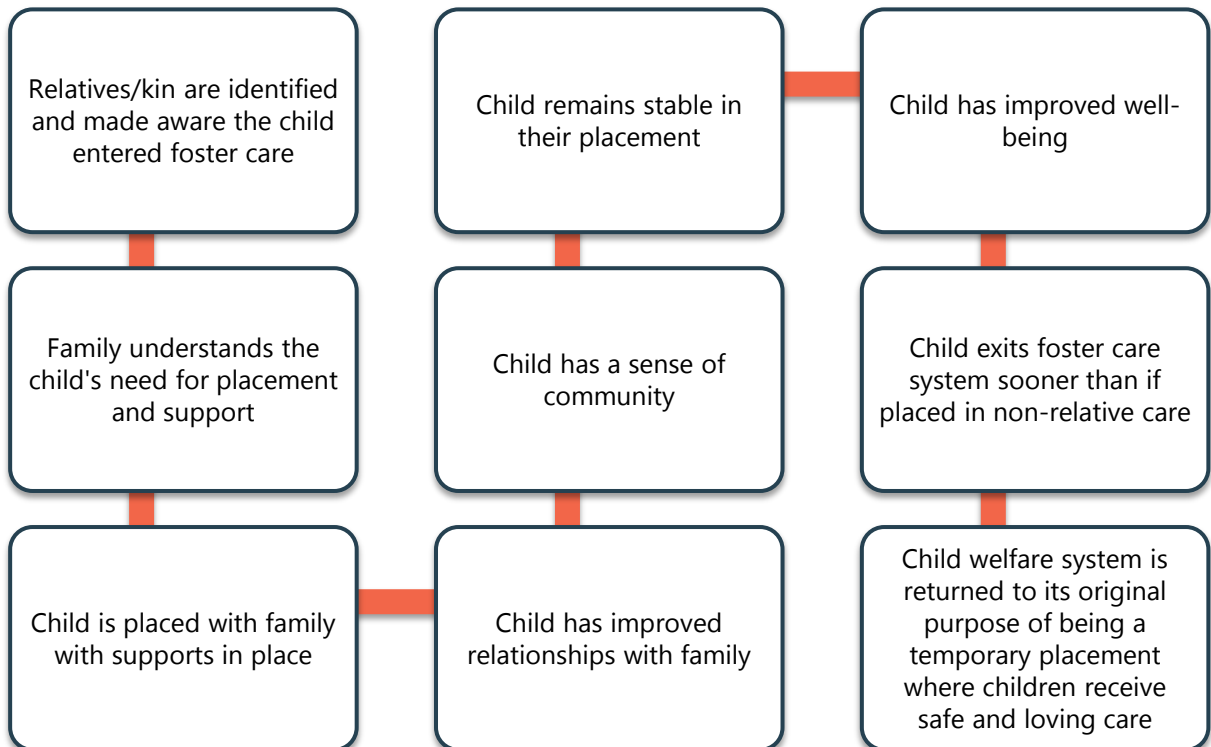
- Identify at least 70 relatives or kin per case.
- Secure one kinship placement in 70% of cases.
- Have one backup placement for 50% of those cases.

These goals represent the minimum goal for each child who enters out-of-home care. The philosophy is to exceed these goals whenever possible. The ultimate goal of FT2F is to avert a childhood spent in foster care, historically known as “foster care drift.”

“Being able to have in-person contact with the [county worker] was super helpful because it allowed me to get some history about the case and to give them more information about what I would be doing.”

— Resource Recruitment Specialist

FIGURE 1. Fast Track to Family Theory of Change



## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

### Staff Responsibilities

At Anu Family Services, key staff for FT2F includes a Resource Recruitment Supervisor (Supervisor) and a Resource Recruitment Specialist (Specialist). The Supervisor is a master's level social worker licensed by the State of Minnesota or Wisconsin and is required to have a minimum of five years' post-licensure experience working in the child welfare field. The Specialist is required to have a bachelor's or master's degree in human services, with a minimum of three years' post-graduate experience working in a child serving agency. The Specialist should also be trained in and have in-depth knowledge of exhaustive family search, as well as the impact of grief, loss, and trauma on families. The Specialist works closely with the county foster care case manager, and other professionals (e.g., Guardians ad Litem), throughout the life of a FT2F case.

It is the responsibility of the Specialist to:

- Assist the case manager and court officials with meeting the Fostering Connections to Success Act, applicable local statutes, and child protection policy in regard to relative/kin notification and placement.
- Keep the professionals involved in the case updated between meetings via phone emails and phone calls.
- Participate in weekly supervision/case consultation.
- Assist in collecting information from relatives/kin to expand the child's support system and family connections, while identifying potential relative home providers.
- Identify and document at least 70 family/kin for each case through diligent search activities, including internet and database searches, child protection and court case file reviews, and child and family interviews.
- Identify at least one placement resource for 70% of youth served.
- Of those 70%, identify at least one backup placement option for 50% of the youth.
- Facilitate ongoing communication with the team and provide the case manager with accurate family documentation, including detailed genograms, efforts made by the Specialist, family contact information, and identified family supports.
- Assist in preparing the family for licensure by explaining the licensing process and assisting with home licensing requirements.
- Attend all meetings and court hearings, advocating for relative/kin placement.
- Complete assessments on the child and family functioning upon case referral, case closure, and 30 days following case closure to measure the success and outcomes of the program.

“ I think because of the caseload size, FT2F offers so many more benefits to the family in terms of being able to offer support. Even if the family can't be a placement option, we should look at how they can support the youth.”

— Resource Recruitment Specialist

Because the Specialists are not overloaded with all the responsibilities of a typical agency case manager, they are able to devote significant effort to each case in a short period of time, with the first few days of a case being the most intense. For this reason, a full caseload is considered two open cases, and caseloads are limited to no more than three open cases at one time. Ideally, a Specialist is not assigned more than one case in a five-day time frame. If two cases must begin simultaneously, assistance from the Supervisor or another Specialist (when applicable) is most likely required. When counting cases, a sibling group is considered one case.

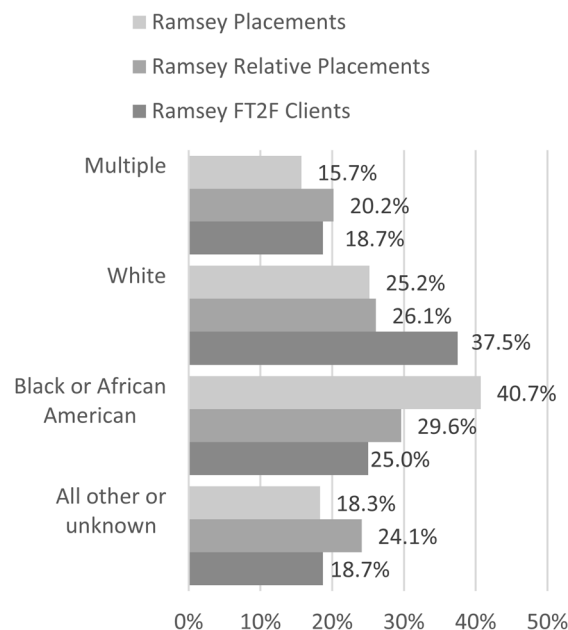
### Program Eligibility and Intake

The FT2F program operates on a referral basis and is designed to serve children and youth of any age

## RAMSEY COUNTY PLACEMENTS

Of all Ramsey County continuous placements during FT2F implementation ( $n = 1,501$ ), 53% of children were male and 47% were female, which is similar to the gender distribution of Ramsey County's FT2F clients (50% male, 50% female). However, there were notable differences by race: overall, Ramsey County placements included a lower proportion of children identified as white than did FT2F clients (25% vs. 38%, respectively), and a higher proportion of Black or African American children (41% vs. 25%, respectively; see figure below).

Of all Ramsey County children *who were placed with a relative* ( $n = 574$ ), the distribution by gender was the same as that of FT2F children (50% male, 50% female), and children's race/ethnicity was similar to that of FT2F children, though FT2F had a larger proportion of children identified as white (see figure below).

