

# Creating Supportive Relationships for Teens in Care

*Thursday, May 24, 2007*

Participant Materials



**New York State  
Office of  
Children & Family  
Services**

New York State  
Office of Children and Family Services Bureau of Training  
and  
SUNY Training Strategies Group

# **CREATING SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS FOR TEENS IN CARE**

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# Myths and Facts about Adolescent Permanency

*Decide whether the following statements are myths or facts and circle your choice.*

1. **Myth**    **Fact**    **Permanency planning for adolescents is a high priority for most states.**
2. **Myth**    **Fact**    **When we talk about permanency planning we really mean adoption.**
3. **Myth**    **Fact**    **Most adolescents and young adults are not interested in having a “forever” family.**
4. **Myth**    **Fact**    **The primary purpose of permanency planning is to make sure that each child has a permanent living arrangement.**
5. **Myth**    **Fact**    **If a young person is preparing for independent living, it is not necessary to promote permanent connections.**
6. **Myth**    **Fact**    **Social workers can usually use traditional approaches to find adoptive homes for teens.**
7. **Myth**    **Fact**    **Young people are not interested in remaining connected to their birth family.**
8. **Myth**    **Fact**    **Youth over the age of 18 aren’t interested in achieving a permanency goal.**
9. **Myth**    **Fact**    **We don’t need to be concerned about permanent connections for youth who are not in foster care and are receiving services from programs.**
10. **Myth**    **Fact**    **Most states have policies that prevent youth from leaving foster care without a permanent connection.**

# Professional Strategies

- Listen to young people talk about their hopes and their fears for family life.
- Ask youth to identify the important people in their lives.
- Find out whom the youth was close to in the past.
- Provide youth opportunities to maintain contact with their siblings and other family members.
- Facilitate communication between the youth and adults who might become permanent connections for youth.
- Teach the interpersonal relationship skills required to develop and maintain a support system.
- Provide opportunities for youth to “make peace with the past.”
- Periodically, revisit all of the permanency goals.
- Empower young people to find their own permanent connections.
- Understand that youth may change their minds about returning home or adoption.
- Provide youth with opportunities to talk with other youth and young adults who have been adopted.
- Provide youth with opportunities to develop relationships with mentors, either through formal mentoring programs or informal interactions.
- Encourage the youth’s involvement in positive community activities.
- Provide opportunities for the youth to remain connected and/or become connected with his home community, tribe or cultural group.
- Make sure that youth understand all of their permanency options.
- Make sure that youth are actively involved in planning for their futures.
- Do not let youth leave foster care without having a positive, caring adult of their choice in their lives!

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<http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/yd/>**

# 45 Suggested Supports...

*...that a Supportive Adult might offer  
to a youth transitioning from care*

## ❑ **A HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS**

Spending the holidays without a family and with nowhere to go is a significant issue cited by young people who have transitioned out of foster care. Extending an invitation to holiday celebrations, or birthdays can help a youth fend off the depression that usually sets in around these important times of year.

## ❑ **A PLACE TO DO LAUNDRY**

Many adults can look back at the times they returned home as a youth with bags loaded with dirty clothes to wash. The offer to use laundry facilities can be a great way to keep a regular connection with a youth and provide them with a way to maintain pride in their appearance, regardless of an unstable housing situation.

## ❑ **EMERGENCY PLACE TO STAY**

Statistics show 25% of young persons will spend at least one night homeless within the first 2-4 years of leaving foster care. The offer of an emergency couch to sleep on or a guest bedroom to stay in can reduce anxiety and keep young people safe during hardships. Supportive adults may want to specify limits in time or expectations (help with housework, etc.) as a condition of this offer.

## ❑ **FOOD/OCCASIONAL MEALS**

A friendly, family-style meal every thursday evening or an invitation to Sunday brunch or a monthly lunch can provide a youth with a healthy alternative to the fast-food that often composes a youth's diet. It also provides a chance to connect and to role-model family life. An open invite to "raid the pantry" can be very comforting to young students or those on a limited budget and will help to ensure that the youth's health isn't jeopardized when funds are low.

## ❑ **CARE PACKAGES AT COLLEGE**

Students regularly receive boxes of homemade cookies, a phone card or photos from their parents when away at college. A regular package to a foster youth who has transitioned from care reminds them of connections "back home", and allows them to fit in with their peers.

## ❑ **EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY**

An employer or person in a position to hire, can help by providing special consideration when hiring for a new position. A phone call to the youth inviting them to apply, help with a written application, coaching for a job interview are all ways to help. Supportive adults can offer a youth the chance to help with yard work, housecleaning, babysitting, etc. in order to earn extra money and to establish a work reference.

## ❑ **JOB SEARCH ASSISTANCE**

Finding a job can be a daunting task for anyone. Advice, help filling out applications or creating a resumé, rehearsal of interview questions, transportation to interviews, preparation of appropriate clothing, discussion of workplace behavior, and just plain cheering on can help a youth successfully land a job.

## ❑ **CAREER COUNSELING**

An adult working in the youth's field of interest can offer advice which could launch a youth's career. Youth particularly benefit from connections and introductions which lead to apprenticeships, job shadows, or other real-world experience. Supportive adults can help the transitioning youth make these contacts.

## ❑ **HOUSING HUNT**

Securing a first apartment is a rite of passage to adulthood. But without guidance, finding housing can turn into an overwhelming experience. Youth leaving care often lack references or a co-signer which a supportive adult may be able to offer. Former foster youth may have opportunities for financial assistance, but may need help locating it or applying for it. Also, supportive adults can utilize apartment hunting as an opportunity to discuss other daily living challenges, like roommates, utilities, selecting a neighborhood, transportation to job and needed services, etc.

## ❑ **RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES**

Extending an invitation to a youth to go bike riding, go bowling, shoot some hoops or to simply take a walk can promote health, relieve anxiety, and provide a comfortable way to connect. Recreational activities like cooking, woodworking, painting or playing guitar can provide an outlet for youth and help to develop skills. Other activities include going to a movie, playing cards or chess or Monopoly, taking photographs, going shopping or taking a short trip.

## ❑ **MENTOR**

Mentors have proven to be an effective influence on youth. Whether a formal or informal mentor to a youth in care, the supportive adult can be a role-model, coach and a friend.

## ❑ **TRANSPORTATION**

Youth often need help with transportation and may have no one to turn to. A supportive adult can be a transportation resource, specifying the limits of the offer, i.e. for school, to find employment, for medical appointments, to visit relatives, etc. Youth can often use help to figure out how to use public transportation.



**□ EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE**

According to statistics, only 50% of foster youth will graduate from high school. These shocking statistics show that many youth in care struggle through school against terrible odds including multiple moves, learning disabilities, lack of parental support and missed time in class. A supportive adult can help by becoming a tutor, an educational advocate, or by simply providing advice when needed. Youth planning to attend college can use help with college applications, finding financial aid, and visits to perspective college campuses.

**□ RELATIONSHIP/MARRIGE/PARENTING COUNSELING**

Youth coming out of foster care often lack the skill to cultivate and maintain lasting personal relationships. In many cases, role-modeled relationships for the youth have included biological parents with dysfunctional relationships and paid caretakers from group homes or facilities. Supportive adults can provide frank discussions about relationships, marriage, the role of a spouse and how to be a good parent when the time comes.

**□ ASSISTANCE WITH MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS/ CHAPERONE**

It can be scary attending a medical appointment all alone. A supportive adult can accompany a youth to a medical appointment or rehearse what questions to ask, interpret a doctor’s instructions, or provide advice about obtaining a second opinion.

**□ STORAGE**

Sometimes the life of a youth can be transient, moving from location to location before getting settled. The supportive adult can provide a safe place to store valuables and help ensure that the youth doesn’t lose track of valuables, including photo albums, family keepsakes, and records.

**□ MOTIVATION**

Everyone does better with a personal cheering section. The supportive adult may be the only one to offer encouraging words to a youth.

**□ SOMEONE TO TALK TO/DISCUSS PROBLEMS**

When a youth transitions out of care, there are often moments of insecurity, loneliness and anxiety. The supportive adult can provide a listening ear for a youth to vent, offer advice and wisdom, or be a sounding board for ideas. It may be wise to establish “calling hours” to avoid late night or early morning calls, if that is a concern.

**□ A PHONE TO USE**

Sometimes a phone is simply not an affordable luxury for a youth starting out on their own. A supportive adult could provide use of their phone as a message phone for the youth’s prospective employers or landlords. Use of the phone can be helpful to keep in touch with caseworkers, siblings, parents, former foster parents, or to access resources in the community.

**□ A COMPUTER TO USE**

Access to a computer is a valuable tool for a youth for school work, employment or housing search, or contact with siblings or other relatives. A supportive adult can provide this access from a computer at work or at home, and may want to establish limits in time, websites visited, or downloads that are acceptable.

**□ CLOTHING**

A youth may need assistance and/or advise in purchasing or preparing clothing for events like a job interview, weddings or special occasions, or graduation. Sometimes special opportunities need special gear, like a school ski trip, a costume party, etc. A supportive adult can assist with laundry, ironing, mending, shopping for new clothes, or occasionally purchasing a new item. Improving a youth’s personal appearance can boost self confidence.

**□ SPIRITUAL SUPPORT**

Youth often develop the same spiritual beliefs as their parents. Youth coming from care may have lacked this spiritual guidance. A supportive adult can invite a youth to join them as they search for their own spiritual path. The adult can offer to explore religion with the youth and invite them to participate in church or other spiritual activities.

**□ LEGAL TROUBLES**

A youth emerging from care who gets into legal trouble usually cannot afford legal advice. When youth have a tangle with the law, they often land in deeper trouble because of their lack of experience and resources in navigating the legal system. A supportive adult can assist by connecting youth to needed legal services. The supporter may also wish to provide preventative advice to the youth who may be headed for legal entanglement.



*JJ from Michigan,  
FosterClub All-Star*

“Permanency is a feeling that is different for everyone, it is not bound by time nor can it be measured. It has to be discovered and often times it has to be tested, and rejected more than once before permanency can be established. Permanency is so hard to understand because it is a conceptual idea of an emotion and is received on both ends very differently for every person. There is no straight “by the book” definition of permanency because the emotions I feel cannot be felt by anyone else, and that’s the great thing about it.”

**□ CULTURAL EXPERIENCE**

Supportive adults who share a cultural background with a youth may wish to engage them in cultural activities. Even if the cultural backgrounds are different, the youth can be motivated to participate in cultural events. Support can be given to examine cultural traditions and beliefs and encouragement given to take pride in their cultural identity.

**□ APARTMENT MOVE-IN**

Moving is so much easier with the support of friends, from packing, to manpower, a truck to move, to help setting up the new apartment. The supportive adult can also invite the youth to scout through their garage or storage area for extra furniture or household items that might be useful.



**COOKING LESSONS/ASSISTANCE**

Many times youth coming out of care have not had the opportunity to practice cooking on their own. Meal preparation is often a natural way to engage in meaningful conversation and build a relationship. The supportive adult may decide to take a youth grocery shopping, or help stock the youth's first kitchen with a starter supply of utensils, spices, cleaning supplies and food.

**REGULAR CHECK-IN (DAILY, WEEKLY OR MONTHLY)**

Simply knowing that someone will be aware that you are missing, hurt or in trouble is important. A supportive adult can instigate regular check-in's with a youth transitioning out of care, easing feelings of anxiety and building confidence that someone is concerned about their safety.

**BILLS AND MONEY MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE**

Sorting through bills and balancing a checkbook can be a particularly daunting task for a youth with a learning disability, deficient math skills or experience. Understanding how to maintain and obtain credit, deciphering loan applications, and budgeting are some of the items where a supportive adult can lend help.

**DRUG AND ALCOHOL ADDICTION HELP**

A high percentage of youth in care have parents who had drug or alcohol dependency problems. Working with young people transitioning out of care to avoid these dangerous pitfalls and offering support if a problem should develop could help break a familial cycle of addiction.

**HELP WITH READING FORMS, DOCUMENTS, AND COMPLEX MAIL**

Many youth in care have learning disabilities which may make complicated reading assignments all the more difficult. The supportive adult can make arrangements for a youth to collect materials for review on a weekly basis or to give a call on an as-needed basis.

**MECHANICAL AND/OR BUILDING PROJECTS**

Youth may need help keeping an automobile in good repair. Teaching a youth about the care of their car can help them build self-confidence and skills that can last a lifetime. Helping a youth fix up their apartment or a rented home, or asking for their assistance in projects around your home, can teach new skills which may be put to use throughout life.

**HOUSEKEEPING**

Some youth, particularly those who have lived in a residential facility or restrictive environment, may not have had real-life experience in keeping a home clean. The supportive adult can discuss cleaning supplies to use for particular household chores, how to avoid disease, and organization of clutter once a youth has transitioned to their own home.

