Family Finding for Children and Families New to Out-of-Home Care:
A Rigorous Evaluation of Family Finding in San Francisco

July 2013

Publication #2013-33a

Karin Malm
Tiffany Allen
Amy McKlindon
Sharon Vandivere

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

More than 400,000 children and youth are in out-of-home care in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [U.S. DHHS], 2011). The majority of these children (64%) are placed in non-relative foster homes, group homes, institutions, and supervised independent living placements, while 26 percent are placed in relative foster homes (U.S. DHHS, 2011). Ideally, the out-of-home placement is temporary, but many children remain out of their homes for extended periods. When the removal is permanent, child welfare agencies are responsible for securing a new permanent home for these children; however, more than 25,000 young people each year age out of foster care without achieving permanency. Research and anecdotal evidence have shown that many youth who age out of foster care remain at risk well into their mid-twenties across a range of measures including housing, education, employment, health, receipt of public assistance, and involvement in the criminal justice system.

Transition to adulthood for young people has lengthened in recent decades, as many young people between age 18 and 25 remain at or return to their parents' homes or rely on parents and family members for material and emotional assistance. This safety net of family support is often unavailable or more fractured for many of the young adults who have been in the foster care system for long periods of time, many of whom have lost ties to their birth families, and have also lost the formal support of the child welfare system. The Family Finding model, developed by Kevin Campbell and his colleagues at Catholic Community Services in Tacoma, Washington, seeks to promote positive relationships and secure commitments from adults who will remain involved in a child's life after they age out of foster care.

The Family Finding model is comprised of six stages: 1) discovering at least 40 family members and important people in the child's life; 2) engaging as many family members and supportive adults willing to participate in a planning meeting; 3) planning for the successful future of the child with the participation of family members; 4) making decisions during family meetings that support legal and emotional permanency for the child; 5) evaluating the permanency plans developed; and 6) providing follow-up supports to ensure the child and family can maintain the permanency plans.

This approach has most commonly been used to find and secure supportive family networks for older youth who have lost connections to their birth family and kin networks as a result of having spent many years in foster care. In recent years there has also been interest in implementing the model with populations of children new to out-of-home care. This broadening of the target population was done with the hope that by engaging relatives and securing legal and emotional permanency with family members earlier in the case process, the population of older youth with limited family connections would be greatly diminished over time.

Due to the relatively recent development of the Family Finding model, published evaluation findings are limited. Evaluations of the California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) have examined the success of the program in securing permanent connections between foster youth and caring adults, and explored how these connections are located, formed, and supported. Neither of the recent reports compares outcomes for youth participating in CPYP Family Finding services with a comparison or control group.

San Francisco County's child welfare agency and private provider Seneca Family of Agencies were encouraged by anecdotal evidence and non-experimental research findings showing children reconnecting with family members and finding permanent homes with relatives. Both organizations had also experienced success in implementing Family Finding for older youth in foster care. In late 2007 Child Trends received funding from The Stuart Foundation to conduct an experimental evaluation of Family Finding in San Francisco examining how the intervention would work for children new to out-of-home care. In shifting the target population for the intervention to the "front end" of the system, San Francisco hoped to increase the frequency and timeliness of reunification and, if reunification was not possible, to place more children with relatives due to the efforts of Family Finding. The Stuart Foundation also funded Seneca to fund Family Finding specialists, separate from the child's primary caseworkers, to provide the services.

A rigorous evaluation was designed to examine the impact of Family Finding on these "front end" cases and an accompanying process study examined outputs and linkages between the program components and other contextual factors. Random assignment of cases began in September 2008 and ended in February 2011, comprising a 25-month total intake period. During this period, children were randomly assigned from a waitlist of eligible children recently detained by the court, i.e., removed from home, either to receive Family Finding services (the treatment group) or to receive "services as usual" (the control group) prior to the beginning of treatment. The evaluation included 239 children in total; 123 in the control group, and 116 children in the treatment group.