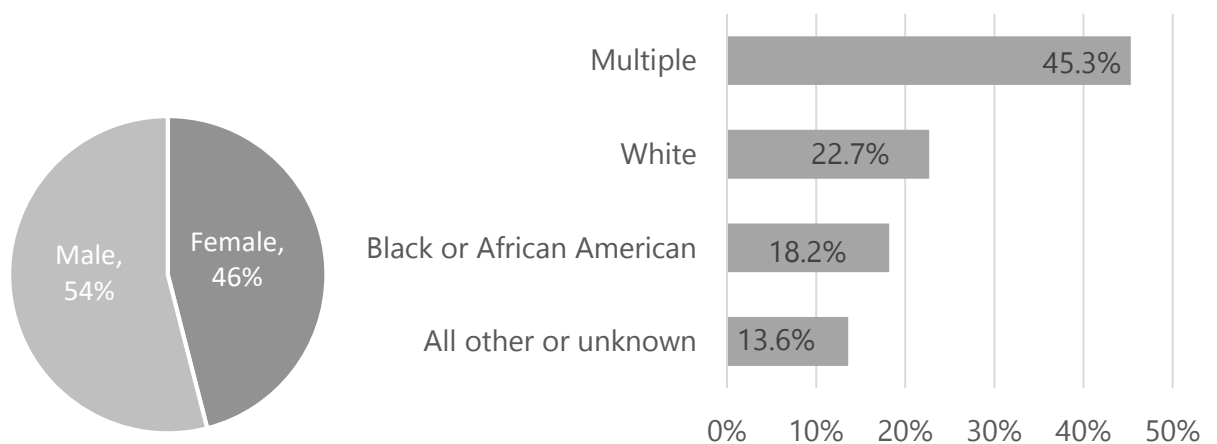


entering out-of-home care due to a need for an emergency placement order. Referrals must be made prior to the initial court hearing (typically within 72 hours of the child entering the foster care system), as it is necessary for the Specialist to attend the first court hearing. Cases are accepted on a first come, first served basis until the caseload of the Specialist(s) is full.

The referral provides the Specialist with the names of the child and siblings, parent(s), grandparents, and other relatives. The referral also contains information on paternity, where the child is currently placed, information about why the child came into care, history of safety concerns (e.g., domestic violence, previous child welfare involvement), and contact information for the case manager, his or her supervisor, and other professionals involved in the case. The assigned Specialist initiates contact with the case manager and other professionals to notify them the child has been referred to the FT2F program.

In 2016–2017, FT2F served a total of 22 children from 13 families. About three-quarters of the children were from Ramsey County (73%), while 27% were from Chisago County. Children were an average of 4.3 years old at the time of intake, ranging from less than 1 month to 13 years old. Demographic information for all FT2F clients (from both Ramsey and Chisago counties) is provided below. As shown, there were roughly equal proportions of male and female children (Figure 2). Nearly one-half were identified as more than one race/ethnicity (45%), while 23% were identified as white, and 18% as black or African American (Figure 2).

**FIGURE 2.** Child gender and race/ethnicity of FT2F clients ( $n = 22$ )



## Starting a Case

The intervention officially starts the day of the first court hearing. The first step is to interview the parent(s) of the child(ren). The relative/kin recruitment process is never the same for two cases or two Specialists. The family's participation guides the Specialist throughout the case. After meeting with the parent(s), the Specialist typically has a list of names to begin a search. It is the Specialist's job to use all known information to immediately begin the search for potential family members and to learn as much as possible about the family.

An important step at the beginning of each case is the utilization of the *Roadmap to Family* document. This comprehensive document captures all of the information gathered throughout the life of the case. This includes information about the child(ren), their family, and kin, and all activities completed during involvement with the family.

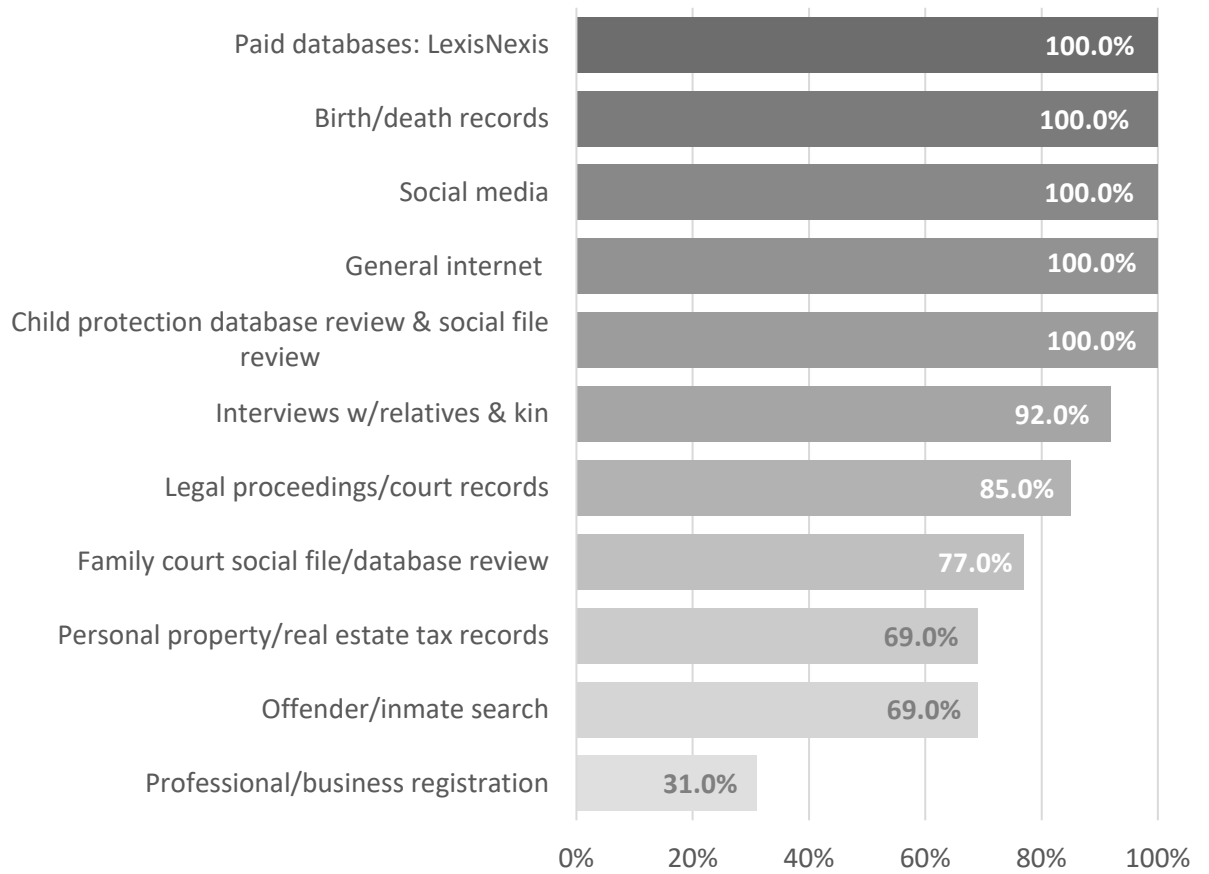
## Searching for Relatives and Kin

Finding relatives/kin takes an extraordinary amount of time. The Specialist uses any and all resources necessary to do so, including:

- Search engines (Examples: Google, Yahoo!, Bing)
- Free online people finders (Examples: whitepages.com, zabasearch.com)
- Paid online people finders (Examples: privateeye.com, archives.com, accurint.com)
- Law enforcement records (Examples: vinelink.com, bop.gov)
- Department of Revenue
- Child protection databases
- Other government databases
- Social networking sites (Examples: Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, Twitter)
- Vital Records Departments
- Obituaries and funeral homes (also Legacy.com, Findagrave.com)

The frequency with which search strategies were used with the FT2F families is shown in Figure 3. For all families, the Specialist conducted general internet searches as well as social media and paid online databases (e.g., LexisNexis). In addition, all cases involved reviewing information from the child protection database and birth/death records. For most families, interviews with relatives and kin were also conducted (92%). The least-used search strategy was professional/business registration (31%).

**FIGURE 3.** Percentage of families for whom search strategies were used (*n* = 13)



Specialists keep search logs (separate logs for maternal, paternal, and kin) to document search efforts made. Each log details dates, times, and specific strategies that a Specialist used to locate people. This document is a living document and is updated as additional searches are conducted.

### Making Contact with Relatives and Kin

Once contact information has been located, the Specialist must contact that person either through a phone call or an in-person visit. When the Specialist speaks with a family member, they are determining the relative's capability to be a support to the child and/or family. When Specialists have the opportunity to meet with relatives face-to-face, they ask for the relative's ideas about placement possibilities and support for the family.