**HOME DECORATING**

Helping a youth decorate their home can be a fun and rewarding way to contribute to the youth's sense of pride and self esteem.

**VOTING**

Youth in our society often form their first political impressions based on their parents' political beliefs. Youth in care often do not receive this role modeling. A supportive adult may wish to discuss current local, state and national issues, help a youth register to vote or take a youth to the polling location to vote.

**VOLUNTEERISM**

Volunteering to help others or for a worthy cause is an excellent way to build self-esteem. Supporters can offer to engage a youth in their own good work or embark on a new volunteer effort together.

**FINDING COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

Navigating through the maze of government agencies and myriad of social service programs is difficult at best even for a resourceful adult. The supportive adult can help the youth make a list of useful resources in the community and offer to visit them together.

**SAFETY AND PERSONAL SECURITY**

The youth transitioning from care needs to take charge of their own personal safety. The supportive adult can encourage them to take a self-defense class, get CPR certified, get current on health and safety issues. The adult can take a tour of the youth's apartment and make suggestions regarding home safety, can help develop an evacuation plan, and make plans with the youth on what to do in an emergency situation. The supportive adult can offer to be called when something goes wrong, and offer to be listed as "person to contact in an emergency" on business forms.



*Sharde from Indiana, FosterClub All-Star*

"Permanency is important because if you spend your entire life moving around it doesn't give you a chance to get close to anyone, and you don't learn how to build those essential relationships you will need later in life. Moving around also influences you to run away from your problems."

**MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT**

Some youth in care suffer from mental health challenges. Depression, attention-deficit disorder, eating disorders, and other illness may afflict the youth. It is suggested that the supportive adult educate themselves about any mental health disorders that are at issue.

**CO-SIGNER**

Many times youth need co-signers to acquire housing, car loans, or bank accounts (particularly when the youth is under 18 years old). Consider the financial liability if the youth were to miss payments or not fulfill the financial agreement. It is suggested that an adult who acts as a co-signer closely supervise the arrangement until the youth has established a consistent pattern of responsibility.



☐ **BABYSITTING**

If the youth is a parent, babysitting services can be the relief that is needed to keep a young family intact. In addition to providing a time-out, the offer to watch a child while the young parent gets other chores around the house accomplished (laundry, cleaning, etc.), provides an excellent opportunity to role-model good parenting skills.

☐ **EMERGENCY CASH**

Most of us have experienced a cash shortage at one time or another as a youth. Youth coming from care usually lack this important “safety net”. The supportive adult may wish to discuss up front their comfort level in supplying financial assistance. They would discuss what constitutes an emergency (not enough to cover rent? a medical emergency? cash for a date? gas money?).

☐ **REFERENCE**

Many applications, including those for college, housing and jobs, require a list of references be provided by the applicant. If the supportive adult is able to give a positive reference for a youth, they should make sure a youth has their current contact information so that the supporter can be included on their list of references.

☐ **ADVOCACY**

Sometimes youth have a difficult time speaking up for themselves in court, at school, with government systems, etc. Supportive adults can help a youth organize their thoughts, speak on their behalf, or assist in writing letters.

☐ **INCLUSION IN SOCIAL CIRCLE/COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES**

Often youth in care have difficulty forming new friendships and relationships when they leave care. A supportive adult can extend regular invitations to the youth to attend social and community gatherings as an opportunity to form new friendships and make connections with people. Good opportunities to make new friends include family weddings, hiking trips, garden clubs, community service projects and volunteer opportunities, dances, sporting events, debate groups, community college classes, etc.

☐ **ADOPTION**

Even for many older youth, including those over the age of 18, adoption remains a dream. An adult who is able to offer this ultimate permanent connection for a youth may make an initial offer to adopt through a Permanency Pact. Often youth may have fears about adoption, interpreting adoption to mean loss of contact with bio parents or siblings (this should be taken into consideration when discussing this option). Youth who once declined to be adopted often change their minds, so an adult may want to renew the offer from time to time.

## About FosterClub



*FosterClub is the national network for young people in foster care.*

**Every 2 minutes**, a child’s life changes as they enter the foster care system. There are more than 513,000 young people living in foster care across the country, and FosterClub *is their club* — a place to turn for advice, information, and hope. Our peer support network gives kids in foster care **a new spin on life**.

At FosterClub’s **web sites**, kids are asking questions and getting answers: [www.fosterclub.com](http://www.fosterclub.com) is for young people and [www.fyi3.com](http://www.fyi3.com) is designed for youth transitioning from care. FosterClub’s gateway for adults who support young people in foster care is [www.fosterclub.org](http://www.fosterclub.org). Our **publications** supply youth with tools for success and also provide inspiration and perspective from their peers who have successfully emerged from foster care. FosterClub’s **training and events** are held across the country and feature a dynamic group of young foster care alumni called the FosterClub All-Stars. **Outreach tools** designed to improve communication with young people in care and engage them in achieving their own personal success.

The members of FosterClub are resilient young people determined to build a better future for themselves and for other kids coming up through the system behind them. Their success depends on the generosity of concerned individuals and collaborations with partner organizations. If you would like to learn more about FosterClub or how you can support young people in foster care, visit [www.fosterclub.org](http://www.fosterclub.org) or call 503-717-1552. FosterClub is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. EIN 93-1287234.



The pinwheel is an enduring symbol of the happy, carefree childhood all kids deserve. For more than 513,000 youth living in the U.S. foster care system, childhood has been interrupted by abuse, neglect or abandonment. FosterClub’s peer support network gives kids in foster care a new spin on life by providing information, resources, encouragement and hope.

*the national network for young people in foster care*

FOSTERCLUB



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## YOUTH IN PROGRESS IS:

## POLICIES

**The New York State Office of Children and Family Services' Foster Care Youth Leadership Team. Our team is comprised of youth leaders, each with an adult mentor from each of the six regional foster care youth leadership groups, OCFS partners, and the NYS Adolescent Services Resource Network.**

### Our MISSION IS:

**To enhance and advance the lives of today's and tomorrow's foster care youth by giving them a sense of self and responsibility.**

**To do this, YIP pledges to educate everyone involved in the foster care system to the realities of this experience. We will accomplish this mission by listening to youth in care and by offering them guidance that will allow them to achieve success in their lives and to realize their full potential.**

**We are Today's Youth,  
Tomorrow's Leaders!**



When attending any event on behalf of Youth In Progress, all members will represent the team in a manner that reflects the mission and values of the team.

When attending any event or activity, all members will:

- ⇒ Report on time, stay for the duration, and fully participate in all sessions
- ⇒ Abide by the session 'Ground Rules'
- ⇒ Be well-rested and alert
- ⇒ Return and remain in their own rooms by 12:00am, if an overnight activity
- ⇒ Refrain from horseplay
- ⇒ Abstain from consuming alcohol or using illicit drugs
- ⇒ Abstain from engaging in any sexual activity
- ⇒ Refrain from exhibiting adultism, ageism, and all other prejudicial behaviors
- ⇒ Abstain from treating any other member in a manner that could be perceived as disrespectful

Mentors accept responsibility for the supervision of their own youth leader(s).

All ASRN Staff and OCFS Staff who attend Youth In Progress activities will adhere to the above policies and will assist mentors and youth leaders to do the same.

Any participant found to be acting in a manner inconsistent with the above policies or in a way that adversely affects the safety and well-being of themselves or the group, may be asked by the group leaders to leave the premises or the event.



## OUR GROUND RULES

### To enhance our activities, we agree to:

- ⇒ Assume good will—remember that we are all working toward the same goal, even if we use different ways to get there
- ⇒ Start and end meetings on time
- ⇒ Be respectful:
  - \* Let others finish speaking
  - \* Avoid side conversations
  - \* Maintain respectful body language
  - \* Turn off cell phones
  - \* Return from breaks on time
  - \* Speak only when recognized by group leader to do so
- ⇒ Be willing to share
- ⇒ Be willing to listen
- ⇒ Ask for clarification when needed
- ⇒ Speak from own experience—use “I” statements
- ⇒ Agree to disagree
- ⇒ “Try It On” - be willing to look at things from a different perspective
- ⇒ Model partnership



## OUR PRIORITIES INCLUDE



Dispel negative stereotypes to “normalize” the experiences of youth in foster care



Increase funding opportunities for Statewide and Regional Youth Voice activities.



Improve policies and practices regarding family and sibling contacts.



Increase youth involvement in selecting, assessing, and retaining service providers.



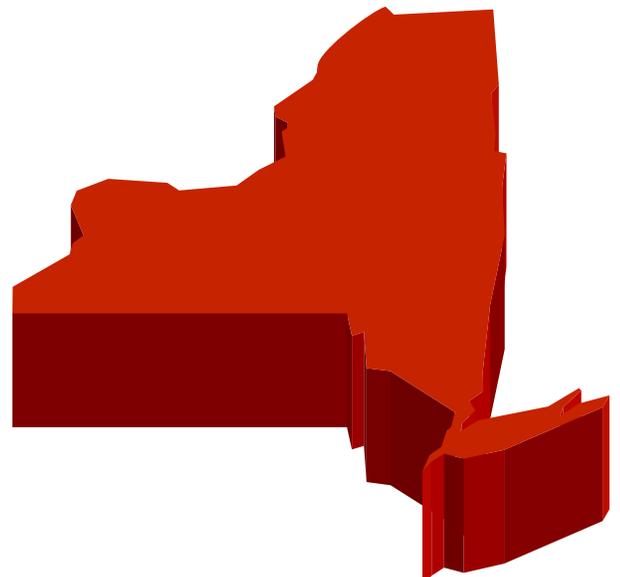
Increase youth opportunities to make decisions and to improve practices that meet their needs and directly affect them. i.e. clothing allowance and policy, financial resources.



Improve available services for youth while in foster care including trial discharge services.



Improve policies and increase availability, awareness, and participation of services provided to youth aging out of foster care.



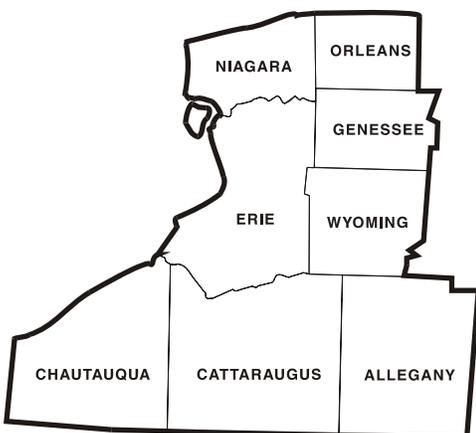
## WHAT WE DO

- Host Annual Regional Foster Care Youth Speak Outs;
- Distribute the *Handbook for Youth In Foster Care* regionally to youth ages 14-21;
- Participate in a variety of speaking engagements and conferences regionally, statewide, and nationally;
- Serve on leadership boards for agencies, local districts, and national organizations;
- Act as co-trainers and speak as panelists for caseworker, child care staff, and foster parent training;
- Appear in training videos specific to working with adolescents in foster care;
- Participate in focus groups; and
- Conduct agency focus groups with youth in care.

## WHERE WE ARE

**The counties in each region are:**

### **Region 1—Stand Up 4 Youth**



### Regional Office Liaisons (RO)

are designated from each of the 6 OCFS regional offices to work with Youth In Progress. RO Liaisons demonstrate their commitment by fulfilling the following expectations:

- Attend Regional Meetings
- Represent Youth In Progress to all local departments of social services and voluntary agencies within their regions
- Participate as members of the Adolescent Services and Outcomes workgroup
- Provide transportation as needed for youth leaders
- Actively recruit local districts and agencies to become involved in youth voice initiatives
- Supervise Foster Care Youth Interns

### Adolescent Services Resource Network (ASRN) Liaisons

are training staff who serve their specified regions. ASRN Liaisons demonstrate their commitment by fulfilling the following expectations:

- Coordinate and maintain resources and records for regional youth leadership activities
- Provide opportunities for information sharing and networking through youth leadership activities
- Represent Youth In Progress to all local departments of social services and voluntary agencies within their regions
- Actively recruit local districts and voluntary agencies to become involved in youth voice initiatives
- Share information and coordinate all activities with RO Liaison
- Develop training with youth and alumni
- Provide transportation as needed
- Maintain balance between youth leadership activities and individual youth leaders' education, vocation, and permanency goals

### OCFS Central Office Staff

are designated to work with Youth In Progress. OCFS Central Office Staff demonstrate their commitment by fulfilling the following expectations:

- Provide Youth In Progress with up-to-date information about adolescent policies and practices
- Assist Youth In Progress to overcome barriers to furthering the mission
- Bring information to the team about statewide opportunities for youth
- Interface with other statewide initiatives
- Facilitate interactions between Youth In Progress and policy makers
- Integrate youth voice into other Child Welfare strategies

Alumni

are those Youth In Progress Leaders who were involved in the foster care system in New York State who either aged out or exited and have made a commitment to remain involved in Youth In Progress activities. All Alumni demonstrate their commitment by fulfilling expectations of youth leaders; they may be given additional developmentally appropriate responsibilities by their regional team based on the individuals' age and strengths.

