

## CLC PRACTICE POINT

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### **PERMANENCY ROUNDTABLES: A NEW APPROACH TO FINDING PERMANENCY FOR OLDER FOSTER CARE YOUTH**

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(Also many thanks to CLC Volunteer Jonathan Schaan for his contribution to this practice point)

Too many children in foster care leave care without a permanent connection. Studies have continually found that foster care children without permanent connections do not fare well after leaving care.<sup>1</sup> A recent Chapin Hall study showed that of the 23- or 24-year-olds surveyed who had left foster care without a permanent connection, close to 40 percent had been homeless or "couch surfed," nearly 25 percent had not earned their high school diploma or GED, only around 50 percent were currently employed, 67 percent of women had become pregnant, and 45 percent of men had been incarcerated.<sup>2</sup>

Last spring, in response to these growing concerns, Hennepin and Ramsey Counties implemented a new pilot project from Casey Family Programs<sup>3</sup> to address permanency options for children who have been in the child protection system the longest. The project is to address the permanency needs of both state ward children and children in long term foster care. The target population is foster youth in care more than 24 or 48 months.

As presented to CLC, the Casey Family Permanency Roundtable Project is intended to address systemic barriers to finding permanent homes or connections for youth who have been in the child protection system for a long period of time. It is a structured process that brings together the child's caseworker, the caseworker's supervisor, a trained facilitator, a permanency consultant from Casey Family Programs, a child welfare specialist from DHS, and an outside Master Practitioner. This group reads the child's file and then meets for two hours to brainstorm innovative ideas for finding a permanent connection for the child and to develop a written permanency action plan which includes strategies, actions, responsibilities, deadlines and identification of potential barriers.

The key to the potential success of a Permanency Roundtable is innovative thinking or "thinking outside the box." It is expected that the participants will revisit kinship searches, former foster parents, teachers, and other adults formerly involved with or interested in the child. They will attempt to increase and strengthen the

<sup>1</sup> See, The Children's Aid Society, Aging Out of Foster Care: Youth Aging Out of Foster Care Face Poverty, Homelessness and the Criminal Justice System, 2, <http://www.childrensaidsociety.org/files/upload-docs/FosterCare.pdf> (last visited March 9, 2011) and Rhode Island Kids Count, Issue Brief #36, Achieving Permanency for Children and Youth in Foster Care (May 2008), <http://www.rikidscount.org/matriarch/documents/Permanency%201B%281%29.pdf> (last visited March 9, 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Mark E. Courtney, et al. Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 23 and 24, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago (2010), [http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest\\_Study\\_Age\\_23\\_24.pdf](http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/Midwest_Study_Age_23_24.pdf) (last visited March 9, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Casey Family Programs is a national foundation based in Seattle, Washington, whose primary focus is on improving the child welfare system. <http://www.casey.org> (last visited March 9, 2011).

pool of permanent homes for the child by identifying new people who are or might be important to the child and exploring family members not previously identified. In addition, they will explore the continued validity of previous permanency options selected by the case worker and/or child.

At the end of the Roundtable discussion, the participants are to create a Permanency Action Plan for the child which should include specific actions that must be taken by specified people within a set time period. The caseworker supervisor is to review progress on the Action Plan.

Interestingly, neither the child nor his or her lawyer participates directly in the Roundtable discussion. CLC is exploring an internal roundtable practice for our oldest foster care clients and we anticipate sending our volunteer attorneys more information about this internal process.

It is of utmost importance to work toward finding permanency for your clients and to advocate for their permanency interests, wishes and concerns during their roundtable process and generally.

#### PRACTICE TIPS FOR VOLUNTEER ATTORNEYS WITH CLIENTS INVOLVED IN THE ROUNDTABLE PROCESS:

- 1) Ensure that you have received a complete copy of your client's Roundtable documents, including but not limited to your client's Permanency Action Plan;
- 2) If you are not receiving information regarding your client's Roundtable process, request that the Court order the agency to immediately provide you with this relevant information regarding your client;
- 3) Concurrent with the agency's process, you will need to gain an in-depth understanding of your client's thoughts regarding permanency. Make sure you brainstorm all options for permanency with your client. REMEMBER THIS WILL BE AN ONGOING DISCUSSION WITH YOUR CLIENT<sup>4</sup>;
- 4) Do not exclude permanency options that may have previously been ruled out and any new ideas that your client may have. Circumstances change and a previous relative or significant individual may now be an appropriate resource for your client. EXPLORE THE VIABILITY OF YOUR CLIENT'S IDEAS;
- 5) Request your client's permission to share his or her permanency wishes with the Roundtable participants and with the Court;
- 6) With your client's permission, communicate your client's wishes to your client's county worker and request that your client's wishes be shared and explored with the Roundtable team;
- 7) With your client's permission, express your client's permanency goals to the court and request that the court include your client's permanency requests in its written court order; and
- 8) Advocate for the submission of court notifications and reports detailing your client's permanency progress to all parties so that your client's permanency progress is being addressed at his or her court hearings.

Given that permanency is so important for a young person's future, it is critical that you find a way to have your client's wishes heard. To ensure the success of any permanency plan, it is vital to engage your client in the development of the child's own permanency plan.

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<sup>4</sup> Please refer to the sample questions in last month's, February 2011, Permanency Practice Point and contact CLC at any time for additional resources.