According to program records, a total of 151 relatives or kin received a letter from FT2F. The Specialist sent an average of 12 letters per family. More letters were sent for Chisago county families ( $M = 15$ ), on average, than were sent for Ramsey County families ( $M = 11$ ). The FT2F Specialist also conducted 88 interviews, with an average of 7 per family (see Table 3).



The impact is that youth have information about who their people are.”

-Relative

**TABLE 3.** Average number of letters and interviews per family

	Letters sent		Interviews	
	Total	Average per family	Total	Average per family
<b>Chisago County</b> ( $n = 2$ )	30	15	74	7
<b>Ramsey County</b> ( $n = 11$ )	121	11	14	7
<b>Total</b> ( $n = 13$ )	151	12	88	7

One-on-one, in-person interviews expand knowledge of the family tree significantly, which is one reason this work takes so much time. Genograms are created for each family. The genogram serves as a quick snapshot of the family and all supports, and serve as a way to document those involved. Though not part of the family’s bloodline, friends are included on the family’s genogram, as they are considered an integral part of the family’s network. In fact, every person encountered or learned of during the search process is typically included on the genogram.

Every time a Specialist has contact with a relative or kin, they document this in the Family Contact Log. The log is divided into subsections to ensure that maternal, paternal, and kin are identified separately. This document is updated as information is gathered and individuals are contacted.

## Family-Centered Interviews and Assessments

Connections are built with relatives through a family-centered approach. Guided by the philosophy that relatives and kin desire to and are capable of caring for children, Specialists look for family strengths and interact with the family accordingly. Specialists always respect the family's time and meet with them when convenient (including evenings and weekends) and where they are comfortable. Often, the relative/kin may be defensive because the child is in protective custody, so a primary goal of the Specialist is to build trust with the relatives/kin and serve as a neutral party and liaison.

In addition to interviews, the Specialist conducts the Global Assessment of Relational Functioning (GARF) on the family and either the Child Global Assessment Scale (C-GAS) or Parent-Infant Relationship Global Assessment Scale (PIR-GAS), depending on the age of the child. These tools, which are freely available online and are validated and nationally recognized assessments, measure relationships with family members / caregivers. The information to complete the assessments is gathered from the relatives, the child welfare team, and, if age appropriate, the child. The Specialist begins gathering information for these assessments upon attending the initial meetings and court hearing, and continues to gather information when meeting with the child.

All assessment information is recorded on the *Child and Family Assessment Form*, which is used throughout the life of a case. It asks for minimal identifying information and provides spaces for scoring the C-GAS, PIR-GAS, and GARF. Every assessment is completed at intake, case closure, and again 30 days after case closure.

## Family Decision-Making

The Specialist involved in helping family members make decisions about who they want to provide placement and support for their child(ren) follows the philosophy that:

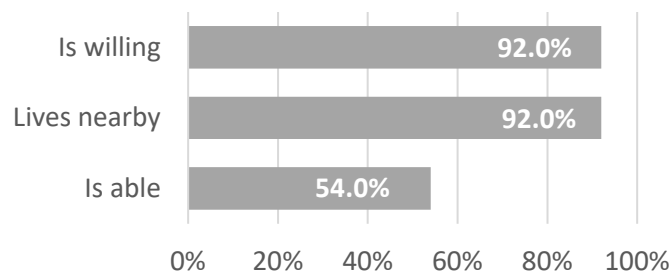
- Every family is unique.
- Every family has its own culture, personalities, personal dynamics, and history.
- Only the family members are experts on the family.
- All families are entitled to respect from the child welfare system.
- Children have a right to maintain kinship and cultural connections.
- Children and parents are nested in a wider family system.
- Active family participation is essential for good outcomes.
- Families are capable of solving problems.



Any involved relatives/kin have the responsibility to determine if they want to be a support or if they want to be a placement provider for the child(ren). After exhausting the family search and engaging relatives, the Specialist may assist the county foster care case manager in helping family members make decisions about who they want to provide care for their child(ren). In addition to identifying one relative to provide placement for the child(ren), the Specialist also assists with seeking one or two backup plans, in case the first option is not viable. In some instances, family meetings are held so that the family members have the opportunity to speak among themselves about the options available to them and the child(ren).

Based on an interview with the FT2F Specialist, nearly all families (92%) had at least one relative who was willing to serve as a placement and/or lived nearby (shown in Figure 4). However, fewer families had someone who was *able* to take the child(ren) (54%).

**FIGURE 4.** Facilitators to placement



Ultimately, the county foster care case manager makes the final placement recommendation, based upon the information gathered by the Specialist and input from the family. The Specialist also assists the foster care case manager in getting the family's advice regarding relatives who might support the child(ren) with:

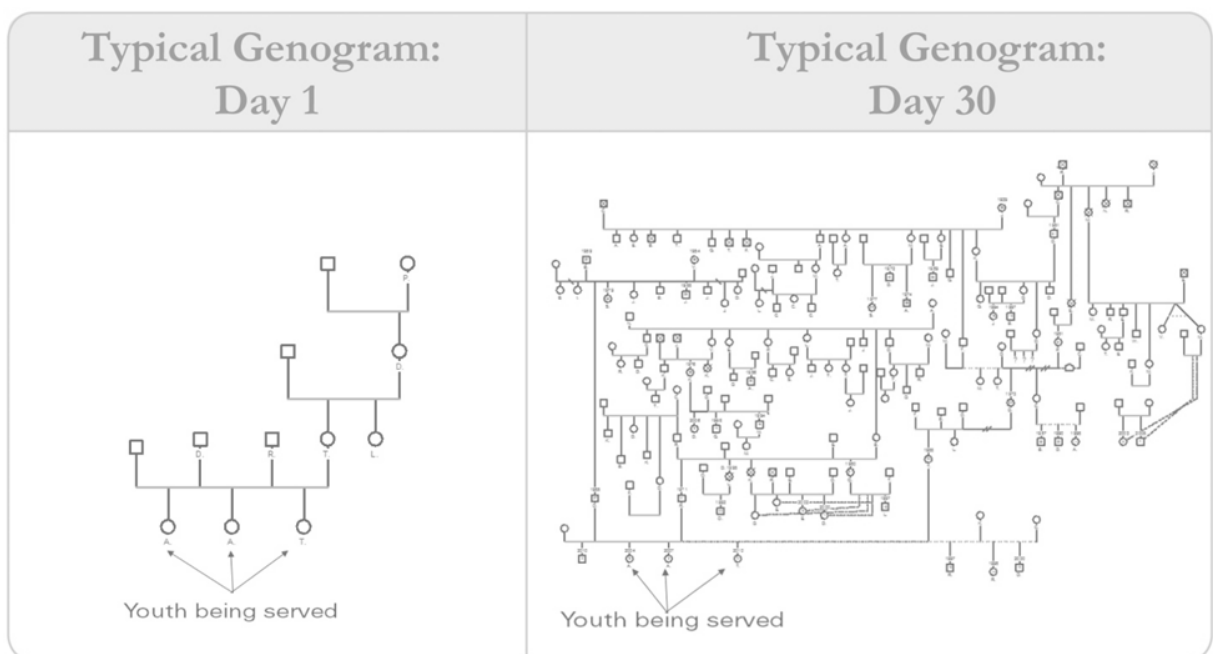
- Respite care
- Assistance with homework
- Mentoring the child
- Emotional support
- Financial support (for additional clothing, sporting activities, class ring, etc.)
- Community activities (faith-based involvement, Boy or Girl Scouts, sports, etc.)
- Employment
- Transportation (to school, medical and/or mental health appointments, or family visits)
- Supervision during the summer and/or non-school hours
- Celebrating holidays and birthdays

## 30-Day Meeting

FT2F requires a meeting be held 30 days after the child(ren) entered care. All professional team members are invited to the meeting, as are placement providers and involved family members. Typically, by this point, every person who is involved in any way has been approved to participate, in some way, in the life of the child(ren). Ideally, this meeting occurs at the end of FT2F involvement in the case.


At this meeting, current versions of the genogram are provided to the team members. For confidentiality reasons, Specialists provide different genograms for the maternal and the paternal members of the family. The professional team members receive a full genogram, but family members only receive information pertaining to their relatives. Genograms created by the Specialist in this process are significantly more robust than traditional genograms created at the beginning of the process (see Figure 5).

**FIGURE 5.** Example genograms



Graphic Source: Anu Family Services Resource Recruitment Policy & Procedure Handbook, p. 11

During this meeting the Specialist provides an overview of the information captured on the *Roadmap to Family* document, which helps those present determine how to proceed. For example, if




someone has identified that he/she wants to visit the child, and this has yet to happen, the team determines what needs to be done to facilitate that. The Specialist makes additions and addenda to the *Roadmap to Family* that describes the procedures identified by the team.