Mentors

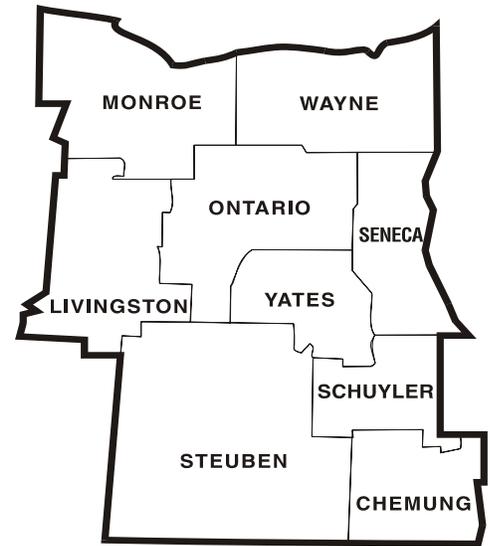
are caring adults who accompany youth leaders to retreats, events, and activities. Mentors include caseworkers, child care staff, parents, foster parents, or any other caring adult. Mentors demonstrate their commitment by fulfilling the following expectations:

- Attend regional meetings
- Demonstrate willingness to allow youth to learn by doing
- Assist leaders in offering solutions and strategies to improve foster care
- Offer support and guidance while refraining from taking control
- Provide transportation and time to youth leaders
- Contribute information gained through their own experiences working in the foster care system
- Actively recruit peers from local districts and voluntary agencies to become involved in youth voice initiatives
- Listen to all foster youth and represent the needs they identify
- Provide supervision and support to individual youth leaders for whom they are responsible
- Support and prioritize youth leaders' own education, vocation, and permanency goals
- Demonstrate and model commitment to self-care as a personal priority

Foster Care Youth Interns

serve the team on a time-limited basis. Interns demonstrate their commitment to the team by fulfilling the expectations of their immediate supervisor. Interns carry out administrative duties necessary to furthering the mission of Youth In Progress. Interns are treated as any other paid staff position for the team and are therefore expected to act as professionals.

**Region 2—Youth On The Move**



**Region 3—Voices United**



## Region 4—Youth 4 Progress

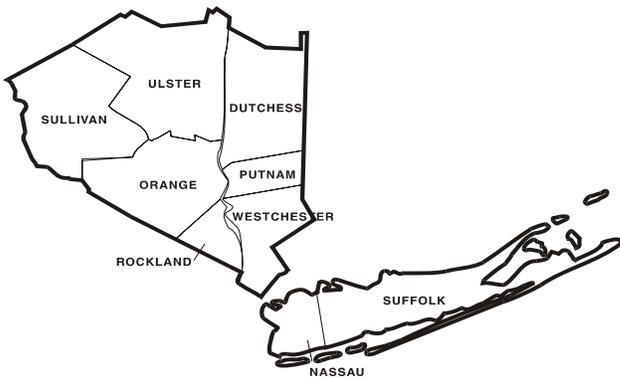
## OUR ROLES

We each have equally important roles to support the furthering of our mission. Regardless of specific role, each member of our team is expected to demonstrate their commitment to our mission by fulfilling the following expectations:

- Act as positive role models
- Be dependable
- Demonstrate respect for others
- Set aside personal differences
- Model Adult/Youth Partnerships
- Accept constructive feedback
- Offer constructive feedback
- Distribute handbooks and other Youth In Progress materials



## Region 5—Youth of Mid-Hudson and Adolescent Leaders of Tomorrow



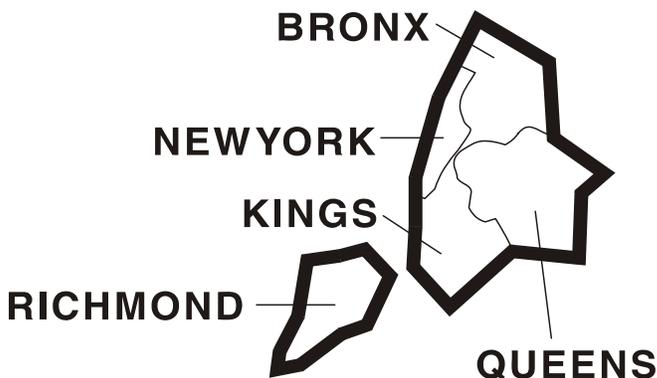
### Specific expectations of each role on the team

#### Youth Leaders

are youth ages 14-21 who are involved in the foster care system in New York State. All youth leaders demonstrate their commitment by fulfilling the following expectations:

- Attend regional meetings
- Recruit peers to join regional group
- Offer solutions and strategies to improve foster care
- Contribute information gained through their own experiences with the foster care system
- Listen to all foster youth and represent their needs
- Participate in regional Speak Outs
- Assist in forming statewide priorities based on information gained at all regional speak outs
- Represent regional foster care youth needs to local districts and voluntary agencies within the region
- Convey all information shared at statewide meetings to their peers regionally
- Support youth leaders who are new to the team
- Act as ambassadors to build relationships with new youth leaders and promote a sense of team among their peers
- Serve as role models by demonstrating dedication to their personal education, vocation, and permanency goals
- Demonstrate commitment to self-care as a personal priority

## Region 6—The Movement





**New York State  
Office of  
Children & Family  
Services**

# **Adolescent Services and Outcomes Practice Guidance Paper**



**State of New York**



**George E. Pataki  
Governor**

**April 2006**

## Executive Summary

The federal Administration for Children and Families conducted a Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) in June 2001. The Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and stakeholders in the child welfare system developed New York State's Program Improvement Plan (PIP) as part of this process. The PIP outlines a set of integrated strategies that form a cohesive plan for strengthening district and agency practice in promoting safety, permanency and well-being. Adolescent Services and Outcomes is one of the core strategy areas.

The Adolescent Services and Outcomes Strategy Workgroup was formed in June 2002 and includes representatives from local social services districts, voluntary agencies, Adolescent Services Resource Networks, Youth In Progress and other state agencies serving youth. The Adolescent Strategy Workgroup conducted a nation-wide review of other states' policies, best practices and legislation governing services to adolescents. The workgroup also explored New York State policies, practices and programs. Based on this work, the Adolescent Services and Outcomes Practice Guidance Paper was developed to provide local districts, OCFS Division of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) and voluntary agencies with guidance on the new framework for practice with adolescents in foster care.

The framework for practice focuses on assisting foster care youth to achieve permanency, recognizing that youth must have ongoing and meaningful connections with family and adults to achieve positive outcomes. Foster care youth should have a connection with at least one Adult Permanency Resource who is committed to providing guidance and assistance to the youth as the youth makes the transition from foster care to self-sufficiency. Permanency planning for foster youth needs to include a broad range of options as well as a concurrent planning approach. The new framework also recognizes the importance of providing youth with training and opportunities to practice life skills and educational opportunities. Youth involvement is essential to the practice framework.

The Adolescent Services and Outcomes Strategy Workgroup has developed the following resources:

- 04-OCFS-INF-07 - Practice Guidance Paper on Adolescent Services and Outcomes
- Proposed regulations on Adolescent Services for Foster Care Youth
- Partnership with Youth In Progress, the foster care youth leadership advisory group
- Handbook For Youth In Foster Care and accompanying video
- Clothing proposal to update 89 ADM-14 issued on April 10, 1989 and accompanying video highlighting the issues.
- Monitoring Tool and Guidelines to Assess Adolescent Safety, Permanency, Services and Outcomes

OCFS expects that through implementation of the new practice framework, training and monitoring, the new practice framework will strengthen services to adolescents and improve their achievement of permanency.

# ADOLESCENT SERVICES AND OUTCOMES

## PRACTICE GUIDANCE PAPER

### Introduction

Over the last several years, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) has undertaken an integrated set of actions to provide adolescents in foster care\* with further supports needed to enable their development into healthy, functional citizens with permanent attachments to supportive adults, families and communities. These actions are outlined in New York State's Program Improvement Plan (PIP) that was developed in response to the state's Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), which took place in June 2001.

The Adolescent Services and Outcomes Strategy included the following set of integrated actions:

- (1) Establish a workgroup comprised of representatives from local districts, voluntary agencies, other state agencies and foster care youth to identify family-centered strategies for adolescents.
- (2) Review model programs, policy and practice frameworks, and review the current regulatory and practice framework for supporting adolescents to self-sufficiency.
- (3) Explore possible regulatory changes to assist foster care youth to make the transition to self-sufficiency and to continue to pursue permanency for foster care youth with a goal of discharge to independent living with permanency resources.
- (4) Develop a policy paper and set of practice guidelines that will assist districts and agencies in strengthening services to adolescents and improving their achievement of permanency.
- (5) Develop a strategy to monitor life skills services and outcomes.
- (6) Monitor the provision of independent living services to all adolescents and the status of their outcome achievement.

Progress on each of these actions will be discussed in this paper.

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\* Foster care as used in this paper shall refer to the placement of a youth in the custody of the commissioner of a social services district under Articles 3, 7, or 10 of the Family Court Act, or voluntarily placed, or placed in OCFS custody as juvenile delinquents, and includes placement of the youth in a foster family boarding home or congregate care setting. Juvenile delinquents placed in OCFS custody are considered to be placed in foster care if they are placed in a Title IV-E eligible facility (non-secure facility or voluntary agency). Foster care shall not include a youth in secure detention or an OCFS secure or limited secure facility.

## Background

Progress was made on all of the action steps described above. The Adolescent Strategy Workgroup was formed in June 2002 and is comprised of representatives from public and private agencies and foster care youth. Additionally, representatives from key state agencies have been identified to participate and/or contribute to workgroup activities. The Adolescent Strategy Workgroup continues to meet on a bi-monthly basis with various subcommittees formed as needed.

The review of New York State policies, practices and programs has been completed. The workgroup continues to examine other state and national programs as well as various policies for services to older adolescents to continually review ideas to improve adolescent services to NYS youth. Based on discussions with the workgroup, OCFS has drafted proposed changes to the independent living regulations. A monitoring tool and guidelines is completed, as well as a strategy to monitor adolescent services and life skill services. Developing a training strategy for use of the monitoring instrument will be the next step for the workgroup.

Based on the work that has been completed to date, this policy paper will provide local districts, OCFS Division of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) and voluntary agencies with a framework for practice to strengthen services to adolescents and improve their achievement of permanency. This policy framework is consistent with the goals and outcomes for youth in OCFS custody. However, there are differences in the terminology and the means by which services are delivered due to legal mandates and the placement mechanisms via the family court process. This policy paper is a work in progress and will be updated periodically as new action steps are developed and work is completed. Additionally, recognizing that this new policy framework represents a major shift in thinking, the current training curriculum will be enhanced and training will be provided to support the new concepts provided in this paper.

All adolescents in foster care between 14 and 21 years of age, regardless of the youth's permanency goal, and former foster care youth who remain in foster care through 18, 19, or 20 years of age, will receive services and supports that will assist them to make the transition to self-sufficiency. Through the review of regulations, policies, current practices and alternative program models, OCFS will provide guidance to local districts, DRS, and voluntary agencies on effective, permanency-focused service strategies for adolescents. OCFS expects that this policy and practice guidance paper, along with enhanced training and monitoring, will provide adolescents in foster care with the supports needed to enable their development into healthy, functional citizens with permanent attachments to supportive adults, families and communities. This is the outcome that New York State will achieve in undertaking the integrated set of actions found in the New York State Program Improvement Plan for the federal CFSR.

Foster care youth need services such as assistance in obtaining their high school diplomas, career exploration, vocational training, job placement and retention, as well as training and practice in daily living skills, training in budgeting and financial management skills, substance abuse prevention and preventive health activities. Former foster care youth who remain in foster care through 18, 19, or 20 years of age also need supports and services. Upon discharge, or later, up to the age of 21, these youth may need such supports and services as financial, housing, counseling, employment, education and other appropriate supportive services to complement their own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency.

## A Framework for Practice With Adolescents

The framework for practice with adolescents recognizes that in addition to providing youth with training and opportunities to practice life skills to assist them to make a transition to self-sufficiency, foster care youth must also have ongoing and meaningful connections with family and adults. Permanency planning for foster care youth needs to include a broad range of options as well as a concurrent planning approach. Educational opportunities and youth involvement are essential to the practice framework.

