

# SUPPORTING LIFELONG FAMILIES

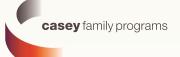
Steps child welfare agencies can take to prevent children from re-entering foster care

Nearly one in five children in foster care has been in care before. Each time a child comes in or out of care, families are fractured and re-fractured. Stable, nurturing families can bolster their resilience and lessen negative long-term effects — but these protective factors can't be nurtured if children keep re-entering care.

While the number of children in foster care has decreased by nearly 25 percent since 2002, the percentage of children who have re-entered care has remained stable. Nearly 20 percent of children in out-of-home care — that's nearly 80,000 children — have been in care before.

These re-entry numbers show that community conditions and service delivery systems aren't providing the support all children and families need to remain together safely. Services and programs that better support families as they transition out of care could help.

We know that most children in foster care have physical, emotional, or behavioral challenges that can create significant ongoing concerns. These challenges often result from the parent's or child's unmet needs, and they require services and supports while the child is in care and after he or she leaves the system.



# STEPS CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES CAN TAKE NOW

What can your agency do to help address the gaps in post-permanency services and supports? Consider some of the practice, policy, funding, data, and related ideas described below.



#### STRENGTHEN PRACTICE AND POLICY

- Using a trauma-informed lens, work with families to integrate skills and strengths supported by services into their daily life.
- Identify the agencies and systems that offer trauma-informed, evidence-based services that families typically interact with after placement. Help build connections, so more child-serving professionals can coordinate and expand services.
- Provide families facing difficulties with information on the support, services, and assistance available to them. Consider providing navigation services to help them better access health, welfare, and community resources.



#### SECURE FUNDING

- Assess local, state, and national funding streams used in post-permanency efforts and ensure that they're being fully leveraged.
- Explore less frequently used and non-traditional funding sources for post-permanency initiatives — such as Medicaid, philanthropies, and social impact bonds — that could supplement traditional funding.
- Compile this information for staff and families. Make sure the resulting documentation is easy to understand and use.

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## INCREASE THE FOCUS ON POST-PERMANENCY

- Use an inclusive approach with all stakeholders to get a full range of views on how to design and deliver post-permanency services.
- Discuss staff expectations about families' needs and responses to services.
- Use language that shifts the focus from preventing re-entry to supporting post-permanency.



## MAKE THE MOST OF AVAILABLE DATA

- Examine jurisdictional data to better understand who is re-entering care.
   Look at trends by age, ethnicity, and other variables.
- Take a closer look at the types of assessments and service planning packages
  that have been used to prepare families for post-permanency. Identify what has
  been effective in the past, as well as areas that can be strengthened to help inform
  future cases.
- Identify and emphasize variables that relate both to positive post-permanency (a family variable) and re-entry (a system variable). Post-permanency variables, for example, may include assessing a family's link to community resources and supports and their accessibility to services.

#### Learn more

To learn more about what is known and what you can do to strengthen post-permanency services, download a copy of our full report, *Supporting Lifelong Families: Ensuring Long-Lasting Permanency and Well-Being*, from **casey.org**.

#### Looking for inspiration?

Programs across the U.S. are providing a range of postpermanency services, including those that focus on basic family resources, safety-focused practices, clinical child supports, caregiver supports and services, support networks, and navigation services. Explore the links below to learn about some of these programs.

- Kinship Navigator Program: dshs.wa.gov/kinshipcare
- Homebuilders: institutefamily.org/programs IFPS.asp
- The Incredible Years: incredibleyears.com
- Treatment Foster Care Oregon (formerly Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care for Preschoolers): <a href="mailto:tfcoregon.com">tfcoregon.com</a>
- Nurturing Parenting Program: <u>nurturingparenting.com</u>
- On the Way Home: cehs.unl.edu/ccfw/way-home/
- Oregon Post Adoption Resource Center: orparc.org
- Shared Family Care: <a href="http://calswec.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/pdf/CalSWEC/san\_francisco\_cft\_shared\_family\_care\_planning\_and\_shared\_coaching\_manual\_final\_7-7-15.pdf">http://calswec.berkeley.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/pdf/CalSWEC/san\_francisco\_cft\_shared\_family\_care\_planning\_and\_shared\_coaching\_manual\_final\_7-7-15.pdf</a>

While it's unlikely that any one program can address all necessary services, they can strive to provide services that meet each child's and family's unique circumstances.

#### **Casey Family Programs**

Casey Family Programs is the nation's largest operating foundation focused on safely reducing the need for foster care and building Communities of Hope for children and families across America. Founded in 1966, we work in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and two territories and with more than a dozen tribal nations to influence long-lasting improvements to the safety and success of children, families and the communities where they live.

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