The evaluation sought to investigate how Family Finding services impact the likelihood of achieving reunification, and of a child's goal being changed to something other than reunification. Overall, the impact findings do not align with initial expectations. The likelihood of reunification did not differ significantly between the treatment and control group children, though a larger, but not statistically significant, percentage of the treatment group was reunified during the study period (57% compared with 47%). Children in the Family Finding group were significantly more likely to have a goal of reunification (than a goal of adoption) but they also were more likely to return to care after being reunified.

The likelihood of reunification did not differ significantly between the treatment and control group children, though a larger, but not statistically significant, percentage of the treatment group was reunified during the study period (57% compared with 47%).

The last finding is concerning and raises the possibility that there may be a tradeoff between increasing connections to family members and risk of a failed reunification. The presence and engagement of family members could afford caseworkers greater opportunities for relative placements, easing their decision to remove the child from their home yet again. Unfortunately, the numbers of children reentering care were too small in this study to explore this question; however, future research should do so.

The implementation study sought to examine how each of the main components of the Family Finding model was implemented. During the *discovery* phase, on average, a total of 30 family connections were discovered for each case. More connections were discovered through the case file review and engaging with the parents or family members than through internet searches or talking with the child or caseworker. On average, it took Family Finding specialists 30 days to begin *engaging* family members and on average, the specialists engaged with 5 persons per child, out of the 30 total family connections typically found. On average two family meetings were held per child during the *planning* component. During the *decision-making* component, which often was combined with the planning component, the Family Finding specialists helped the family develop a series of plans for the child and the parent, but the decision ultimately rested with the child's caseworker who determined the next steps for the case. Eighty-five percent of the children served had plans involving family members committing to ongoing contact with the child. The implementation study also examined the service context to determine how similar Family Finding services were to the "services as usual" received by all children. Caseworkers reported providing some services similar to Family Finding components, but the services were far less intensive than Family Finding services and implemented inconsistently.

Eighty-five percent of the children served by the Family Finding specialists had plans involving family members committing to ongoing contact with the child.

Qualitative findings indicated multiple barriers to full implementation of the six-step Family Finding model and, for the most part, the children and families served, i.e., the treatment group, did not receive the full complement of Family Finding services. In particular, two components—*evaluating* permanency plans and providing *follow-up* supports—were not implemented by the Family Finding specialists in a systematic way. Further, while it was anticipated that the child's caseworker would "pick up" where the Family Finding specialist left off through early collaboration in the Family Finding process, this did not often occur. In addition, the transfer of a case from one unit to another in the immediate weeks and months following out-of-home placement meant the Family Finding specialist needed to coordinate with different caseworkers throughout the six-month period of Family Finding. Also, while caseworkers received general training on Family Finding, they did not receive standardized training on how to implement the remaining steps in the model nor were they required or expected to do so in a consistent or measurable way. Unfortunately, we do not know the degree to which the lack of full implementation affected the findings.

Qualitative findings indicated multiple barriers to full implementation of the six-step Family Finding model and, for the most part, the children and families served did not receive the full complement of services.

Our analyses of program outputs found that cases in which 40 or more family connections were discovered were neither more nor less likely to be associated with positive permanency outcomes, including reunification. Qualitative evidence from our site visits indicates that, while they faced challenges in meeting the goal of 40 new connections, for the most part, Family Finding specialists were intent on discovering a large network of connections (one goal was to create a family tree) and took to heart the training they received that directed them not to stop identifying connections until they had identified at least 40. Further examination of the correlation between numbers of family members discovered and engaged and resulting permanency outcomes is needed. Given the many demands on staff and the complexity of the families served, it is important to understand whether time spent expanding the numbers of family connections could be better spent supporting healthier relationships between already discovered family members.

Further examination of the correlation between numbers of family members discovered and engaged and resulting permanency outcomes is needed.

While the findings did not show improved reunification outcomes for children in the treatment group relative to those in the control group, the considerable increase in the number of family members connected to the children and their parents through Family Finding must be recognized. Enhanced well being and other positive outcomes may have resulted from the increase in family connectedness but were not captured as part of the impact evaluation. We found family members were often engaged only as potential "back up" placement resources, in the event the reunification efforts failed, rather than as active participants in reunification efforts. Therefore, their engagement may not have been expected to increase the likelihood of reunification, yet would be expected to increase the likelihood of the child being placed with a relative. While it was hypothesized that engaging family members at the start of a case would enhance reunification, aligning the goals of Family Finding with the activities necessary for a child to be successfully discharged to reunification may need to be more explicit. Further examination of the context in which reunification services are delivered, what casework practices lead to successful reunifications, and how Family Finding efforts fit into this context is needed.