This approach to practice represents a major shift in thinking and in practice for OCFS as well as many local districts and agencies. To support the new Permanency law and this new framework for practice, OCFS is adopting new terminology. Regulations were filed on an emergency basis, which were effective December 21, 2005, renaming the permanency planning goal of independent living established in New York State Regulations, Section 430.12 (f). The goal formerly referred to as Independent Living, has been renamed “Discharge to Another Planned Living Arrangement with a Permanency Resource.” The new regulations define this permanency planning goal as assisting foster care youth in their transition to self-sufficiency by connecting the youth to an adult permanency resource, equipping the youth with life skills and, upon discharge, connecting the youth with any needed community and/or specialized services. The new regulations define an *adult permanency resource* as a caring, committed adult whom the local social services district has determined to be an appropriate and acceptable resource for a youth, and someone who is committed to providing guidance and assistance to the youth as the youth makes the transition from foster care to self-sufficiency. Efforts must be made to make the relationship between the youth and the adult permanency resource legal and binding through adoption or guardianship. However, when this is not possible, an adult permanency resource may instead be the youth’s mentor, former foster parent, teacher, or staff person. OCFS believes that this link to an adult permanency resource is so critical to positive outcomes for youth that it has been incorporated into our practice framework, standards, and our documentation requirements (See CONNECTIONS below).

In addition to the above regulatory changes, proposed regulations on adolescent services for foster care youth have been drafted and are under review by OCFS. The proposed regulations will refer to independent living services as life skills services and will require the provision of life skills services that focus on achieving outcomes consistent with the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP). Adolescent life skills services will be defined as services designated to assist foster care youth and former foster care youth to prepare for employment and post secondary education, and to make the transition to responsible adulthood. The proposed regulations will require the provision of life skills services to all foster youth over the age of 14, regardless of the youth’s permanency goal. In addition, the proposed regulations would provide for the regular and continuous exploration of permanency alternatives for all youth in foster care over the age of 14.

Permanency planning is good casework practice for all children and youth in foster care. A concurrent planning approach seeks to provide a ready alternative for children and youth “in case” the primary plan cannot be achieved. A concurrent planning approach for youth who are likely to remain in foster care through age 18, 19, or 20 involves working toward establishing or re-establishing positive connections with the youths’ birth families where safe and appropriate, seeking adoptive families or guardianship arrangements, or identifying other ongoing supportive relationships, while providing the youth with the education opportunities, experiences and skills they need for self-sufficiency.

Concurrent planning results in family-based plans that are consistent and ongoing. Every effort must be made to assist foster care youth to establish permanent connections with caring supportive adults, the adult permanency resources, who will be available when youth are discharged from foster care. On July 1, 2003, the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) implemented several changes to casework practice in an effort to improve outcomes for adolescents in foster care. These changes are described in the attached memorandum issued by ACS.\*\* This ACS policy and procedure, which focuses on achieving permanency for the older youth in foster care, is based on best practice and is consistent with the New York State CFSR PIP strategies for adolescents and this practice guidance paper.

Education is essential to this practice framework. For youth to make a successful transition to self-sufficiency, youth should stay in school and obtain their high school diplomas. Opportunities to pursue post-secondary educational or vocational training programs also are important. Some adolescents in foster care have disabilities, including learning, language, neurological and emotional disorders. The caseworkers' assessment of the youths' educational strengths and challenges are critical to youth having positive educational experiences. Staying in school provides youth with opportunities to experience continuity and receive support from adults and peers. These youth are less likely to engage in juvenile delinquency behavior and more likely to become acclimated to home and family settings. Encouraging youth to receive their high school diplomas, vocational certificates or continue on with college are the best case practice for youth to achieve success.

Since Federal Fiscal Year 2003, when funds were first made available for the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program under the Promoting Safe and Stable Families amendments, local social services districts have been helping youth aging out of foster care to make the transition to self-sufficiency and receive the education, training and services necessary to obtain employment. New York State receives approximately \$3.3 million in federal funds each FFY for this ETV program. The funds are being used to provide up to \$5,000 for each eligible youth to attend a post-secondary education or vocational training program. The following categories of youth are eligible for the ETV program: (1) youth eligible for services under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program; (2) youth adopted from foster care after attaining the age of 16; and (3) youth participating in the ETV program on their twenty-first birthday, until they turn 23 years old as long as they are enrolled in a post-secondary education or vocational training program and are making satisfactory progress toward completion of that program. During FFY 2003-2004 and FFY 2004-2005 over 700 youth each year were awarded ETV funds to attend a post-secondary or vocational training program.

Our practice framework also supports youth involvement in improving the child welfare system. The OCFS undertook a new initiative in 2003 to develop a Statewide Foster Care Youth Leadership Team. The development of this ongoing partnership focuses on making targeted improvements in the quality of foster care services and improving positive outcomes for children and families. The Statewide Foster Care Youth Leadership Team is known as "Youth in Progress" (YIP). The team is comprised of youth leaders and adult mentors from each of the six regional foster care youth leadership groups, foster care alumni (former foster care youth), OCFS partners (regional office and central office staff), OCFS interns, and the NYS Adolescent Services Resource Network members.

The mission of YIP is "to enhance and advance the lives of today's and tomorrow's foster care youth by giving them a sense of self and responsibility. To do this, YIP pledges to educate everyone involved in the foster care system to the realities of this experience. We will accomplish this mission by

listening to youth in care and by offering them guidance that will allow them to achieve success in their lives to realize their full potential.”

Since 2003, YIP has developed a number of ongoing priorities that they are committed to working on in both their regional and statewide activities. The current priorities are to:

- Dispel the negative stereotypes of youth in foster care; to “normalize” the experiences of youth in foster care.
- Improve policies and practices regarding family and sibling contacts.
- Increase youth involvement in selecting, assessing, and retaining service providers.
- Improve available services for youth while in foster care and when leaving foster care, including trial discharge services.
- Improve practices to meet the clothing needs of youth in foster care and increase youth opportunities to make decisions about clothing.

The YIP team meets centrally at least twice per year and maintains quarterly contact through conference calls, videoconferences, and iLinc meetings. In addition, the six local regional groups meet monthly to develop activities to support the priorities of the statewide group. YIP has developed a PowerPoint presentation which is periodically updated to include their mission statement, goals, priority areas and their many accomplishments. The first “Foster Care Youth Leadership Summit” was held in August 2003, at Herkimer County Community College, Herkimer, New York. The youth and adult partners at the first summit worked together to produce a handbook about the rights and responsibilities of foster care youth. In collaboration with OCFS, an introductory video to accompany the handbook was later developed and continues to be updated and distributed to foster youth via local districts and voluntary agencies. A Spanish language version is currently being distributed.

YIP participants worked with OCFS central office to update and educate local districts and voluntary agencies about issues related to an out dated clothing inventory, as well as wrote and produced a video on clothing allowances and shopping to raise awareness about effective implementation strategies for these state policies and to elaborate on these issues. Other YIP accomplishments include: local, regional, statewide and national presentations on adolescents in foster care; a website for youth in care; presentations to the OCFS Commissioner’s Advisory Group; host and present workshops at annual regional foster care youth speakouts; serve on leadership boards for agencies, local districts and national organizations; act as co-trainers and panelists for training; participate in focus groups; conduct focus groups; and serve as foster care experts in a variety of settings.

The strategies described above will assist New York State in continuing to implement the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act of 1999. Under this law, the Title IV-E Independent Living Program is renamed the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP). The purpose of this law is to provide states with flexible funding to help youth who are likely to “age out” of the foster care system make the transition to self-sufficiency by providing services and helping them obtain employment or continue their education. States may use the funds to promote the self-sufficiency of these young people by providing assistance in obtaining a high school diploma, post-secondary education, career exploration, vocational training, job placement and retention, training in daily living skills, training in budgeting, counseling, emotional support, and substance abuse prevention and treatment. For children who have left foster care and are 18, 19, and 20 years old, states can use up to 30 percent of their funds to provide housing assistance. During federal fiscal year 2004-

2005, New York State allocated \$11,235,954 in federal funds to local social services districts to provide services to foster care youth and former foster care youth under the CFCIP. These funds require a 20 percent local match. These changes are described in the attached overview of the CFCIP. For additional information on allocations, refer to Local Commissioners Memorandums 05-OCFS-LCM-11, 04-OCFS-LCM-11, 03-OCFS-LCM-02 and 02-OCFS-LCM-05. The continued implementation of CFCIP, accompanied by training, monitoring and assessment of service provision, will enhance positive outcomes for adolescents in foster care.

## **The Adolescent in Foster Care: What Courts and DSS Can Do to Improve Their Life Chances**

New York State's recent Permanency legislation, Chapter 3 of the Laws of 2005, brought many changes to laws that will affect adolescents. The law refers to the permanency goal, independent living as "another planned permanent living arrangement that includes a significant connection to an adult willing to be a permanency resource for the child." As indicated above, regulations were filed on emergency basis to implement the new law. With these new regulations, which became effective December 21, 2005, the discharge planning goal of independent living has been renamed discharge to another planned living arrangement with a permanency resource. The permanency law requires the provision of life skills services (formerly referred to as independently living services) for all youth in foster care 14 years of age and older, regardless of the child's permanency goal. This change is in recognition that it takes time to develop these skills and abilities in youth, and even if the child is adopted, life skills are needed. It also recognizes that youth may be leaving care at younger ages. Additionally, the Permanency Hearing Report must include a description of the services provided to the child.

For children age 14 and older who have chosen to withhold their consent to adoption, there is a requirement that the Permanency Hearing Report must describe the facts and circumstances, as well as the reasons the child has chosen to withhold their consent.

The law requires permanency hearings for youth ages 18 to 21 who consent to continued foster care. In the past, youth over age 18 did not have automatic access to the court for review of their information and possible action.

In addition to these changes, there are two other provisions that could have an impact on youth. First, the strengthened procedures for post adoption contact requires that the Law Guardian agree to the provision of the contact agreements. It also requires a youth over the age of 14 to sign consent to continued contact with siblings. Second, the provision requiring notice of the Permanency Hearing to former foster parents in whose home the child resided for at least 12 months, could provide a previously ignored permanency resource for the youth. These resources have generally not been contacted later in the case, and due to changed circumstances of either the child or the family, may be an ideal permanency resource.

## **Preparing Youth For Self-Sufficiency**

In addition to providing youth with meaningful connections to family and adults, adolescents need to learn life skills. Caseworkers and caregivers assisting youth in making a successful transition to self-sufficiency must readily accept a set of values and act in ways that promote self-sufficiency. The programs that teach youth life skills will only be as effective as the foster parents and staff's

abilities to help youth learn and practice these essential life skill areas. To make a successful transition to self-sufficiency and achieve positive outcomes, adolescents need to develop a set of competencies and basic life skills.

### ***...Values Underlying Self-Sufficiency Preparation***

Since the foster care experience must provide the nurturing, support, and teaching that a family would provide, the current four day training curriculum on adolescent issues, Introduction to Self-Sufficiency, is offered to local social services districts, voluntary agency staff, and caregivers. This training reflects the following expectations of workers and caregivers preparing youth for the transition from foster care to adult self-sufficiency:

- A broad-based teamwork approach is necessary to prepare youth to live self-sufficiently.
- Teamwork is essential among youth; their caregivers (foster parents, group or residential facility staff); their families, if appropriate (parents, siblings, and extended family members if appropriate to the families' ability and youths' safety and needs); alternative adult permanency resources, if appropriate; and their caseworkers.
- While youth are in placement, this team of people become the youth's surrogate "family." In addition to providing a safe, nurturing, family environment to meet the youth's needs for safety and emotional security, the partnership of supporters assists youth in goal planning, forming attachments, identity formation, and cultural awareness to assist the youth in their ongoing path from adolescence into adulthood.
- Preparing for self-sufficiency is a process, not an event. In order to be prepared to live successfully in the community, youth must build and use a prescribed set of tangible (hard) and intangible (soft) life skills. (See competencies below.)
- The youths' strengths and needs should be assessed periodically throughout placement. Opportunities to build on strengths and to practice new skills should be provided as soon as youth enter care, incorporated into their daily living, with developmentally appropriate goals and expectations developed with the youth as part of their biannual service plan process.

### ***...The Crucial Role of Foster Parents and Staff***

Local districts, DRS, and voluntary agencies are important in the development of programs to support youth in all placement settings to learn life skills. However, the programs can only be as effective as the staff and foster parents who implement them through their work directly with youth on a daily basis. It is this connection to the youth through role modeling, encouragement, appropriate consequences, and the utilization of "teachable moments" that enable youth to truly learn and practice life skills. It is critical that staff and foster parents also participate in school-related tasks, including educational assessments and individualized transition plans for adolescents classified as needing special education.

