

**Anu Family Services (formerly PATH Wisconsin)/
Bremer Project:
Preventing Placement Disruptions in Foster Care
Year Two: Permanency Pilot Program**

**Final Report:
Implementation Study**

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Connections to permanence

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Summary: Family Search and Engagement Implementation Study

Summary of Lit Review: Importance of Connections and FSE Model

- Research indicates that placing youth with relatives is linked to increased placement stability, reduced trauma of separation and reinforcement of children's sense of identity and self-esteem.
- Youth who age out of care without social support networks experience increased risk of homelessness, early pregnancy, incarceration, school drop-out and poverty in adulthood.
- Foster youth without supportive connections also experience increased incidence of mental health and behavioral problems, including depression.
- Studies have indicated that former foster youth who had some continuity of relationships with significant others, including siblings, foster parents, and biological parents, had better adult developmental outcomes than those who lacked these supports.

Research Questions for Implementation Study:

- What strategies have resulted in successful progress in implementing the program?
- What challenges and barriers have impeded the implementation?
- What does permanency mean for the youth in this project?

Summary of Methodology:

- The implementation study included qualitative, semi-structured interviews with foster youths, Anu Family Services social workers, supervisors, regional director, and foster parents for a total of 10 interviews. The interviews with the youth included completion of the *Connectedness Map*, which is part of the FSE model.
- The study also included researcher observation of the Family Finding program development meetings between July 2008 and January 2009, and several TFC team meetings in the eastern and western regions.
- The study also included document analysis of the case files of the two youth, and thorough review of the FSE training manual.
- Interviews were transcribed and qualitative data analysis strategies were used to identify themes around successful implementation strategies and challenges to implementation.

Summary of Findings:

- **Successful Strategies**
 - **Resources to Support the Work** - including additional staff time and the need for clinical skills, supervisory support and consultation groups
 - **Engagement of Staff, Foster Parents and External Partners** – importance of an integrated team approach, including the youth and their family, social workers, supervisors, foster parents, extended family members, and external partners, such as county and state workers and community service providers.
 - **Philosophy Shift and Agency Commitment** - a renewed agency focus on the importance of family connections for all youth. One example of this shift is the new agency mission statement, which now reads, "We create permanent connections to loving and stable families." Another example was the shift in how staff views their own connections with foster youth in the child-centered, FSE process, in which a TFC social worker came forward as a potential adoptive resource for the youth in the pilot.

- **Challenges to Consider in Implementation**
 - **Concerns about Youth** - Difficulty in obtaining consents for youth to participate in the pilot was a significant barrier to implementing FSE. Guardians' concerns included concerns about finding family members who could pose a risk to the youth and concerns about the youths' reactions and possible disruption of current placements.
 - **Preparing Youth for Permanence** – adopting a model, such as the *3-5-7 Model* to address issues of grief and loss with the youth, as they prepare for permanent, lifelong connections.

- **Youth's Perspective: Ambivalence**

Stability	Fear of Stability
<p><i>It [adoption] is kind of a big deal. You never have to change again. No one bothers your stuff. I would be really happy if I never had to move again. And I would be really happy if I didn't have to change schools again.</i></p> <p><i>I hate moving. I've moved so many times in my lifetime, more than some people move in their whole lifetime. I moved 8 times in one year, not counting the 5 years I was with my mom.</i></p>	<p><i>My mind is set on long-term foster care...I like that there is openness to it. You can't just pick and choose who your family is. But if a family isn't working out for you, you know...You can say 'This isn't working for me.' You can't do that with adoption.</i></p>
Connections to Current Home	Connections to Biological Family
<p><i>I really do want to stay here. I like my school. It's got my friends; it's my future. It's everything for me right now...At school, I call my foster family my family – my mom and dad and brothers and sisters. They are like my family. I haven't been able to have stability in my own family 24/7, and I have that now.</i></p>	<p><i>I always see adoption as replacing my real family. I can see adoption for someone who doesn't have a family backing them up. Even though I can't live with a lot of my family, I still have a whole lot of people backing me up. My mom sticks behind me no matter what. I've got her. I've got my aunts and uncles, my grandma, my sister. I have a lot of people. I just feel that if I chose this forever family, I just blocked out these people.</i></p>
Sense of Belonging	Difficulty Connecting
<p><i>When I turn 18, [my mom] really wants me to live with her while I go to school. And that doesn't seem like such a bad idea when I turn 18. Right now it's not such a good idea, but...it doesn't seem like such a bad idea to have a home to go to.</i></p>	<p><i>He believes that once he hurts somebody, or if he goes too far, that the family won't want anything to do with him. He doesn't know...that people can change, and that sometimes we mess up, and that's ok, and we can still love you. (Quote from youth's foster parent.)</i></p>

Summary of Implications:

- **Practice Implications**
 - *Secure necessary resources*
 - *Adopt collaborative team approach*
 - *Include clinical components in Family Search and Engagement*
- **Policy Implications**
 - *State policies to support family finding efforts for youth in care (i.e., California statutes).*
 - *Policies that promote earlier efforts in intensive family finding.*