Typically, FT2F services conclude at the 30-day meeting; however, if the child has not been placed with relatives or kin within the 30-day time frame, the team may agree to continue services to meet the desired program outcome of relative/kin placement. Cases may be placed on hold when an outside factor is impeding the ability of a Specialist to meet his/her goals. In the instance of an extension of services or placing the case on hold, the *Resource Recruitment Extension/On Hold Plan of Action* form must be completed with the team during the 30-day meeting.

## Case Closing and Follow-Up

At the conclusion of a case, the Specialist provides a *Closing Summary* to professional team members. The *Closing Summary* is a thorough report of the search and recruitment efforts, and includes:

- Summary of efforts
- Family search activities
- Family participation
- Maternal information
- Paternal information
- Sibling information, including efforts to place siblings together and, if not, visitation and contact
- Educational information, including efforts to maintain the child in his/her school of origin
- Potential relative/kin placements
- Additional family supports
- Completed documents:
  - Roadmap to Family
  - Family Contact Log
  - Family Genograms
    - Initial Genogram – only includes information from the original referral
    - Closing Genogram – most final and complete version, including all known family members, kin, social and relational connections, and desired involvement of supports



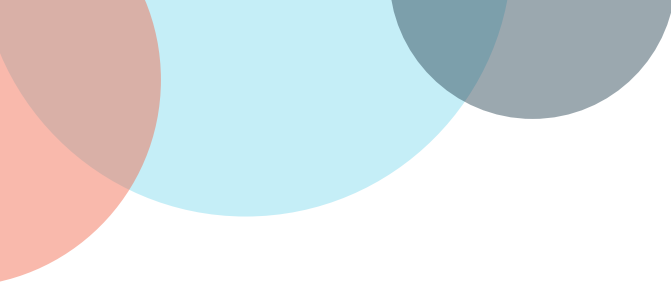
Due to confidentiality, a child's relatives and kin are not provided with a copy of the closing documentation; however, the relative caregiver is provided with an updated copy of the child's natural and professional supports as documented on the Roadmap to Family form.

The first official follow-up with clients consists of the Specialist attending a meeting 30 days after case closure. This meeting is an opportunity for the Specialist to ensure that the supports that were put in place are being utilized. It is also the time when information for the final assessments (GARF and CGAS/PIRGAS) can be gathered.

Additional follow up is conducted by the Supervisor and takes place directly with the foster care case manager or his/her supervisor. These occur at 3, 6, and 12 months after case closure. If the child was placed by the time the FT2F case is closed, the purpose of follow up is to learn if the child is still placed with the same identified relative placement provider. If the child is not, information on why this is the case and the progress toward placement is collected. If a relative provider was identified but the child was not placed prior to case closure, the follow up is to learn if the child has been placed or is still moving toward placement with the relative and to determine whether a Specialist can be of assistance.

## **FT2F TIMELINE OF EVENTS\***

\*The activities listed below represent the general FT2F process and procedures. There are several ongoing activities that occur throughout the life of each case, including family interviews, data gathering, and providing team updates. Also, additional activities occur when an individual requests further involvement in the life of the child, which includes conducting initial background checks and assessing appropriateness of the contact.



**Days 1 & 2 Activities**

Receive referral

Conduct initial search

Attend initial court hearing

Attend initial meeting

Contact parents, grandparents, siblings, and/or siblings caregivers—any individuals named as potential placement option

Conduct visits, in-person interviews

Establish educational stability plan, sibling visitation plan

Paternity activities established

**Week 1  
(1–5 Business Days)**

CPS database search

Court file review

Potential placement options identified

Supports identified

Barriers to placement identified

Relatives identified and recorded on genogram (though started in Week 1, it typically takes 2 - 3 weeks to identify 70 or more relatives)

**Weeks 2–3**

Potential backup placement identified

If placement has not occurred at two weeks a meeting is held to discuss barriers

**Week 4**

All identified needs for a successful placement addressed

Roadmap to Family completed and accurate

30-day meeting

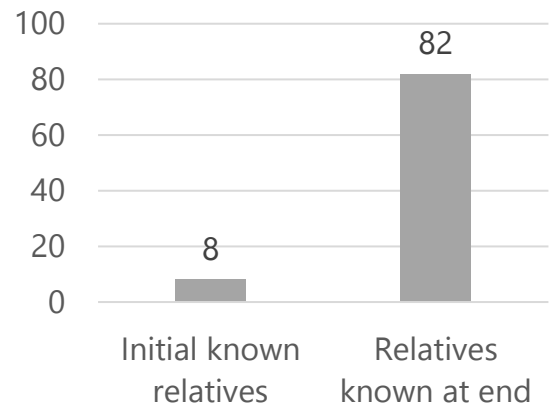
Complete the Child and Family Assessments (GARF, C-GAS, PIR-GAS)

Case closure

# RESULTS: IDENTIFICATION OF RELATIVES AND KIN

A key goal of this evaluation was to establish the extent to which FT2F programming results in identification of viable kin or fictive kin families. At the time of referral to FT2F by the county (typically within 72 hours of placement), there were an average of eight known relatives per family. Through the FT2F family-finding process, this increased to 82 relatives, on average, representing a substantial gain in those who may have been able to serve as a placement for the child or provide other supports (Figure 6). The number of known relatives by county before and after FT2F involvement is shown in Table 4.

**FIGURE 6.** Number of known relatives per family before and after FT2F



On average, FT2F identified **10 times** as many relatives as were known initially.

**TABLE 4.** Number of known relatives by county

	Initial known relatives at FT2F start		Relatives known at FT2F end	
	Total	Average per family	Total	Average per family
Chisago County ( <i>n</i> = 2)	22	11	166	83
Ramsey County ( <i>n</i> = 11)	78	7	906	82
<b>Total (<i>n</i> = 13)</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1,072</b>	<b>82</b>

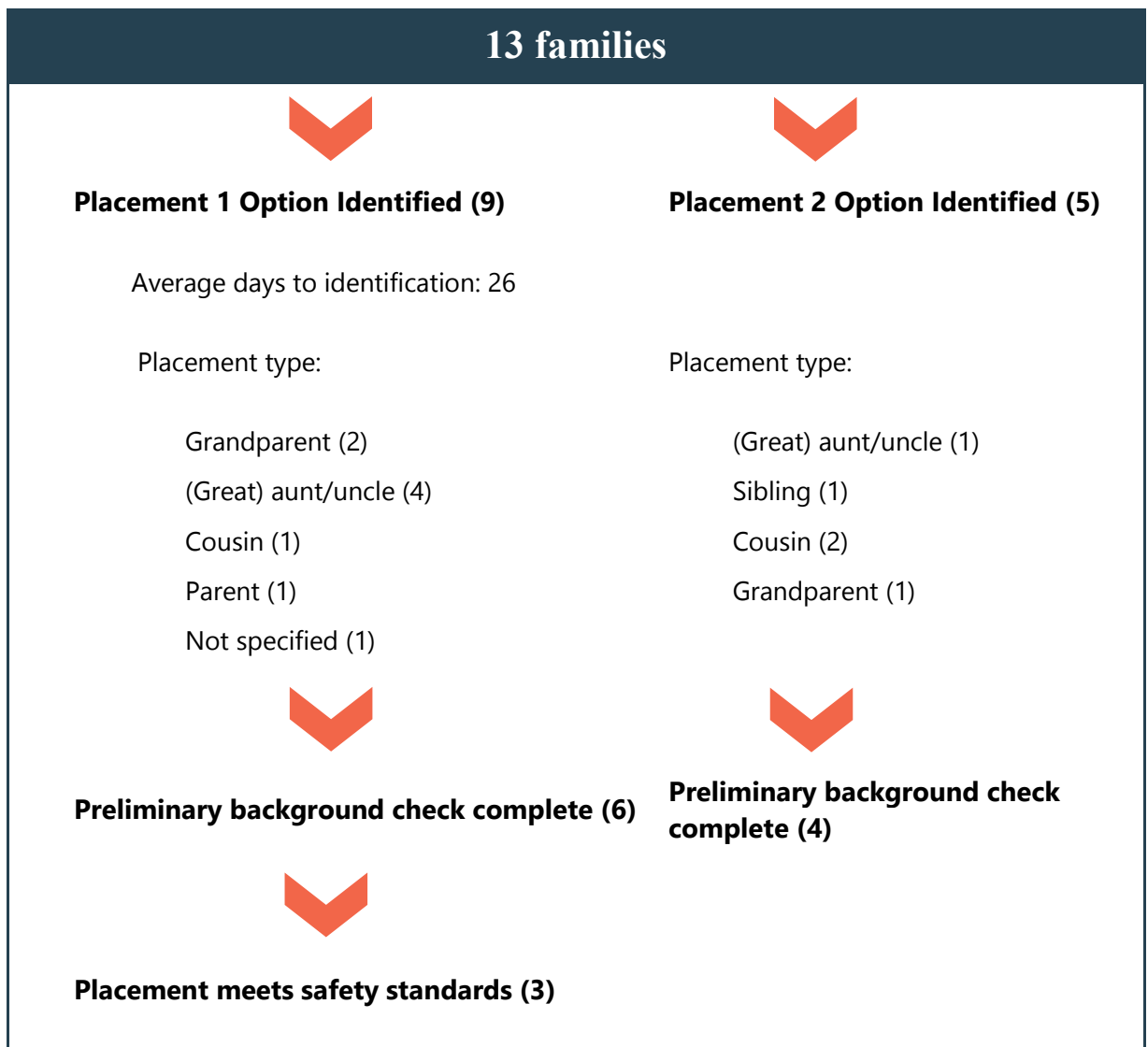
Across all cases, 14 viable placements were identified, according to the FT2F program coordinator, which equates to about one viable placement per family, on average (Table 5). A viable placement is defined as identifying a kin who is willing and able to accept placement of their relative child into their home.