Child and adolescent development, assessment, effective work with youth in placement settings, methods to teach and promote life skill acquisition, and communication skills with adolescents are just some of the areas in which foster parents and staff need to be competent and, if necessary, to receive training. The OCFS-sponsored Adolescent Services Resource Network is a highly effective and flexible resource to which every local district, DRS, and voluntary agency has access to for

training and technical assistance, both on-site at the district or agency, as well as through regionally based events. Some of the ways the Adolescent Services Resource Network can be utilized include specific training to help staff and foster parents: learn about the goals of life skills preparation; cope with challenges in working with adolescents in placement; and develop a youth leadership program within their region. (See additional information below.)

OCFS encourages districts, DRS, and voluntary agencies to consider the following principles in assessing the role their foster parents and caregiver staff play in their program implementation strategies:

- Adult caregivers have to be willing to take an extra step with adolescents in placement to provide guidance and support through challenging times, as well as through calm. Adult caregivers need to be able to deal with challenges to rules and behavioral expectations as they would with their own children.
- Instead of thinking “What can I do for these youth?” think “What can I do to help these adolescents learn to do for themselves?”
- Supporting youth to learn new skills:
  - Takes time. Learning complex skills means the skills need to be broken down into small steps with the youth given the ability to practice and receive feedback at each step.
  - Needs supervision. Until the “teachers” are confident the “learners” are capable of doing the task on their own, they need to provide support to the youth in learning the tasks.
  - Practice over time. Skills are learned as they are deemed important by the “learners,” not by the “teachers.” Hands-on learning through practice and teaching others are what human beings remember long-term.
  - Positive feedback from the “teachers” is crucial for the “learners” to keep motivated and encouraged to keep learning. If the youth and the caregivers do not believe the youth are capable of learning the skills, the youths’ success may be diminished.
- Residential care staff need to be seen and to see themselves as part of the life skills team, and expand their vision of responsibility. Residential care staff need to be a critical part of the self-sufficiency process, and not perform solely as group monitors who manage behavior, but as part of the team that seeks to shape adolescent behavior in a positive way.
- Think realistically and creatively about foster parent recruitment and retention. Foster parents of adolescents need specialized training, and may need different supports. Examples:
  - Look to professional organizations for people who may want to “parent” teens by helping them to transition into the community, rather than “parent” babies or toddlers.
  - Look for foster parents who would like to parent teen mothers with their babies.
  - Have current and former foster care youth serve on your panels and participate in training so they can speak to foster parents and caregivers about what adolescents need.

- Find out what skills foster parents and staff have that they can “teach” youth. Build opportunities for staff or foster parents to mentor youth in their special skill area or have them lead some group activities.

### **...Life Skills Competencies**

Becoming self-sufficient occurs over time and necessarily includes a process of trial and error. Youth must have the ability to practice life skills, not just read or talk about them. Youth need the opportunity to take risks, make mistakes, and to learn from their mistakes while they are in care. The youths’ life skills team needs to provide the youth with the opportunity to make mistakes within a safe environment. Appropriate feedback and mentoring will support the youth as they learn and practice self-sufficiency skills. The youths’ caregivers, foster parents and agency staff must provide the youth with hands-on opportunities to practice skills through life skills simulations, role plays, field trips, and social events.

To thrive and transition into healthy, productive, and self-sufficient adulthood, adolescents need a set of competencies and basic life skills that are supported and enhanced by strong and lasting connections with family or caring adults. The following is a list of competency areas in which adolescents should achieve proficiency while they are in placement. However, it is important to note that proficiency is achieved at different levels and at different times dependent upon the skills, talents and needs of each of the individual youth in care.

In order for youth, regardless of their permanency planning goals, to achieve self-sufficiency and make a successful transition to adulthood, they should achieve competence in six major areas, or domains of functioning. These competencies and teaching methodologies for staff and foster parents are outlined in the two day Life Skills Toolbox Training, provided by the Adolescent Services Resource Network. For a competency to be truly achieved, the youth will not only have the “how to” knowledge of the particular areas, but also value their importance to their well-being and have the motivation to put the knowledge into action. The six domains and topic areas are:

#### ■ **Daily Living Skills**

- Nutrition
- Menu Planning
- Grocery Shopping
- Meal Preparation
- Dining
- Cleanup and Food Storage
- Home Safety

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*(These competency areas are based on the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment. New York State provides training and technical assistance in how to use these domains to develop programs and curriculum through the Independent Living Network members. See information regarding the Independent Living Network and training descriptions for the Independent Living Core: Introduction to Self-Sufficiency, and the Independent Living Tool Box training outlined below.)*

## ■ **Housing and Community Resources**

- Housing
- Transportation
- Community Resources

## ■ **Money Management**

- Beliefs About Money
- Saving
- Income Tax
- Banking and Credit
- Budgeting/Spending Plan
- Consuming

## ■ **Self Care**

- Personal Hygiene
- Health
- Alcohol, Drugs and Tobacco
- Sexuality

## ■ **Social Development**

- Personal Development
- Cultural Awareness
- Relationships
- Leisure Time

## ■ **Work and Study Skills**

- Career Planning
- Employment
- Decision Making
- Education and Study Skills
- Legal Issues

## *...Outcomes*

Services to youth in foster care are only a means to an end. Positive outcomes for youth who leave foster care at the age of majority cannot be guaranteed. However, the likelihood of their achievement is far greater if the expected outcomes are clearly articulated and the means to achieving those outcomes are clearly supported. To assist youth in making a successful transition to self-sufficiency, their service plans and action steps must be developmentally appropriate, enhance positive youth development, and provide youth with opportunities for practical experience. Most importantly, the youth have to be involved in the goal-setting and service-planning process, and actively engaged in the development and follow-through to encourage the goal acquisition. The youth must be evaluated periodically to assess their progress toward achieving the life skills outcomes listed below.

Services that assist youth to make a transition to self-sufficiency must be provided for the purpose of accomplishing, or making progress toward, the following outcomes:

- Youth have opportunities for ongoing exploration of permanency options and for learning to establish and maintain personal support systems.

- Youth have connections with caring adults.
- Youth have access to health care services, including preventive health services.
- Youth are employed/have employability skills, including development of work ethics.
- Youth obtain their high school diplomas, are prepared for/entered into post-secondary education institutions, or have completed/entered into vocational training programs/specialized programs.
- Youth have resources to meet their living expenses.
- Youth have safe and stable housing.
- Youth avoid high-risk behaviors.
- Youth have abilities related to problem-solving/decision-making.
- Youth have home management skills.
- Youth have budgeting and financial management skills.
- Youth have the ability to access community resources.
- Youth have or can obtain essential documents.
- Youth who remain in foster care through age 18, 19, or 20 have access to post-discharge services, including a trial discharge period and supervision until age 21.

## Core Elements of a Model Program for Preparing Youth for Self-Sufficiency

Adolescent services programs must contain the following components to provide youth with opportunities to achieve positive outcomes and make a successful transition to adulthood. The core elements that are critical to a model program include the requirements of the Chafee legislation and elements which emphasize positive youth development. The model program components listed below emphasize the importance of youth contributing to their community.

- Ongoing exploration of consistent adults or families in their lives (permanency alternative)
- Preventive health and well-being
- Employment skills/ Development of work ethics
- Education Support (*e.g., tutoring/encourage academic success*)
- Housing
- Budgeting and financial management skills
- Shopping, cooking, and housecleaning skills
- Accessing community resources/community linkages
- Connections with caring adults
- Youth development
- Developmentally appropriate services
- Aftercare services

## Training and Technical Assistance

Training is intended to provide youth with the skills they need to achieve the stated outcomes. Staff and caregivers need specific skills to engage youth and help them acquire the skills that lead to self-sufficiency. Current training and technical assistance that support youth in self-sufficiency are offered to local social services districts and voluntary agency child welfare staff and foster parents through the New York State Adolescent Services Resource Network. The Adolescent Services Workgroup, in collaboration with the Bureau of Training and Youth in Progress, is conducting a review of all sponsored training curricula to promote the integration of adolescent issues across projects, where appropriate.

Each Adolescent Services Resource Network provider responds to special regional needs with training courses and technical assistance on a wide variety of topics. The Adolescent Services Resource Network provides agencies with assistance in developing curriculum, workshops, conference planning, staff development and foster parent training, as well as strategies and skills for working with youth in a variety of settings.

Strategies for finding adult permanency resources for youth may include training staff and foster parents on developing life books or lifepaks with the youth, as well as exploring current and past relationships important to the youth through ecomaps and genograms. Training on these specific techniques is available through the Adolescent Services Resource Network.

In addition, the Adolescent Services Resource Network has a library of resources (housed at Hunter College School of Social Work) for staff working with youth that includes curricula, videos, books, and games that can be accessed by contacting the appropriate Adolescent Services Resource Network member. To enable OCFS to develop a feedback mechanism to directly hear the concerns of youth in foster care, the Adolescent Services Resource Network members conduct youth “speak outs” and youth leadership training throughout the year. Each Network member also has a regional YIP group which works on issues of importance to each of the local/regionally based groups. These efforts also support the statewide Foster Care Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YIP) developed in 2003.

### *...Adolescent Services Resource Network*

The Adolescent Services Resource Network consists of four regionally based members:

#### **Regions 1 and 2:**

#### **Center for Development of Human Services**

Adolescent Services Training Program

State University College at Buffalo

1695 Elmwood Avenue

Buffalo, NY 14207-2407

Meg Brin, Administrative Director, Child Welfare (716) 876-7600 Ext 256

Provides training and technical assistance on adolescent issues to the local districts and voluntary agencies in the following New York State counties:

Allegany	Livingston	Seneca
Cattaraugus	Monroe	Steuben
Chautauqua	Niagara	Wayne
Chemung	Ontario	Wyoming
Erie	Orleans	Yates
Genesee	Schuyler	

**Regions 3 and 4:  
Professional Development Program**

Rockefeller College  
State University New York  
Richardson Hall 381  
135 Western Avenue  
Albany, NY 12222

Pam Reger, Program Manager (518) 442-5136

Provides training and technical assistance on adolescent issues to the local districts and voluntary agencies in the following New York State counties:

Albany	Franklin	Oneida	St. Lawrence
Broome	Greene	Onondaga	Tioga
Cayuga	Hamilton	Oswego	Tompkins
Chenango	Herkimer	Otsego	Warren
Columbia	Jefferson	Rensselaer	Washington
Cortland	Lewis	Saratoga	
Delaware	Madison	Schenectady	
Essex	Montgomery	Schoharie	

**Region 5:  
Child Welfare Training Program**

School of Social Welfare  
Health Sciences Center, Level 2, Room 093  
SUNY Stony Brook  
Stony Brook, NY 11794-8231

Diana Filiano, Director (631) 444-3697

Provides training and technical assistance on adolescent issues to the local districts and voluntary agencies in the following New York State counties:

Dutchess	Putnam	Sullivan
Nassau	Rockland	Ulster
Orange	Suffolk	Westchester

**Region 6:  
IL Resource Center at Hunter College School of Social Work**

129 East 79<sup>th</sup> Street, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10021

Judy Blunt, Director (212) 452-7436

Provides training and technical assistance on adolescent issues to the local districts and voluntary agencies in the following New York State counties:

New York City – Five Boroughs

Bronx	Manhattan	Staten Island
Brooklyn	Queens	

## Training Courses

### *...Introduction to Self-Sufficiency*

The Adolescent Services Resource Network provides the outcome-based training programs, “Introduction to Self-Sufficiency” and the “Life Skills Toolbox” described below. These trainings have been revised to reflect the new policy framework for providing services for adolescents in foster care.

### *...The New York State Introduction to Self-Sufficiency Training*

This four-day training program for local district and voluntary agency staff and foster parents is designed to provide the foundation skills, knowledge, values and attitudes needed to effectively provide services to adolescents in care. This training utilizes role-play, case studies, video presentations and experiential group activities to provide an understanding of adolescent services and issues, and life skills training to develop the adult’s skills in working effectively with adolescents to achieve self-sufficiency. Topics covered include the following:

- Requirements related to Discharge to Another Planned Living Arrangement with a Permanency Resource (formerly known as the Independent Living Regulations)
- Framework for Practice with Adolescents
- Using Interpersonal Helping Skills with Adolescents
- Adolescent Development
- Identity
- Emotional Issues of Youth in Care
- Case Planning for Adolescents and Implementation
- Problem Solving and Decision Making
- Developing and Enhancing Supportive Relationships
- Identifying, Establishing and Using Community Supports

### *...The Life Skills Toolbox*

This two-day training program is designed to build on the Introduction to Self-Sufficiency training, which is a pre-requisite to this course. The toolbox training is designed to provide the skills, knowledge, values and attitudes needed to effectively develop curriculum, based on a standardized assessment instrument (the Casey Life Skills Assessment), to teach life skills to adolescents in care using the Life Skills Toolbox as a resource. This high impact program utilizes experiential group activities to provide an in-depth understanding of life skills training domains and the adult’s role in helping youth achieve self-sufficiency, both in groups and in individual activities. Topics covered include the following:

- Understanding the language of the Life Skills Toolbox
- Utilizing competencies and performance indicators when designing life skills instruction
- Using the strengths needs assessment when developing a life skills intervention strategy
- Creating effective learning environments
- Using the life skills toolbox to design life skills groups or individual activities
- Documenting the youth’s life skills progress

## CONNECTIONS

CONNECTIONS is New York State's child welfare computer system that allows for documentation of information about children in the custody of local social services districts and their families. The CONNECTIONS system is part of a federal initiative called the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). CONNECTIONS assists caseworkers in assessing each youth's progress toward achieving desired outcomes.