While the findings did not show improved reunification outcomes for children, the considerable increase in the number of family members connected to the children and their parents through Family Finding must be recognized.

The rich information gathered from this evaluation has laid the foundation for the Family Finding evidence base. This evaluation represents a huge step in beginning a conversation, based on evidence, to help further examine the conditions in which Family Finding is and is not effective. Along with other evaluations currently being implemented, this evaluation contributes to the overall knowledge base focused on improved family engagement within child welfare practices, programs, and policies.

INTRODUCTION

Child welfare agencies remove more than 250,000 children from their homes each year as a result of some form of abuse or neglect, most commonly at the hands of their biological parents. A recent national report on foster care rates reveals that 408,425 children and youth are in out-of-home care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [U.S. DHHS], 2011). These children are nearly twice as likely to be placed in the care of non-relatives as with relatives (64% in non-relative foster homes, group homes, institutions, and supervised independent living placements, compared with 26% in relative foster homes) (U.S. DHHS, 2011).

Ideally, the removal of these children from their family is temporary, allowing the family to complete a case plan of services targeted at rehabilitation and prevention of future child maltreatment. However, for many children, this removal is lengthy. Of the 662,539 children who spent time in foster care from October 2009 to September 2010, 26 percent had been in the system for 18 months or more, while 9 percent had been in the system 5 years or more (U.S. DHHS, 2011). Only 254,114 (38%) exited the system that year (U.S. DHHS, 2011). Extended spells in out-of-home care are particularly difficult for children who have mental and behavioral challenges, whose families have multiple problems, who are older in age, or who have unstable placement histories, and therefore have extensive service needs (Breland-Noble et al., 2005).

When the removal is permanent, child welfare agencies, with oversight from the dependency court, bear the responsibility of securing a new permanent home or family setting for these children to support their overall well-being. However, the number of young people aging out without achieving permanency increased steadily from 1998 to 2007, peaking at almost 30,000 in 2007 (McCoy-Roth et al., 2011). In 2010, the number of youth aging out decreased slightly to 27,854, or 11 percent of children leaving foster care that year (U.S. DHHS, 2011). These youth are at increased risk of adverse life events, as described in greater detail below.

Outcomes for children who do not achieve permanency

Over the past decade both research and anecdotal evidence have revealed that many youth who age out of foster care have negative experiences and outcomes in the years immediately following their stays in foster care (Courtney et al., 2011; Pecora et. al, 2005). While longitudinal data are limited, findings from the Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth indicate that former foster youth remain at risk well into their mid-twenties across a range of measures including

housing, education, employment, health, receipt of public assistance, and involvement in the criminal justice system (Courtney et al., 2011).

More specifically, these youth often become homeless and experience housing instability (Courtney et al., 2011; George et. al, 2002; Pecora et. al, 2005). Foster youth have typically had a poor education as well as educational instability, which then decreases their employment options and increases their likelihood of becoming and remaining impoverished after they leave the system (Courtney et al., 2011; Pecora et. al, 2005; George et. al, 2002; Dworsky & Courtney, 2000). Former foster youth are also more likely than young adults in the general population to have poor physical health and lack health insurance (Courtney et al., 2011). In contrast, stable family environments (Pecora et al., 2005), less restrictive placements, and strong social networks can serve as protective factors for overall well-being of children and youth in foster care (Perry, 2006). Since it has long been established that personal relationships and the resources they provide positively affect mental health (Berkman, 1983; Kessler and McLeod, 1985), evidence that youth in foster care are more vulnerable to poor social and emotional functioning than those not in foster care is not surprising (Courtney et al., 2011; Pecora et al., 2005).