**TABLE 5.** Viable placements identified by county


	Viable placements identified	
	Total	Average per family
<b>Chisago County (<i>n</i> = 2)</b>	2	1
<b>Ramsey County (<i>n</i> = 11)</b>	12	1
<b>Total (<i>n</i> = 13)</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1</b>

Figure 7 diagrams the process of identifying placements based on FT2F program records. As shown, nine of the thirteen families had a “placement 1 option” identified, while five had a second option identified. On average, it took 26 days for the first placement option to be identified. (Note: this information was not available for the second placement option.) Placement types were typically extended family members, such as grandparents and aunts/uncles. At the will of the caseworker, FT2F would conduct the Home Safety Checklist. For six of the nine families with a first placement option, a preliminary background check was completed, and for three of those, the placement was determined to meet safety standards according to the Home Safety Checklist.

**FIGURE 7.** Diagram of family placements







Among FT2F children from Ramsey County, three of sixteen children were placed with relatives/kin (19%). During the period of FT2F implementation, Ramsey County's records show that 38% of all placements were with relatives or kin, indicating that FT2F had a lower relative placement rate than the county as a whole. In addition, Ramsey County's average time to relative placement was 17.8 days, versus 31.7 days for Ramsey's FT2F families, suggesting that relative placement through FT2F took longer. It should be noted, however, that although FT2F was designed to be used within 72 hours of a child being placed in out-of-home care, in some cases (particularly with Ramsey County), many children had already been placed in out-of-home care for a considerable amount of time by the time they were referred to FT2F. Additionally, some of these cases were considered to be more difficult than typical, both of which would contribute to the relatively longer time frame for FT2F children to gain relative placement. And, data are not available to allow for a comparison to determine whether the placements of FT2F children were more likely to result in a longer-term arrangement relative to the larger group of Ramsey County placements, as might be expected based on the diligent FT2F efforts to find and engage those relatives and verify their ability to serve as a placement option.

# RESULTS: PLACEMENT AND PERMANENCY OUTCOMES

To better understand outcomes that occurred in Chisago and Ramsey during the implementation of FT2F, Butler examined county-level trends in foster care placements and permanency data. These data include state and federal performance measures from 2013–2017 and were obtained from the [Minnesota Department of Human Services \(2018\)](#). Butler also compared outcomes from Chisago and Ramsey to those of other counties that are demographically similar but did not implement FT2F.

## CHISAGO AND COMPARISON COUNTIES

Outcomes for Chisago County were compared to those of Beltrami, Ottertail, and Winona counties (see Table 6; [US Census, 2017a](#)).

TABLE 6. Demographics for Chisago and comparison counties

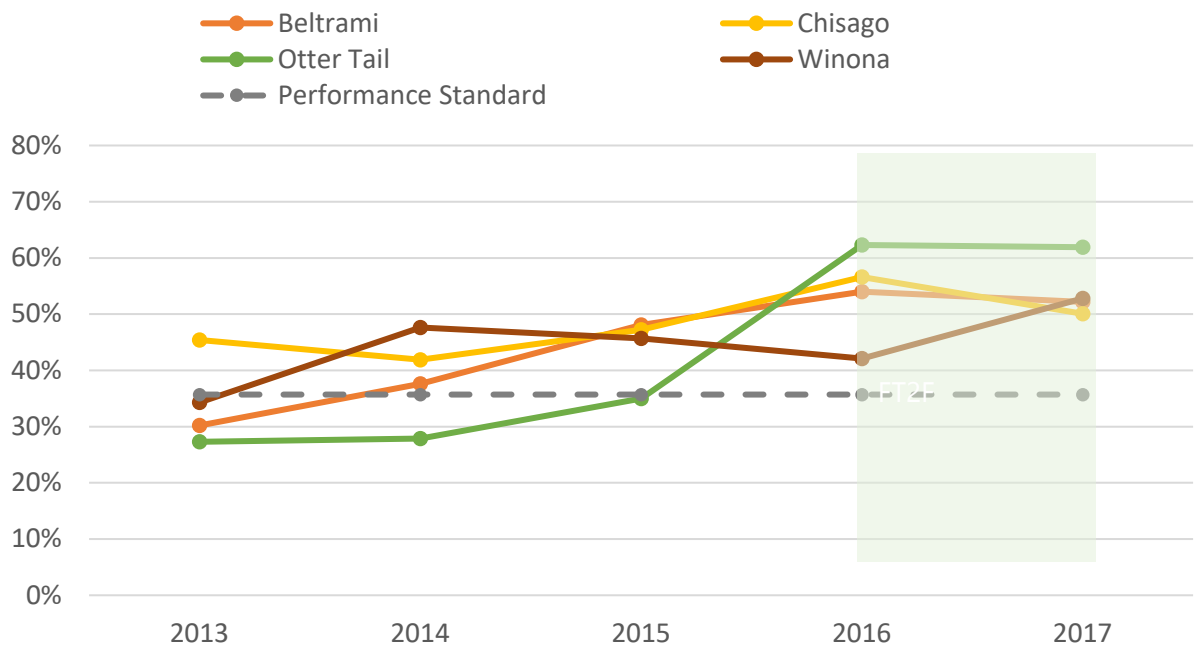
Beltrami County	
<b>Race:</b> Asian, 0.7%	<b>Population</b> (2017): 46,513
American Indian/Alaska Native, 21.9%	<b>Ethnicity:</b> Hispanic or Latino, 2.3%
Black or African American, 0.8%	<b>Education</b> (2012–2016): HS grad, 90.2%
Two or more races, 3.2%	<b>Median Income</b> (2012–2016): \$45,201
White, 73.3%	
Chisago County	
<b>Race:</b> Asian, 1.1%	<b>Population</b> (2017): 55,308
American Indian/Alaska Native, 0.7%	<b>Ethnicity:</b> Hispanic or Latino, 2.1%
Black or African American, 1.4%	<b>Education</b> (2012–2016): HS grad, 93.8%
Two or more races, 1.5%	<b>Median Income</b> (2012–2016): \$72,908
White, 95.2%	
Otter Tail County	
<b>Race:</b> Asian, 0.6%	<b>Population</b> (2017): 58,345
American Indian/Alaska Native, 0.8%	<b>Ethnicity:</b> Hispanic or Latino, 3.5%
Black or African American, 1.6%	<b>Education</b> (2012–2016): HS grad, 91.7%
Two or more races, 1.5%	<b>Median Income</b> (2012–2016): \$53,351
White, 95.4%	
Winona County	
<b>Race:</b> Asian, 2.7%	<b>Population</b> (2017): 50,873
American Indian/Alaska Native, 0.5%	<b>Ethnicity:</b> Hispanic or Latino, 2.9%
Black or African American, 1.9%	<b>Education</b> (2012–2016): HS grad, 92.5%
Two or more races, 1.3%	<b>Median Income</b> (2012–2016): \$52,840
White, 93.6%	

## Relative Placements

The percentage of days children spent in relative foster care from 2013–2017 is shown in Figure 8 for Chisago and comparison counties. Chisago remained above the performance standard of 36% throughout this time period, and the proportion of days children were in relative care increased notably from 2014 to 2016 (from 42% to 57%), which was followed by a slight decrease by 2017 (50%). Comparison counties generally followed a similar pattern, with the exception of Winona County, which had a decrease in proportion of relative placements between 2014–2016, followed by an increase from 2016 and 2017.