CONNECTIONS creates a single, statewide, integrated system for the collection and recording of child protective, preventive, foster care and adoption service information.

CONNECTIONS is being implemented in a series of releases. The case management release which has been implemented requires caseworkers to document in CONNECTIONS their assessment and service planning efforts with a family/individual. It supports a strength-based approach to practice that includes the following main components: a safety assessment; risk assessment; family assessment; child functioning; and adolescent life skills assessment.

### *...Adolescent Life Skills Assessment*

CONNECTIONS provides support for the casework team and a youth to assess the youth's strengths and needs regarding his or her readiness to make a successful transition to adulthood. CONNECTIONS requires caseworkers to complete a life skills assessment for each foster care youth 14 years of age or older, regardless of the youth's permanency planning goal. The assessment areas include:

- Forming and Sustaining Positive Relationships
- Problem Solving/Decision Making/Goal Planning
- Preventive Health and Wellness
- Education and Supports
- Vocational/Career Planning
- Employment Skills
- Budgeting and Financial Management
- Housing
- Home Management
- Accessing Community Resources

Using the scales below, the caseworker indicates the youth's current skill level for each area:

- Exceptional skills in the area
- Adequate skills in the area
- Limited skills in the area; needs some support and skill development/training
- No or very limited skills in the area; needs significant support and skill development/training

The caseworker, with the input of other members of the service team and the youth, integrates the assessment of life skills strengths and needs with the assessments of safety, risk, youth and family functioning. This information is then used to develop service planning activities to assist the youth in developing any needed skills to make a successful transition to self-sufficiency.

### **...Evaluation of Permanency Progress for Children in Foster Care**

As stated earlier, periodic reassessment of the youth's progress is an essential part of outcome-focused planning and service provision. Therefore, CONNECTIONS requires the caseworker to answer a set of permanency progress questions listed below for each youth age 14 and over who is likely to remain in foster care through age 18, 19, or 20.

#### **Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) Petition**

1. Has the child been in foster care for 15 of the past 22 months?
2. Has the child in foster care been determined by a court to be an abandoned child?
3. Has a court determined that the parent of this child committed a serious crime against this child or another of the parent's children?

If the answer is yes to any of the above questions, the caseworker must indicate if a petition to terminate parental rights has been filed.

*If no, the caseworker must specify and explain the compelling or other reason for not filing a petition to terminate parental rights.*

#### **Parent Location (for youth not freed for adoption)**

1. Have both parents been identified?

If both parents have not been identified, the caseworker must describe the efforts to identify them.

2. Have both parents been located?

*If both parents have not been located, the caseworker must describe the efforts to locate them, including results from inquiries to the Parent Locator Service.*

#### **Alternative Permanency Resources**

Have you explored alternative permanency resources that may be available to the child should he or she be unable to return home?

If yes, the caseworker must indicate if any potential resources have been identified and document who they are.

If no, the caseworker must explain why permanency resources have not been explored.

#### **Concurrent Planning Discussion with Foster Parent**

1. If the child has been in placement 3 months or more, has the foster parent been asked whether he or she would consider adopting the child should the child become free for adoption, or otherwise provide a permanent living arrangement for the child?

If yes, the caseworker must describe the foster parent's response.

#### **Consent to Adoption**

1. Is the legally freed youth who is 14 years or older refusing consent to his or her adoption?

If yes, the caseworker must describe the permanency alternatives discussed with the youth including the possibility of changing his or her mind about adoption.

**Resource Connection**

1. Is the child currently connected to an adult/family/mentor in the community that he/she can go to for emotional support/advice/guidance?

If yes, the caseworker must identify the resource and the relationship to the child.

If no, the caseworker must explain efforts to help the child connect to such a resource.

**... Discharge Protocol: Discharge to Another Planned Living Arrangement with a Permanency Resource**

CONNECTIONS requires the caseworker to answer a set of questions that address safety, permanency and well-being of the youth upon discharge from foster care. CONNECTIONS requires that the caseworker answer/update the questions listed below at the time of the 90-day notice to discharge a youth from foster care to another planned living arrangement with a permanency resource, at trial discharge and at final discharge.

1. Has the youth received a 90-day written notice of intent to discharge?  
If yes, the caseworker must enter the date of the 90-day notice.  
If no, the caseworker must explain.
2. Has the youth secured an appropriate residence?  
If no, the caseworker must describe the actions taken and/or still needed to secure an appropriate residence. (Include referral to preventive or other housing services for an eligibility determination.)
3. Does the youth have a sufficient source of income upon discharge?  
If no, the caseworker must describe the actions taken and/or still needed for the youth to secure a sufficient source of income.
4. Will the youth have medical coverage upon discharge for preventive health care and identified physical, mental, dental health and prescription needs?  
If no, the caseworker must describe the actions taken and/or still needed for the youth to secure medical coverage (include referrals to medical assistance for an eligibility determination).
5. Are arrangements being made for the youth to receive essential documents such as birth certificate, social security card, medical records, and education records at the time of discharge?
6. Identify the adult resource available upon the youth's discharge to provide emotional support/advice/guidance. If no one has been identified, explain efforts that will be taken to secure a resource.
7. Are there any safety concerns related to the youth's discharge from foster care?  
If yes, identify the concern and describe the actions taken and still needed to address it.
8. Identify the arrangements made with service providers for services that the youth will need upon discharge.
9. Has the youth been advised of the services that will be available to the youth upon his/her discharge from foster care until he/she attains the age of 21?  
If no, please explain.

## Conclusion

This guidance paper provides local districts, DRS, and voluntary agencies with a new framework for practice to strengthen services to adolescents and improve their achievement of permanency. This paper provides the policy and practice framework that OCFS will be supporting through regulatory change, documentation requirements in CONNECTIONS, training, and monitoring.

The paper provides guidance on permanency outcomes for adolescents in foster care, and methods and supports to achieve them. Training and technical assistance will continue to be available through the Adolescent Services Resource Network to assist local districts, DRS, and voluntary agencies in strengthening their services to foster care youth. While this new framework represents a major shift in thinking and in practice for OCFS and many local districts and voluntary agencies, the new framework will be supported through training and teamwork through our statewide implementation.

## Overview of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP)

The key provisions of the law are as follows:

- **Enacted into law**
  - December 14, 1999
- **Funding**
  - Provides for 80 percent federal funding
  - Requires a 20 percent match
  - Allocation to states based on the number of children in foster care during the most recent federal fiscal year
- **Eligibility**
  - Youth “likely to remain in foster care until age 18”
  - Former foster care youth 18, 19, or 20 years old who aged out of foster care
- **Increased Assistance for Former Foster Care Youth Ages 18, 19, and 20**
  - Mandates services for former foster care youth between 18, 19, and 20 years old who remained in foster care until age 18 and permits such services for any former foster child
  - Requires the provision of financial, housing, counseling, employment, education and other appropriate support and services
  - State option to provide room and board assistance
  - Up to 30 percent of a state’s federal allotment may be spent on room and board
- **Requires Participation by Youth in Designing Their Own Life Skills Program Activities**
- **Allows States the Option of Providing Medicaid Coverage for Youth 18, 19, and 20 Years Old Who Aged Out of Foster Care**
- **Expanded Accountability**
  - Requires public input on a state’s independent living program
  - Requires tracking who receives services and what they receive
  - State performance is judged on outcome measures
- **Preparation Training for Staff and Foster/Adoptive Parents**

## Adolescent Strategy Workgroup Resources Available for Review

- **Resource information for Older Adolescents Services and Workforce Investment Act**  
[www.workforcenewyork.org/youth.htm](http://www.workforcenewyork.org/youth.htm)
  
- **Permanency for Adolescents**  
 Robert G. Lewis – Keeping the promise of a permanent home for every child, article entitled “What do you think?”  
[www.highpopples.com](http://www.highpopples.com)  
  
 Adolescents and Families for Life: A Toolkit for Supervisors by Robert G. Lewis and Maureen S. Heffernan  
[www.highpopples.com](http://www.highpopples.com)
  
- **Youth Speak Outs**  
 Youth speakouts are held annually in each region. Summaries are available from each Adolescent Services Resource Network member.
  
- **Opportunity for Youth in Foster Care**  
 Information about CWLA National Foster Youth Advisory Council (NFYAC)  
[www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org)
  
- **The Jim Casey E–Update – September 2002**  
 The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities initiative presents the fourth of its electronic newsletters designed to bring policymakers, practitioners, media and friends up-to-date on foster care transition issues, as well as news from the initiative.  
[www.jimcaseyyouth.org](http://www.jimcaseyyouth.org)
  
- **The Way Program**  
 A brief description of this program model, developed by Children’s Village, August 2002, at the first meeting of the Adolescent Strategy Workgroup.  
[www.thechildrensvillage.org](http://www.thechildrensvillage.org)
  
- **Another Planned Living Arrangement with a Permanency Resource Regulations (formerly referred to as the Independent Living Regulations)**  
 Office of Children and Family Services Regulations, 18 NYCRR, Section 430.12 (f)  
[www.otda.state.ny.net/otdaintranetsearch/18nycrr/default.htm](http://www.otda.state.ny.net/otdaintranetsearch/18nycrr/default.htm)
  
- **Adoption Subsidy Regulations**  
 The regulations provide for the payment of an adoption subsidy for the adoption of a handicapped or hard-to-place child.  
 Office of Children and Family Services Regulations, 18 NYCRR, Section 421.24 (a)
  
- **Permanency Bill, Chapter 3 of the Laws of 2005**  
 Information on the recent Permanency Bill.  
 To access the OCFS internet site at [www.ocfs.state.ny.us](http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us), click on the left under “Resources & Information”, then click on “Legislation and Regulatory Agenda”.

- **You Gotta Believe! The Other Child Adoption & Permanency Movement, Inc.**  
 This organization's sole purpose is to place teens and pre-teens into permanent families before they are discharged from foster care.  
[www.yougottabelieve.org](http://www.yougottabelieve.org)
- **Casey Family Programs Foundations For the Future**  
 A framework for youth transitioning from foster care to successful adulthood.  
[www.casey.org](http://www.casey.org)
- **Challenges in Helping Youth Live Independently**  
 A discussion on the federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Independent Living Program (ILP) and the needs of youth leaving the foster care system.  
[www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov)
- **Permanency Planning: Creating Life Long Connections**  
 Material from National Resource Center for Youth Services.  
[www.nrcys.ou.edu/](http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/)
- **What Young People in the System Say Is Working**  
 Information from the State of Washington Office of the Family and Children Services Ombudsman.  
[www.governor.wa.gov/ofco](http://www.governor.wa.gov/ofco)
- **Local Commissioners Memorandums**

  - **03-OCFS-LCM-18** Federal Fiscal Year 2003 Education and Training Voucher Program issued on November 4, 2003
  - **04-OCFS-LCM-08** on Match Requirements and Other Relevant Requirements for the Education and Training Voucher Program issued on August 10, 2004
  - **05-OCFS-LCM-01** on Federal Fiscal Year 2004-2005 Education and Training Voucher Program issued on January 27, 2005
  - **05-OCFS-LCM-16** on Federal Fiscal Year 2005-2006 Education and Training Voucher Program issued on October 27, 2005
- **New York State Foster Parent Manual**  
 This manual was developed under contract with the Welfare Research Institute.  
[www.ocfs.state.ny.us](http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us)

## Administration for Children's Services



150 William St. 18<sup>th</sup> floor  
New York, New York 10038

WILLIAM C. BELL  
*Commissioner*

### MEMORANDUM

**To:** Executive Directors, Contract Foster Care Agencies  
ACS Staff

**From:** William C. Bell, Commissioner

**Date:** June 12, 2003

**Re:** Implementation of the Adoption and Safe Families Act, Part V:  
Family-Based Concurrent Planning for Youth with Goals of Independent Living

#### **I. Family-Based Concurrent Planning for Youth with Goals of Independent Living: Finding Permanent, Nurturing Family Connections**

Permanent, nurturing family connections are the foundation of all child welfare services and are as critical for adolescents in foster care as they are for younger children.

The Administration for Children's Services calls on all its staff and foster care agency partners to actively participate in a culture shift aimed at ensuring that no youth ages out of foster care without a life-long connection that is as legally secure as possible to a caring adult committed to functioning in a parental capacity. With family-centered casework and support services, many adolescents in care could be discharged to their parents or members of their extended families or find adoptive families.

