What does it mean?

Fundamental Strategies in Creating Permanency for Older Youth

1. Youth Voice and Involvement
2. Healthy Permanent Relationships
3. Community Resources and Awareness
4. Policies and Practices
5. Funding

Developed at the Summit for Youth Permanency, June 2011

The Summit for Youth Permanency was brought to you by Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Through the Eyes of a Child, Department of Health and Human Services, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and Sherwood Foundation.

Youth Voice and Involvement

Short-Term- locally

- Invite youth to serve on service organizations' advisory committees
- Ensure service plans are created with youth involvement to include appropriate steps and supports
- Involve youth in decision-making process
- Listen to youth and act – stop speaking for them
- Develop a standardized survey or self-study to help youth discover what they want, who they want in their life and how to articulate it
    - Have a professional help youth interpret survey results and with relationship building
- Utilize Youth Court Questionnaire/Form
- Ensure all youth attend 6-month court reviews
- Keep asking, even if youth say "no" to adoption, guardianship, creating connections – make sure they have accurate information, find out why they are rejecting permanency

Short-Term – statewide

- Provide youth with court process education and give them opportunities for input
- Increase youth involvement in policy development and decision making
- Implement youth-driven policies and practices in the recruitment and placement of adoptive, guardianship and foster parents

Long-Term – locally

- Match foster parents and youth more effectively by engaging young people in the process
- Engage youth in training foster parents
- Allow time for providers to get to know the children/youth they serve
- Explain procedure and process to youth clearly
- Create specific teams for youth in transition made of caseworkers who understand older youth and permanency issues

Long-Term – statewide

- Support the creation of a peer network and alumni community to create opportunities for relationship building and permanence

Needs More Investigation

- Find youth-directed supports

Healthy Permanent Relationships

Short-Term – locally

- Maintain connections with siblings
- Enhance family finding (use genograms) – place youth with family, friends before strangers/foster parents
- Create local vehicles for increased communication between youth and professionals
- Educate youth on how to build and sustain positive relationships, including with biological family
- Keep asking, even if youth say "no" to adoption, guardianship, creating connections – maker sure they have accurate information, find out why they are rejecting permanency
- Permit contact with biological family unless unsafe
- Allow non-custodial parent visits without court intervention
- Create system where foster families help biological families
- Educate youth on how to be safe with biological family, so they are prepared for reunification. Provide support to biological families to learn skills.

Long-Term – locally

- Provide additional training and support for foster parents to handle the complex needs of older youth and to maintain permanent relationships with youth
- Ensure appropriate mental health services for youth
- Create positive permanency-building environment for youth in institutional placements

Needs More Investigation

- Increase mentoring supports
- Identify caring adults with specialized supports
- Provide individualized support

Community Resources and Awareness

Short-Term – locally

- Increase awareness of available programs
- Enhance support for teen parents including parenting classes and childcare
- Create awareness campaign communicating that it is okay to accept help
- Provide transportation for youth to court hearings
- Develop partnerships between employers and educators to develop lasting supports/connections
- Create local vehicles for increased communication between youth and professionals

Short-Term – statewide

- Create advocacy document to help partners communicate the need for permanency

Long-Term – locally

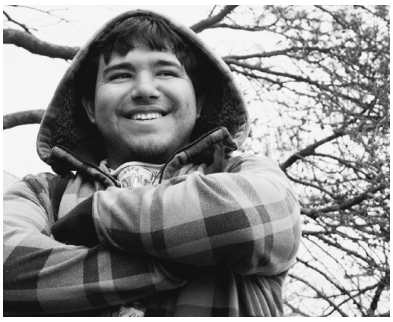
- Initiate a community awareness campaign to increase the pool of potential foster/adoptive parents and decrease the negative perceptions associated with older foster youth
    - Wear button with a foster youth's photo and message, "ask me about…"
    - Tell one new person each day
- Strengthen prevention resources and services for biological families
- Ensure appropriate mental health services for youth
- Create positive permanency-building environment for youth in institutional placements
- Create collaborate education events - foster youth focusing on the future, HHS, school districts, families, CASA, GAL and judges
- Ensure that GAL makes contact with supports and is involved in team meetings