Overall, during the time that FT2F was implemented, Chisago’s rate of relative placements seemed to have increased and then decreased slightly, while remaining above the performance standard and fairly similar to comparison counties.

**FIGURE 8.** Percentage of all foster care days spent with a relative for Chisago and comparison counties



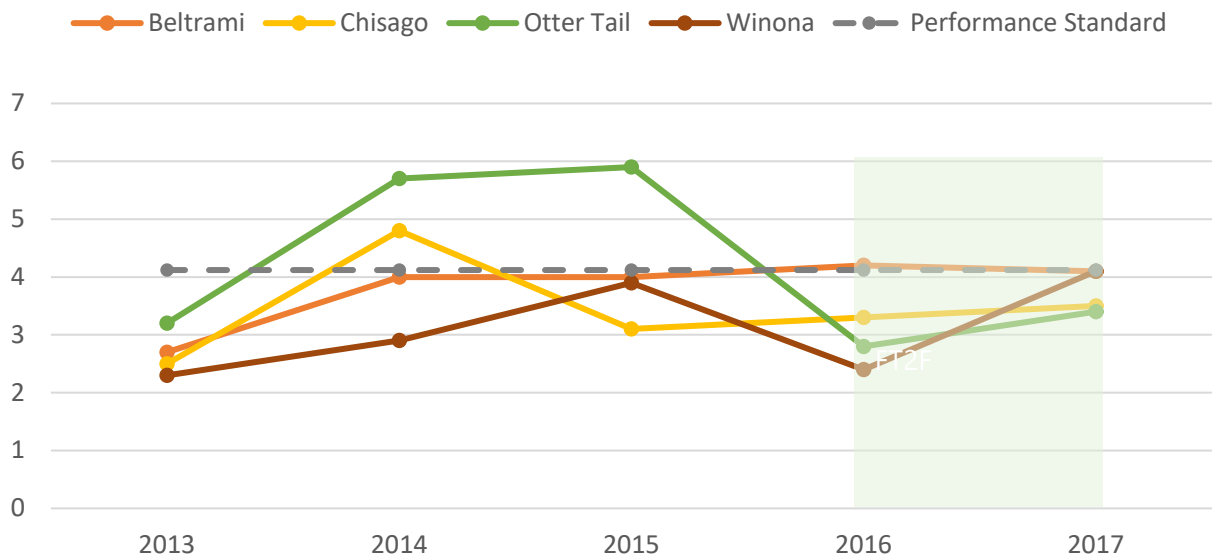
**TABLE 7.** Total number of days spent in family foster care by year and county

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>Beltrami</b>	122,071	160,216	198,881	228,626	235,250
<b>Chisago</b>	8,605	12,344	15,314	17,340	24,821
<b>Otter Tail</b>	7,185	9,646	10,927	19,101	28,300
<b>Winona</b>	5,539	7,331	7,976	10,564	21,501

## Placement Stability

According to the performance standard, children should experience no more than 4.12 placement moves per 1,000 days in foster care. As shown in Figure 9, Chisago’s placement moves were generally similar to those of other counties over time. During the implementation of FT2F, the number of placement moves by Chisago County children remained fairly consistent, around 3.4.

**FIGURE 9.** Number of placement moves per 1,000 days in foster care for Chisago and comparison counties



## Permanency

County-level data on 12-, 12-23-, and 24-month permanency are presented in Table 8, with cells shaded in pink representing values below the performance standard. Since 2015, Chisago County has remained above the performance standards for each of the permanency measures and has permanency rates most similar to those of Otter Tail County.

While Beltrami County was often below the performance standards during this time period, it should be noted that this county had many more children in foster care than did the other counties.

**TABLE 8.** Percent of all children entering foster care discharged to permanency within three time frames for Chisago and comparison counties

Year	# months after entering foster care	Performance standard (%)	Beltrami (%)	Chisago (%)	Otter Tail (%)	Winona (%)
2013	12 months	40.5	45.0	67.6	67.4	73.7
	12-23 months	43.6	24.2	50.0	62.5	100.0
	24 months	30.3	12.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
2014	12 months	40.5	40.8	69.6	58.1	63.6
	12-23 months	43.6	26.7	37.5	0.0	100.0
	24 months	30.3	10.1	0.0	33.3	0.0
2015	12 months	40.5	37.3	54.0	68.6	77.8
	12-23 months	43.6	34.3	62.5	57.1	40.0
	24 months	30.3	12.9	50.0	16.7	0.0
2016	12-months	40.5	37.0	66.7	45.8	48.4

	12-23 months	43.6	27.9	62.5	55.6	50.0
	24 months	30.3	17.5	33.3	0.0	0.0
2017	12 months	40.5	43.7	45.6	39.7	42.0
	12-23 months	43.6	40.8	83.3	72.0	36.4
	24 months	30.3	18.3	57.1	10.0	16.7

*Note:* Cells shaded in pink represent values below the performance standard.



## RAMSEY AND COMPARISON COUNTIES

Outcomes for Ramsey County were compared to those of Anoka, Hennepin, and Olmsted counties (see Table 9; [US Census, 2017b](#)).

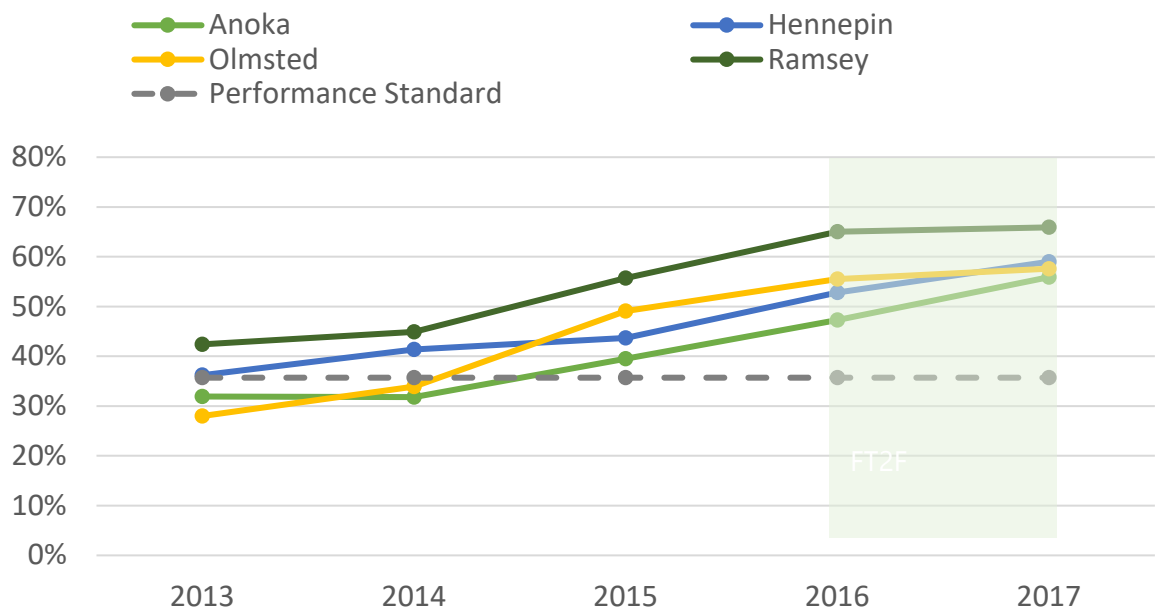
TABLE 9. Demographics for Ramsey and comparison counties