Effective July 1, 2003, family-based concurrent plans must be developed for (a) youth for whom it is proposed to assign the permanency planning goal of independent living and (b) for youth who already have a goal of independent living and who have indicated their intention to sign themselves out of care or who will age out of care within the next 12 months.

Effective for UCRs due in January 2004, family-based concurrent plans must be developed for all other youth in care who currently have a goal of independent living.

In each case, these plans must be documented in the Concurrent Planning section of the UCR or in a Plan Amendment and updated in the Concurrent Planning section of each subsequent UCR.

To this end, certain specific casework steps need to be taken to identify and nurture permanent family connections for youth with goals of independent living. These include, at a minimum:

1. At the time of the youth's entry into care (and before a voluntary placement of a young person in care occurs), all participants in the placement process, including ACS child protective staff and Child Evaluation Specialists, must take steps to work with the youth to identify trusted caring, committed adults to serve as a permanency resource and to participate in planning for the youth's future. Caring committed adults might include:
  - a. family members (not only the youth's parents, but extended family members such as grandparents, older siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, godparents),
  - b. current and former foster parents, or siblings' foster or adoptive parents,
  - c. current and former neighbors,
  - d. parents of close friends,
  - e. agency staff, group home staff and child care staff,
  - f. teachers, coaches, mentors, and acquaintances from school, work, summer camp, church and after-school activities,
  - g. other responsible adults whom the young person trusts or with whom young person feels or may have felt safe.
2. Congregate care child care staff and milieu workers, foster care caseworkers and social workers must work with youth currently in foster care to try to identify caring, committed adults whom the youth trusts and with whom the youth might like to establish a permanent family connection. Caring, committed adults might include:
  - a. family members (not only the youth's parents, but extended family members such as grandparents, older siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, godparents),
  - b. current and former foster parents, or siblings' foster or adoptive parents,
  - c. current and former neighbors,
  - d. parents of close friends,
  - e. agency staff, group home staff and child care staff,
  - f. teachers, coaches, mentors, and acquaintances from school, work, summer camp, church and after-school activities,
  - g. other responsible adults whom the young person trusts or with whom young person feels or may have felt safe.
3. A permanency focus needs to be incorporated into independent living workshops and activities as well as into daily life in congregate care settings. For instance:
  - a. As a normal part of child care staff's interaction with youth, conversations should include a focus on who might the young person like to go home to, who did they spend time with on weekends and holidays, who do they trust, who would they like to visit, who do they wish to be in contact with.
  - b. Routine independent living skill-building activities like cooking and budgeting offer an opportunity to ask youth questions like: "Is there someone in your past who you remember being a really good cook? Do you know anyone who is good with budgeting his or her money? Who would you trust to take care of your savings?"

- c. Routine health discussions might include questions like, “When your mom wasn’t available, was there someone you would go to when you didn’t feel well?”
4. Efforts must be made by social work staff to interview group home and child care staff, as well as the youth’s foster parents, to find out who the youth has connections to: “Who loves this young person? Who does the young person trust? Who does the young person get telephone calls from? Who has the young person had a special relationship with in the past? Who visits the young person and whom does the young person visit? Has the young person formed a bond with any group home or child care staff that might turn into a permanent connection? Does the youth miss a particular former foster parent? Where does the young person go if they go AWOL?”
5. Steps need to be taken to involve caring, committed adults identified by the youth in family team conferences aimed at planning for the youth’s future and their discharge from foster care.
6. When reunification is the concurrent plan, steps need to be taken to:
  - a. engage members of the youth’s family around the family’s role in decision-making and treatment conferences, in visiting, and in discharge planning,
  - b. identify preventive services and supports the family may need to prepare for the youth’s discharge from care (such as linkages to peer support groups, family mediation programs, tutoring and other academic supports, vocational training, community mental health programs etc.)
7. Steps need to be taken to sensitively address the strong feelings that might underlie a statement by a young person that he or she does not want to be adopted. Young persons who have been freed for adoption or whose parents are not meaningfully planning for their return need to be helped to “unpack the ‘No’” and to find out what underlies their reluctance to consider adoption. Possible steps might include:
  - a. Calling the Dave Thomas Foundation (1-800-ASK-DTFA) to order a free copy of the video “*Finding Forever Families: Making the Case for Child-Specific Recruitment*” and arranging to watch the video with young people who need families but who have said “no” to adoption;
  - b. Making arrangements for the young person to talk to several young adults who were adopted as adolescents. Agencies unable to identify one of their own former foster children who were adopted as teens can contact the *ACS Families for Teens Speakers’ Bureau* coordinated by ACS’ Parent Recruitment and Expedited Permanency Unit (212-676-WISH) and ask for assistance in identifying an adopted young adult;
  - c. Providing an opportunity for the young person to meet adoptive parents who have previously adopted an adolescent. Agencies unable to identify adoptive parents interested in teens can contact ACS’ Parent Recruitment and Expedited Permanency Unit (1-212-676-WISH). For additional suggestions, see the attached *Families for Teens Resource Guide*.
  - d. Engaging the youth, his or her parents (if the youth is not currently freed for adoption) and foster parents or prospective adoptive parents in a discussion about ongoing contacts with members of the youth’s birth family after the adoption. Youth and parents need

help understanding that although a termination of parental rights ends the legal rights of the birth parents, a TPR does *not* necessarily terminate their emotional relationship or prevent the young person from visiting or contacting members of his or her birth family.

- e. In certain special cases, the best permanency resource for a young person who has been freed for adoption may be a member of the child's birth family, including a parent from whom the child has been freed. Sometimes, a parent's situation has changed significantly since the time of the termination proceeding and a bond between the youth and his birth family continues. The assessment of whether that resource is appropriate at this time is a social work decision. Close consultation with the ACS attorney and the youth's law guardian is essential.
8. For youth who are freed or whose parents are not meaningfully planning for reunification, steps need to be taken to identify permanency leads if interviews with the youth and staff do not yield possible permanent connections. Such steps include (1) making referrals to specialized adoption recruitment agencies such as those identified in the attached *Families for Teens Resource Guide*, and (2) making arrangements with ACS' Parent Recruitment and Expedited Permanency Unit (1-212-676-9474) for the young person to be featured on Wednesday's Child, a program on WNBC (Channel 4) which features freed young people in need of a family.
  9. For foster parents who may be reluctant to adopt a child living in their home, steps need to be taken to sensitively address the feelings and concerns that might underlie their reluctance to proceed with an adoption. Such steps might include:
    - a. Making arrangements for the foster parent(s) to talk to adoptive parents who have adopted adolescents and who can help foster parents understand the importance to the young person of having a parental figure make a permanent commitment to them. Agencies unable to identify one of their own adoptive parents can contact the ACS *Families for Teens Speakers' Bureau* coordinated by ACS' Parent Recruitment and Expedited Permanency Unit (212-676-WISH) and ask for assistance in identifying adoptive parents who chose to adopt teenagers, including adoptive parents of a similar cultural background;
    - b. Helping foster parents address some of their financial concerns about adoption (availability of adoption subsidy, SSI and other benefits; availability of financial aid for higher education);
    - c. Helping foster parents identify services that would be available after an adoption to address ongoing needs the young person might have for medical or mental health services, education, vocational training etc.;
    - d. Helping kinship foster parents understand and address some of the concerns that are specific to kinship adoption. For specific resources, see the *Resources for Kinship Caregivers* section of the attached *Families for Teens Resource Guide*.

## II. Limiting the Use of Independent Living as a Permanency Planning Goal

- A. ACS Approval Required for Independent Living Permanency Planning Goal and Family-Based Concurrent Plans for Reunification, Discharge to Relatives, Adoption,

## Guardianship, Custody or (for Youth 18 and Older Only) Another Ongoing Supportive Relationship

Consistent with the Adoption and Safe Families Act, ACS views independent living as a strongly disfavored permanency planning goal<sup>1</sup> which may be assigned only if a concurrent family-based plan for reunification, discharge to relatives, adoption, guardianship or custody, or (for youth 18 or older only) another ongoing supportive permanent relationship<sup>2</sup> has been documented in writing for ACS, the Family Court and the child's law guardian.

ACS is now amending the delegation of case management set forth in a memorandum from ACS, "*Delegation of Selected Case Management Functions*" dated April 26, 1999, as supplemented by a subsequent August 30, 1999 Questions & Answers memorandum, by requiring that effective July 1, 2003:

1. No youth in foster care aged 15 or younger may be given a permanency planning goal of Independent Living (Permanency Planning Goal 03) without the prior written approval of the goal and of a written concurrent family-based plan for reunification, discharge to relatives, adoption, guardianship or custody by the ACS Deputy Commissioner or his/her designated delegate from the responsible case management area. The family-based concurrent plan must be updated in the Concurrent Planning section of each subsequent UCR.
2. No youth in foster care aged 16 or older may be given a permanency planning goal of Independent Living (Permanency Planning Goal 03) without the prior written approval of the goal and of a written concurrent family-based plan for reunification, discharge to relatives, adoption, guardianship or custody by an ACS case management Supervisor II or Field Office Child Protective Manager. The family-based concurrent plan must be updated in the Concurrent Planning section of each subsequent UCR.
3. Written approval of the concurrent plan by a Level II ACS case management supervisor (when OCACM or ACM is responsible for case management) or a Child Protective Manager (when the ACS Field Office is responsible for case management) is required for all youth in care who currently have a goal of independent living. In these cases, the family-based concurrent plan must be submitted to the appropriate ACS case management area in the Concurrent Planning section of the next UCR and updated in the Concurrent Planning section of each subsequent UCR. This provision is scheduled to take effect beginning with UCRs due in January 2004, except for youth who have indicated their intention to sign themselves out of care or who will age out of care within the next 12 months. In those cases, this provision takes effect on July 1, 2003.
4. Goal changes to Independent Living (PPG 03) may no longer be entered into CCRS and CONNECTIONS by foster care agency staff. Goal changes approved in accordance with this memo may be entered into the computer system of record only by approved ACS case management staff.
5. Active youth participation in developing these concurrent plans is essential and must be documented in the Concurrent Planning section of the UCR.
6. ACS' decision to approve or disapprove the goal change and concurrent plan shall be made within thirty (30) days of submission.

## **B. Permanency Hearings and Permanency Hearing Petitions**

In preparing permanency hearing petitions and participating in permanency hearings in Family Court (including any Family Court permanency mediation sessions), foster care agency and ACS staff and attorneys shall not propose or advocate for a goal of independent living unless that goal has been approved as set forth in this Memorandum.

## **C. Court-ordered Goal Changes to Independent Living**

If the Family Court orders a change of goal to independent living that has not been approved as set forth in this Memorandum, then a written family-based concurrent plan must be developed by the agency for that youth and approved by ACS, as set forth in section II(A) above.

While it is the responsibility of the agency to comply with the court order, it is the responsibility of the ACS attorney to bring the court order to the attention of the Supervising Attorney, who will discuss with the ACS General Counsel and/or his or her designee whether to seek a re-hearing or to appeal an order mandating a goal change that has not been approved as set forth in this Memorandum.

## **III. Adoption as an Option for Adolescents**

The appropriate concurrent plan for a youth in care needs to be determined on an individual, case-by-case basis, with active youth participation. For many youth with goals of independent living and a strong attachment to their birth families, reunification with their parent(s) or members of their extended family may be the best concurrent plan. However, ACS believes that adoption has been too readily discounted in the past both by casework staff and by young people themselves as a permanency option.

ACS explicitly rejects the notion that there is an “age limit” for adoption or that adolescents are “too old” to be adopted. On the contrary, adoption is a viable option for adolescents, who have a critical role to play in identifying their own potential adoptive resources.

Too often, it is the misplaced fear that adoption will lead to the severing of their emotional ties with members of their birth families that leads some adolescents to reject the idea of adoption for themselves. Adolescents, along with child care staff, caseworkers, mental health professionals and others, need help to understand that the nature of adoption has undergone a radical transformation over the past several decades.

No longer does adoption mean the complete replacement of the birth family by the adoptive family. Adolescents who wish to do so should be supported in their desire to remain safely in contact with key members of their birth family: parents, grandparents, siblings and other significant members of their extended families.

The participation of adolescents in planning for their own adoption is critical. Adolescents need to be actively involved in identifying past and present connections who can be explored as potential adoptive resources.

Young people 18 and older should be informed by their caseworker that they can consent to their own adoption and that there is no need for legal proceedings to terminate their parents’ parental rights. Adoption subsidy may be available if the youth was freed before age 18.

## Adoption Waivers

No youth in foster care may be asked to sign an across-the-board adoption waiver or to sign a general statement that they do not wish to be considered for adoption.