Long-Term – statewide

- Create a peer network and alumni community to create opportunities for relationship building and permanence
- Make sure that every youth in care has a CASA volunteer

Needs More Investigation

- Build personal and community connections for youth in care and those aging out



Policies and Practices

Short-Term – locally

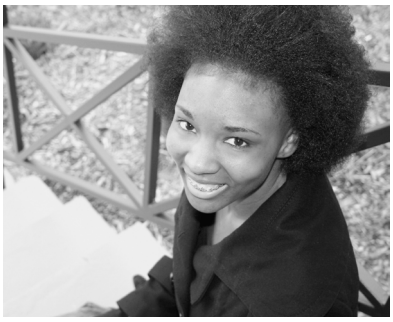
- Create a tool to conduct a needs-based service assessment in each service area (assess status of permanency and incorporate into regional summit planning – use data and community issues)
  - Assess training needs
- Create practices that support youth in identifying, creating and maintaining lifelong supports
- Look for family connections that may be available now but were not available at time of removal, complete search for family members (use of genograms), including non-custodial, conduct file mining
- Develop a standardized survey or self-study to help youth discover what they want, who they want in their life and how to articulate it
  - Have a professional help youth interpret survey results and with relationship building
- Ensure service plans are created with youth involvement to include appropriate steps and supports

Short-Term – statewide

- Review policy regarding mandatory background checks for friends/ peers of youth in care (other options for determining safety)
- Assess the implications of removing Independent Living as a permanency objective
- Increase inter-agency communication regarding permanency efforts
- Increase education for youth, service providers and foster parents on existing permanency services and policies
- Review policies regarding sibling placements and relationship enhancement
- Re-evaluate rate of removals and strategize to maintain in-home placements
- Implement youth-driven policies and practices in the recruitment and placement of adoptive parents, guardianship and foster parents
- Increase youth involvement in permanency policy development and decision making

Long-Term – locally

- Create a team who only works with youth ages 16+ (need to investigate nationally and connect to specialized GALs)
- Enhance programs that address social/emotional well being
- Ensure that GAL makes contact with supports and is involved in team meetings
- Provide additional training and support for foster parents to handle the complex needs of older youth and to maintain permanent relationships with youth
- Recruit more foster parents (traditional/therapeutic) to provide more options for permanent placements



Policies and Practices

(continued)

Long-Term – statewide

- Extend optional care to age 21 (work on permanency options until age 19)
- Increase flexibility in policies (including age limitations) to accommodate individual needs of youth in transition and increased accessibility to services and supports
- Change former ward criteria and requirements – make career options available for internships/apprenticeships including youth not attending college
- Make sure every youth in care has a CASA volunteer
- Review research and resources to develop transitional programming to focus on permanency without a plan/home/resources beyond 19 (no 90 days before aging out)

Needs Further Investigation

- Place fewer youth in foster homes (smaller case loads)
- Build accountability checks and balances for professionals
- Require permanency hearing 1 year after removal
- Require any child over age 8 to attend hearings unless excused
- Ensure all youth attend 6-month court review
- Ensure fully staffed team meetings
- Assess and implement realistic time frame for permanency
- Inform youth of options
- Train caseworkers
- KVC aftercare and Independent Living Specialist
- Create new services with housing-first model and wrap-around for support
- Create earlier, high-quality independent living skills programs/services
- Increase training and support for kinship homes
- Educate youth on aftercare services and benefits
- Provide cultural diversity training

Funding

Short-Term – locally

- Provide funding for youth to be involved in extracurricular activities to give them opportunities to build supports
- Develop shared resources among organizations to ensure permanence for young people

Short-Term – statewide

- Analyze the funding to build informal supports (e.g. extracurricular activities)

Long-Term – locally

- Increase funding for local mental health services

Long-Term – statewide

- Review research and resources needed to develop transitional programming to focus on permanency for youth without a plan/home/resources beyond 19 (not 90 days before aging out)
- Create access to resources/dollars for transitioning youth
- Enhance programs that address social/emotional well being

Needs More Investigation

- Utilize all existing funding streams to focus on permanency – federal resource guidance
- Establish leadership group at state level to review existing funding and federal funding guidelines
- Fund transportation for juveniles to attend adolescent 10P?