Anoka County	
<b>Race:</b> Asian, 4.7%	<b>Population</b> (2017): 351,373
American Indian/Alaska Native, 0.9%	<b>Ethnicity:</b> Hispanic or Latino, 4.6%
Black or African American, 6.5%	<b>Education</b> (2012–2016): HS grad, 93.5%
Two or more races, 2.8%	<b>Median Income</b> (2012–2016): \$73,579
White, 85.1%	
Hennepin County	
<b>Race:</b> Asian, 7.6%	<b>Population</b> (2017): 1,252,024
American Indian/Alaska Native, 1.1%	<b>Ethnicity:</b> Hispanic or Latino, 7.0%
Black or African American, 13.4%	<b>Education</b> (2012–2016): HS grad, 92.8%
Two or more races, 3.2%	<b>Median Income</b> (2012–2016): \$67,989
White, 74.6%	
Olmsted County	
<b>Race:</b> Asian, 6.5%	<b>Population</b> (2017): 154,930
American Indian/Alaska Native, 0.4%	<b>Ethnicity:</b> Hispanic or Latino, 5.0%
Black or African American, 6.1%	<b>Education</b> (2012–2016): HS grad, 94.3%
Two or more races, 2.3%	<b>Median Income</b> (2012–2016): \$69,308
White, 84.7%	
Ramsey County	
<b>Race:</b> Asian, 15.2%	<b>Population</b> (2017): 547,974
American Indian/Alaska Native, 1.0%	<b>Ethnicity:</b> Hispanic or Latino, 7.6%
Black or African American, 12.3%	<b>Education</b> (2012–2016): HS grad, 90.3%
Two or more races, 3.5%	<b>Median Income</b> (2012–2016): \$57,717
White, 67.8%	

## Relative Placements

Ramsey and its comparison counties tended to show the same general trend with respect to relative placements, demonstrating increases between 2014 and 2016 and leveling off in 2017 (Figure 10). Ramsey County consistently had greater proportions of relative placements than did the other counties and exceeded the performance standard of 35.7% in each year for which data are available. Although relative placements were at their highest when FT2F was being implemented, it cannot be ascertained whether this is because of FT2F or other influential factors.

**FIGURE 10.** Percentage of all foster care days spent with a relative for Ramsey and comparison counties

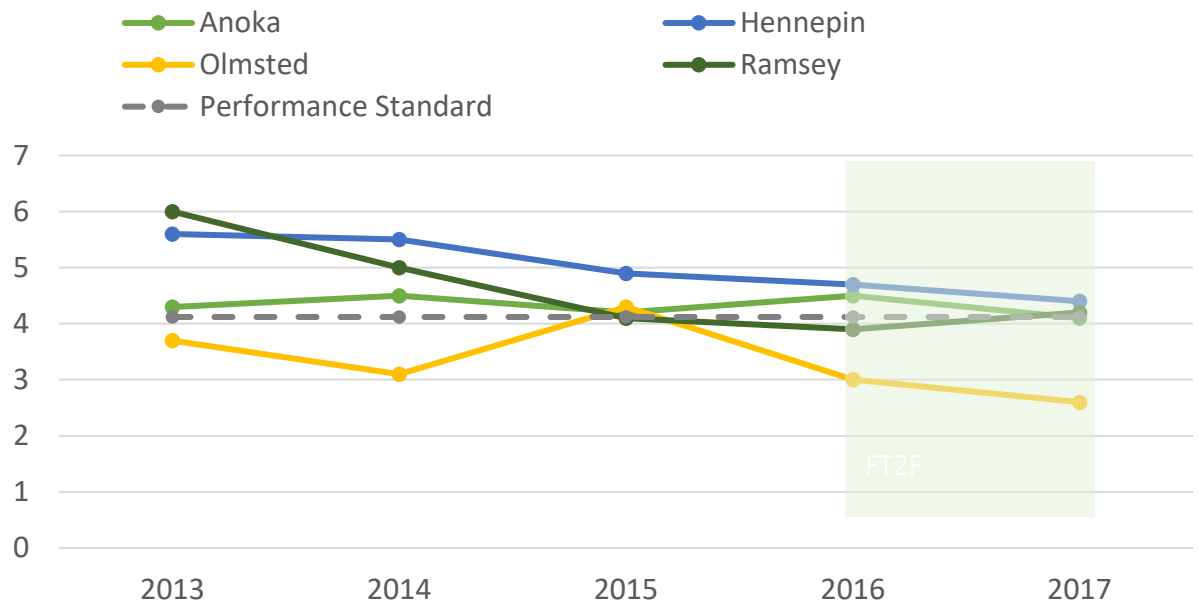


## Placement Stability

Compared to similar counties, Ramsey was typically “in the middle” with respect to placement stability from 2013–2017 (Figure 11). While Ramsey’s placement moves were above the performance standard in 2013 and 2014, they moved below the standard of 4.12 beginning in 2015 (fewer placement moves is desirable) and remained below the standard during the implementation of FT2F. Overall, placement stability has been an area in which Ramsey has made steady improvement in recent years, but it appears that this trend began before FT2F.



**FIGURE 11.** Number of placement moves per 1,000 days in foster care for Ramsey and comparison counties



## Permanency

Ramsey and its comparison counties generally met or exceeded performance standards for 12- and 12–23-month permanency but were below the standard in some years for 24-month permanency, as shown in Table 10. Ramsey tended to have the highest 24-month permanency rates across years, with the exception of 2017, in which its rate was lower than Anoka and Hennepin counties.


**TABLE 10.** Percent of all children entering foster care discharged to permanency within three time frames for Ramsey and comparison counties

Year	# months after entering foster care	Performance standard (%)	Anoka (%)	Hennepin (%)	Olmsted (%)	Ramsey (%)
2013	12 months	40.5	72.9	60.1	44.8	68.4
	12–23 months	43.6	27.6	44.6	85.0	46.9

	24 months	30.3	4.5	18.4	14.3	30.8
2014	12 months	40.5	68.4	57.1	57.3	65.1
	12–23 months	43.6	38.1	54.3	52.9	52.8
	24 months	30.3	20.8	11.3	0.0	23.9
2015	12 months	40.5	60.2	48.2	59.0	60.1
	12–23 months	43.6	62.5	47.3	58.1	45.3
	24 months	30.3	10.3	16.4	10.0	34.7
2016	12 months	40.5	53.3	43.2	35.1	52.2
	12–23 months	43.6	61.3	42.0	71.4	46.9
	24 months	30.3	16.7	18.8	30.8	37.8
2017	12 months	40.5	48.1	42.6	41.5	49.8
	12–23 months	43.6	51.0	46.2	62.9	37.9
	24 months	30.3	30.3	35.2	22.2	24.5

*Note:* Cells shaded in pink represent values below the performance standard.

In summary, Chisago’s and Ramsey’s placement and permanency outcomes generally met or exceeded performance standards and were typically similar to comparable counties. There is some evidence of improvements in relative placements and placement stability over time, though it appears that the trends toward better outcomes began before FT2F. In terms of permanency, there were less discernable patterns with respect to progress over time. This may be expected, given that previous studies have not shown an effect of Family Finding programs on placement and permanency outcomes (Vandivere & Malm, 2015; Vandivere et al. 2017; Koh & Testa, 2008; Leon, Saucedo, & Jachymiak, 2016).



Importantly, while these data provide descriptive information about children's outcomes in agencies in which FT2F was implemented, it is not possible to determine the extent to which FT2F influenced these outcomes. This is largely because: 1) child-level placement and permanency outcome data were not available for the counties, making it impossible to create a matched comparison group; 2) FT2F served a relatively small number of children and placed even fewer with relatives (thus those numbers cannot statistically be compared to the much larger county numbers); and 3) it was not possible to rule out other factors that may influence placement and permanency outcomes.



# RESULTS: KIN & COUNTY CASEWORKERS' EXPERIENCES WITH FT2F

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To better understand kin / fictive kin experiences with FT2F, Butler conducted interviews with three family members and also conducted interviews with two county caseworkers to better contextualize the FT2F experience relative to services as usual. All kinship care providers and county child welfare caseworkers that were interviewed reported positive experiences with the FT2F Specialist. They expressed the following as factors that contributed to their positive experiences with the FT2F Specialist:

- *Interpersonal skills.* The FT2F Specialist listened, communicated, and empathized with kin.
- *Material support.* The FT2F Specialist submitted in-depth documentation and briefs for county workers.
- *Guidance.* The FT2F Specialist provided explanations of the process to kin and discussed placement options with county workers.
- *Responsiveness.* The FT2F Specialist quickly returned calls and addressed concerns.
- *Time.* The FT2F Specialist had time to engage kin and provide support for county workers.

For kin who were completely new to the child welfare system, the FT2F Specialist provided guidance and support through an unfamiliar system. Kin experienced with the child welfare system noted that working with the Specialist was unique: *"This is the first time I worked with Fast Track. Working with [the FT2F Specialist] was something that was unique compared to the other experience I had when I took in my other two grandkids. It was a very positive experience."* One kinship care provider even said that *"seeing how [the FT2F Specialist] and others work with families has inspired other members of my family to get into similar work."*

County child welfare caseworkers expressed positive experiences with the FT2F Specialist as well. They cited the material support that the Specialist provided, such as the in-depth genograms and documentation, as helpful. Caseworkers stated that the Specialist's capacity enabled positive engagement with kin and useful material support for county workers.