Although Section 111 of the New York Domestic Relations Law provides that an adoptive child over 14 years old must consent to his or her own proposed adoption by a specific set of adoptive parents (unless the judge presiding over the adoption “dispenses with such consent”), the law does not mandate or envision an across-the-board written waiver of adoption as a permanency goal.

ACS hereby prohibits the use of adoption waivers. Youth over the age of 14 may certainly object, as permitted by DRL section 111, to a specific adoption by a specific set of adoptive parents, but agencies and ACS staff may no longer invite youth in care to waive their right to adoption by any and all prospective adoptive parents. Furthermore, even if a youth objects to a specific set of adoptive parents, agencies and ACS must continue to seek to identify other prospective adoptive parents for youth.

## IV. Post-Reunification and Post-Adoption Services

It is essential to bear in mind that families that are reunited or families that are created for youth in care through adoption may need effective support services to thrive and to endure.

Staff are strongly encouraged to make use of the resources identified in the attached *Families for Teens Resource Guide* and other available counseling, medical and mental health services, educational advocacy, vocational and mentoring services.

## V. Reporting to ACS, Family Court and the Youth’s Law Guardian on the Family-Based Concurrent Plan

The family-based concurrent plan for a youth with a goal of independent living must be submitted to ACS in writing as part of a Plan Amendment (if a goal change to independent living is proposed) and regularly updated in the Concurrent Planning section of the UCR (section 10 of the Initial UCR and Section 9A of the 90-day and 6-month periodic UCR).

Copies of the family-based concurrent plan shall also be made available to the Family Court judge and to the child’s law guardian in connection with any Permanency Hearing or other Family Court proceeding to review the status of the youth’s foster care placement. ACS case managers responsible for preparing Permanency Hearing petitions shall attach the family-based concurrent plan, as reflected in the Concurrent Planning section of the UCR, to the Permanency Hearing petition. Agency caseworkers shall include the family-based concurrent plan in any updated report they submit to the court in conjunction with the Permanency Hearing.

Diligent efforts to implement the concurrent plan must be documented in the Concurrent Planning section of the UCR. At a minimum, that section must include:

1. a description of the specific casework practice steps taken to identify and nurture permanent family connections for youth with goals of independent living, as outlined in section I above;
2. the name, address, telephone number and relationship to the young person of all caring adults identified through the casework process outlined in section I above;

3. a description of the efforts taken by the agency to involve those caring adults in:
  - a. visiting the young person;
  - b. planning for the young person's future;
  - c. participating in a series of conversations and/or family team conferences to explore their willingness to make a permanent commitment to the young person.

**VI. Effective Date**

This memorandum becomes effective July 1, 2003, except as provided in section II(A)(3).

## Families for Teens Resource Guide\*

June 2003

*There are a growing number of resources available to support Families For Teens. The following is a sample of some of the resources in the New York City area:*

### ***...Post-Reunification Services***

#### **NYC Youthline**

1-800-246-4646

(confidential information service for youth and parents with referrals to employment, training/education, recreation, after-school programs, summer camps, mental health counseling, prevention and intervention programs and health care).

#### **Berkshire Farm Center and Services for Youth, NYC Region**

Shamika Daniels, Aftercare Program Coordinator

250 West 57<sup>th</sup> St., New York NY 10107

(212) 245-3316

*(Berkshire Farm's after-care program specializes in programs for youth 12 to 18 years old returning to their families from congregate care; services include home-based clinical intervention, educational advocacy, intensive case management, individual and group counseling, parent skills training, monitoring and supervision, independent living skills training and job search assistance)*

#### **FEGS Young Adult Intensive Psychiatric Rehabilitation & Treatment Program**

Carol Jobson

1600 Central Ave., Far Rockaway, NY 11691

(718) 327-1600, x 230

(specializing in services for youth 15-19 years old)

### ***...Youth Development and Support Services***

#### **Cornell University Cooperative Extension, New York City Programs**

16 East 34<sup>th</sup> St., New York NY 10016-4328

(212) 340-2900

[www.cce.cornell.edu](http://www.cce.cornell.edu)

(wide range of youth development programs offering leadership activities, community service and opportunities for youth to enhance their skills in science and literacy)

#### **Citizens Advice Bureau Community Center**

1130 Grand Concourse, Bronx NY 10452

(718) 731-3114

[www.cabny.org](http://www.cabny.org)

(after school programs for teens, including tutoring, recreation, family life and sex education, job readiness, academic and career enrichment and group counseling)

#### **The Door**

121 Ave. of the Americas, New York NY

(212) 941-9090

(computer classes, tutoring, homework help, college preparation, career development services, job placement, recreational activities, health education, mental health counseling, GED, ESL classes, assistance with immigration matters)

**Hetrick Martin Institute**

2 Astor Place, New York NY

(212) 674-2400

[www.hmi.com](http://www.hmi.com)

(services for gay, bi-sexual, lesbian, transgendered and questioning youth)

**Youth Advocacy Center**281 6<sup>th</sup> Ave., 2nd floor, New York NY 10014

(212) 675-6181

[www.youthadvocacycenter.org](http://www.youthadvocacycenter.org)

(job readiness and self-advocacy programs to help “at risk” youth achieve their educational and career goals)

***...Resources for Kinship Caregivers*****Grandparent Resource Center**

Rolanda Pyle, Director

NYC Dept for the Aging, 2 Lafayette, 15<sup>th</sup> floor, New York NY 10007

(212) 442-1094, (212) 442-1192

[www.nyc.gov/dfta](http://www.nyc.gov/dfta)[rpyle@aging.nyc.gov](mailto:rpyle@aging.nyc.gov)**Bronx Coalition of Grandparent Support Groups**

Hattie Lucas, (718) 671-2090, x 229

**Brooklyn Grandparent Coalition**

Jewish Board of Family and Children’s Services

Deborah Langosch, (212) 632-4760 (also co-chairs NYC KinCare Taskforce)

[www.brooklyngrandparents.org](http://www.brooklyngrandparents.org)**Manhattan Grandparent Caregiver Coalition**

Doris Williams, (212) 283-2479

**Queens Grandparent Coalition**

Gwendolyn Florant (718) 389-5100, x119

**Grandparent Caregiver Law Center**

Gerard Wallace, Esq.

(866) 434-4571 (toll-free number)

[Gerard.Wallace@hunter.cuny.edu](mailto:Gerard.Wallace@hunter.cuny.edu)***...Specialized Adoption Recruitment Agencies*****You Gotta Believe!**

Pat O’Brien, Executive Director, 1728 Mermaid Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11224

1-800-601-1779, (718) 372-3003, [ygbpat@msn.com](mailto:ygbpat@msn.com), [www.yougottabelieve.org](http://www.yougottabelieve.org)*(You Gotta Believe!* specializes in finding adoptive homes for older children and adolescents and in preparing adoptive families for teen adoptions. *You Gotta Believe!* also produces the Adopting Teens and ‘Tweens cable television show and can assist caseworkers in identifying young people who were adopted as teenagers with whom youth in care can talk about adoption.)

**Family Focus Adoption Services**

54-40 Little Neck Parkway, Suite 4, Little Neck, NY 11362  
 (718) 224-1919, [www.familyfocusadoption.org](http://www.familyfocusadoption.org); [ffas@familyfocusadoption.org](mailto:ffas@familyfocusadoption.org)

**New York Council on Adoptable Children**

589 8<sup>th</sup> Ave., 15<sup>th</sup> floor, New York NY 10018  
 (212) 714-2788, [www.coac.org](http://www.coac.org)

**Association of Black Social Workers**

1969 Madison Ave., New York NY 10035  
 (212) 831-5181, [ABSWNYC@aol.com](mailto:ABSWNYC@aol.com)

**...ACS Recruitment Services**

ACS' Parent Recruitment and Expedited Permanency (PREP) Unit (212-676-WISH) runs a wide variety of programs related to Families for Teens including *Wednesday's Child* (212-676-WISH, 212-676-9474) ([www.nyc.gov/adopt/wednesdayschild](http://www.nyc.gov/adopt/wednesdayschild)), a program on WNBC Channel 4 featuring young people who have been freed for adoption and who are in search of a family; the *Families for Teens Speakers Bureau*, a dynamic and compelling group of youth and adult speakers who share their personal experiences in regards to foster care, adoption, and lifelong family connections; *Circles of Support*, a series of neighborhood-based support groups for foster and adoptive parents; the *ACS Recruitment Hotline*; the *New York City Family Album*; Internet photo listings; and "A Child is Waiting", a *Daily News* feature that appears on the first Sunday of each month with photos and biographies of children who need adoptive homes.

**...Post-Adoption Services & Searches**

In New York City, post-adoption services are available through the *New York City Post-Adoption Consortium*, Carol Hirsch, Chair (212-994-7915) and the *ACS Post-Adoption Services Intake Unit* (212-676-7379).

Educational advocacy is available through *Advocates for Children* (212-947-9779). *Resources for Children with Special Needs* (212-677-4650, [www.resourcesnyc.org](http://www.resourcesnyc.org)) provides information, referrals and advocacy for caregivers raising children ages 1- 21 with any kind of disability.

The *American Adoption Congress*, P.O. Box 42730, Washington, D.C. 20015, (202) 483-3399, [www.americanadoptioncongress.org](http://www.americanadoptioncongress.org) assists those who have been adopted and who want to find a missing birth parent or siblings. *Adoption Crossroads* can also assist adopted youth with searches and offers support groups. Call (212) 988-0110 or (845) 268-0283 or go to their website at [www.adoptioncrossroads.org](http://www.adoptioncrossroads.org)

**...Web-Based Resources**

*AARP Grandparent Information Center*, 601 E St., N.W., Washington DC 20049, (202) 434-2296, [gic@aarp.org](mailto:gic@aarp.org), [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org)

*Casey Family Programs*, 1300 Dexter Ave. North, Floor 3, Seattle WA 98109-3542, (206) 282-7300, [www.casey.org](http://www.casey.org)

*Generations United*, 122 C Street, N.W., Suite 820, Washington, DC 20001, (202) 638-1263, [www.gu.org](http://www.gu.org) (kinship care information and resources)

Harvard School of Public Health, Center for Health Communication, Parenting Project, *Raising Teens (report)*, 677 Huntington Ave., Boston MA 02115, (617) 253-1592, [www.hsph.harvard.edu/chc/parenting](http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/chc/parenting)

National Adoption Center, 1500 Walnut St., Suite 701 Philadelphia PA 10102, 1-800-TO-ADOPT, [www.adopt.org](http://www.adopt.org). National photo-listing project is handled by *Adopt US Kids*, [www.adoptuskids.org](http://www.adoptuskids.org)

National Resource Center for Youth Services, University of Oklahoma College of Continuing Education, 4502 E. 41<sup>st</sup> St., Building 4 West, Tulsa OK 74135-2512, (918) 660-3700, [www.nrcys.ou.edu](http://www.nrcys.ou.edu). (*Permanency Planning: Creating Life Long Connections for Teens in Foster Care (monograph)* available from NRCYS).

National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice, University of Iowa School of Social Work, 100 Oakdale Campus, W206, Iowa City IA 52242-5000, (319) 335-4965, [www.uiowa.edu/~nrcfcp](http://www.uiowa.edu/~nrcfcp)

National Resource Center for Foster Care & Permanency Planning, Hunter College School of Social Work, 129 East 79<sup>th</sup> St., New York NY 10021, (212) 452-7053, [www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcp](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcp)

National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption, 16250 Northland Drive, Suite 120, Southfield, MI 48075, (248) 443-7080, [www.spaulding.org](http://www.spaulding.org)

New York City Administration for Children's Services, Adoption Support Resources, [www.nyc.gov/adopt](http://www.nyc.gov/adopt)  
North American Council on Adoptable Children, 970 Raymond Ave., Suite 106, St. Paul MN 55114, (651) 644-3036, [www.nacac.org](http://www.nacac.org)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau, National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, 330 C. Street, S.W., Washington D.C. 20447, (888) 251-0075 or (703) 352-3488, [www.calib.com/naic](http://www.calib.com/naic)

### **...Training Materials**

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, *Finding Forever Families: Making the Case for Child-Specific Recruitment* (video)(1-800-ASK-DTFA; 1-800-275-3832) [www.davethomasfoundationforadoption.org](http://www.davethomasfoundationforadoption.org)

Robert G. Lewis & Maureen S. Heffernan, *Adolescents and Families for Life: A Toolkit for Supervisors* (978-281-8919; [rglewis@rglewis.com](mailto:rglewis@rglewis.com))

Robert G. Lewis, Thea Stovell, Susan Landers & Robin Warsh, *Family Bound: Preparing Teens for Permanency* (518-946-8286, [annaleecourt@yahoo.com](mailto:annaleecourt@yahoo.com) or 978-281-8919, [rglewis@rglewis.com](mailto:rglewis@rglewis.com))

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