Both kinship care providers and caseworkers believed a neutral party like the FT2F Specialist was beneficial to the process. Kin said that it was *"nice to have someone else (other than the court or*

*CPS) come in and talk to us in person and take down information and hear us out. She listened, and it's always nice to be able to say what you feel and have her consider it.*" That sentiment was echoed in a caseworker's statement that *"sometimes it's nice for the family to work with someone who is neutral, like [the FT2F Specialist]."* Having a neutral party interact with the family was perceived as beneficial.

## INTERPERSONAL SKILLS WITH KINSHIP CARE PROVIDERS

Kinship care providers mentioned interpersonal skills most when reflecting on their positive experiences with the FT2F Specialist. Kin said that the Specialist listened to them, provided encouragement, and showed empathy and respect. Kin felt heard and at ease with the Specialist. A kinship care provider said *"everyone was upset and angry and she just tried to calm everyone down. She did her best. She did a good job."* Another stated that *"I had to go back through steps again to get licensed again. Sometimes the process was discouraging, but [the FT2F Specialist] helped encourage me."* Kin said that the Specialist *"was very nice, because I have a background that ain't so precious. I was very comfortable, at ease. It was ok to talk to her. I didn't feel like it wasn't okay to say something."* Furthermore, the Specialist demonstrated respect for culture, *"understood our ways,"* and *"was curious about how the circle connected."* As one kinship care provider put it, *"I knew it was her job, but it wasn't like it was a checklist process. I never felt 'one and done' with her."* Although mentioned less often than kinship care providers, caseworkers also commented on the Specialist's interpersonal skills. A caseworker said that the Specialist *"builds great rapport with family members"* and *"was less likely to make assumptions about families."* Caseworkers noted interpersonal skills between the Specialist and kinship care providers, not between themselves and the Specialist.

## MATERIAL SUPPORT TO COUNTY WORKERS

Caseworkers cited material support most often when discussing their positive experiences with FT2F. Extensive genograms, in-depth documentation, and closing summaries were particularly helpful. Material support helped caseworkers by

- Narrowing down their search for potential placements,
- Widening the potential kin support pool, and
- Creating and updating detailed records so that the caseworker did not start from scratch.

A caseworker explained how the documentation that FT2F provided was useful:

*The documentation and info she provided us was so useful. We could use that when it came to permanency. It narrowed down what we had to do. Even in cases when she wasn't able to find a placement, there was all kinds of other support people identified for the parents/child. Even though she only had a few cases a month, the ones she got were really tough ones and that helped us a lot.*

Although kinship care providers did not mention material support as often as interpersonal skills, they did share that the Specialist initiated paperwork to get children into programs and bought necessities for the children in their care.

## GUIDANCE

Although stated far less often than interpersonal skills or material support, guidance that the FT2F Specialist provided was mentioned by kinship care providers and caseworkers alike. Kinship care providers stated that the Specialist clearly explained the process and gave guidance. The Specialist *"gave me the best info she had, and what it's like for a kid to come into care. She told me some of the things to look for, who I would be involved with. She was informative about the process."*

Caseworkers said that they were in contact with FT2F workers by cell phone and email. A caseworker said that the FT2F Specialist *"would send updates at the end of the week. It was a nice detailed update. That was really helpful."* Additionally, caseworkers would discuss potential placement options and kin support with the Specialist.

## RESPONSIVENESS

The responsiveness of the FT2F Specialist to kin concerns, questions, and needs also contributed to positive experiences. One kinship care provider said that *"if I was to call her and needed answers she was pretty quick to respond back. She answered our questions, whatever resource we needed she was there to help us find them."* Feeling like the Specialist was just a phone call away was beneficial.

## TIME

Caseworkers consistently stated that the FT2F Specialist had time to engage with kin and provide material support. They shared that the amount of time the Specialist had to engage kin helped caseworkers:

*Just finding, if not a placement, the support people for the kid and parents. Sometimes she was able to find relatives quicker because she was able to go to a home and knock on the door and see if anyone was there. We didn't have time to do that.*

Caseworkers also reflected on the impact their high caseloads have on kin engagement:

*Not having time to do several contacts with family—if there are 40 or 50 family members around, we just don't have the time to get through all of those people. We don't have time to do unannounced visits to family homes to make contact with them. If we get a return letter without an updated address, we don't follow-up.*

A caseworker shared that *"if it falls to individual caseworkers, they'll continue to bump up against time barriers and management of caseload."* One county worker stated that *"county workers' caseloads are high. That's not going to go away. Anu has a specialty and focus that county staff don't necessarily have."* Since the Specialist only had one or two cases at any given time, she was able to take the time to engage with kin, submit in-depth documentation, and complete extensive kin searches.

## OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE KIN ENGAGEMENT AND PLACEMENT PROCESSES

Kinship care providers and caseworkers highlighted potential opportunities to improve the kin engagement and placement processes. Communication and staffing were identified as possible areas to improve. A caseworker shed light on why communication may be difficult between the caseworker and potential kin placements:

*Relatives often want to know what's going on with the child, but we are unable to tell them. We can tell them if the child is with a relative, which can ease their worry, but a lot of people get mad that we can't tell them anything more than the fact that we are looking for support and placement options.*

The lack of information due to legal barriers may be detrimental to caseworker and kin relationships. Additionally, the lack of communication between the FT2F Specialist and caseworkers also impacts kin:

*[The FT2F Specialist] shared as much as she was able to tell me. I don't think the County gave her enough information. She answered to the best of her ability—the SW he had at the County was not very good. We don't have him anymore. A lot of things got missed because he didn't communicate with [the FT2F Specialist] and the other team members. We eventually asked for a new county social worker. If he had been more like [the FT2F Specialist], we would have had better communication. The social worker didn't give*



*enough background information, so I had to find it out on my own in other ways. There was info I needed to help my nephew.*

Communication may be impacted by caseworker capacity and legal barriers regarding what information can be disclosed to kin. Communication amongst the kin, FT2F, and caseworkers may also be impacted by county staff turnover. For instance, *“we had five different supervisors during the time we worked with FT2F and there was never one person they had contact with for more than 6 months. That probably made it more difficult for FT2F to do their work.”* Having a supportive supervisor was beneficial to one caseworker’s kin search and engagement work, *“I think that I’m lucky enough to have a supportive supervisor, so I haven’t really struggled with identifying relatives or kin.”* It seems that having such a supportive supervisor is rare but can make searching for kin easier.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evaluation of the FT2F program, the following recommendations are made to advance the promotion of making kin connections and viable placements for children and youth in out-of-home care in Minnesota's public child welfare system:

**Future Staff Selection** – Intentionally hire and retain Specialists who demonstrate knowledge and skills in engaging family members, exhibit a dedication and passion for family connections for children, and follow an approach that is strength-based and family-centered as supported by the Minnesota Child Welfare Practice Model. Additionally, continue to maintain the program and Specialist staff within a community-based setting that is external from the county child welfare agency to assure continued engagement and trust of family members in the process. Qualitative findings support that this is a key component of program success.

**Data Access** – Assure that future FT2F contracted arrangements permit access to Social Services Information System child- and parent-level data to facilitate the effective and comprehensive delivery of services and to support continuous quality improvement at the program level. Minnesota statute permits the inclusion of contracted providers as members of the child welfare system. This permissive statutory language can readily be integrated into contracts to permit data sharing that is protected by data privacy law and can be extended for periods beyond the case closure of specific families. This will minimize future challenges pertaining to conducting comparative analysis of child outcomes within an evaluation process and provide valuable information on outcomes.

**Outreach to Policy Makers** – Outreach to department and legislative policy makers should be conducted to pursue statewide dedicated funding for community-based providers to support kinship search and placement services that are regionally accessible across the state. Qualitative findings revealed the expanded identification of kin available to a child in out-of-home care. The development of a wider network of support for the child through family connections is highly valuable. Even if the FT2F program did not locate kin who could accept physical custody of the child, a broad array of kin were found for the child to stay connected to within their family system. Healthy child well-being includes having a family network of connections and support for a child. This is particularly important for youth in out-of-home care who are approaching a time in which they are "aging out of the system". Expanded kinship search services are not a "nice to have" but rather a "must have" resource for children to provide enduring lifelong connections.

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