Importance of caring, involved adults

There is a growing consensus in developmental and social psychology that the transition to adulthood for young people has lengthened in recent decades, with the period of time from approximately age 18 to age 25 being labeled "emerging adulthood" (Arnett, 2007, and Arnett & Tanner, 2006, as cited in Avery, 2010). This transition involves cognitive, behavioral, and emotional development and is a time when many young people remain at or return to their parents' homes or rely on parents and other supportive adults for various forms of material and emotional assistance (Furstenberg, 2010; Swartz et al., 2011). This "safety net" of family support is one that is typically unavailable to young adults aging out of the foster care system, many of whom have lost ties to members of their birth families, and all of whom have lost the formal support of the child welfare system.

While many youth have lost connections to their birth families during their time in foster care, many youth also return to live with their birth parents or other family members for some period of time following emancipation. The limited nature of longitudinal data on this population makes it challenging to get an accurate count of how many youth return to live with family members, but the Midwest Study found that close to one in four youth (22%) lived with their birth parents at some point between exiting foster care and age 25-26, and close to one in three (29%) had lived with another relative (Courtney et

al., 2011). Further, the majority of former foster youth felt very close (74%) or somewhat close (20%) to at least one member of their birth families, indicating that family members can and often do serve as an important emotional as well as material resource to former foster youth (Courtney et al., 2011). Research suggests that positive, regular contact with birth family members may contribute to improved social well-being and adjustment for these youth (Andersson, 2005).

By fostering these positive relationships and securing commitment from adults to remain involved in a child's life, services that promote connecting children in foster care to their families are designed to support the family relationships that many youth turn to in the future. These services can also be used to support parents in reunifying with their children, as described in greater detail below. For example, one early study found that placing children with relatives is helpful in facilitating reunification because relatives can work collaboratively with parents (Maluccio, Fein, & Olmstead, 1986, as cited in Farmer, 1996).

Services that connect children in foster care with relatives can also enhance reunification efforts by bolstering the social support available to parents. While few studies have directly examined the relationship between extended family support and reunification, one qualitative study of parents who successfully reunified with their children indicated that extended family members often serve as important sources of both emotional encouragement and concrete assistance (Lietz, Lacasse, & Cacciatore, 2011). Friends and neighbors were also identified as important supports for successful reunification in this study, particularly in the absence of extended family members (Lietz et al., 2011). Several studies have defined social support more broadly and have similarly found that the presence of supportive individuals in the parent's life is an important factor for service engagement and successful reunification (Kovalesky, 2001). A survey of child welfare caseworkers, judges, and substance abuse counselors revealed that these professionals see social support as an important facilitator of reunification (Karroll & Poertner, 2002). Level of social support has also been inversely related to the risk of children re-entering foster care following reunification (Festinger, 1996).

Legislative history of family connections

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 (P.L. 105-89) established legal requirements for the timely achievement of permanency (ideally, in the form of adoption) for children who cannot return home by requiring that a permanency planning hearing be convened within a year of a child's entry into the child welfare system. Unfortunately, child welfare agencies have still not been successful in securing permanent homes for all children and youth in foster care.

Not only did ASFA emphasize the importance of permanency for children, it also legally recognized well-being as a national goal for children in care. A permanent family setting is crucial to children's healthy development. Childhood and adolescence are critical periods for children to develop social, psychological and interpersonal skills. Social networks within family and community settings play critical roles in helping children to acquire these skills as well as form positive self-identities (Hines, 1997). However, placement in foster care can often disrupt children's social networks as family, friends and community ties weaken or become absent.

Federal recognition of the importance of permanency and family connections was further codified in the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-351). In addition to strengthening supports for older youth, the Act includes several key measures to promote connections between children and youth in foster care and their kin. More specifically, within 30 days of a child's entry into care, the state must provide notice to the child's adult relatives and inform them of options available for them to become involved as a placement or resource for the child. States may also waive non-safety-related foster care licensing standards for kin, as well as claim federal reimbursement for guardianship assistance payments made to eligible kin caregivers assuming permanent legal guardianship. With the Fostering Connections Act, Congress also authorized $75 million over 5 years for "Family Connections" grants, allowing states, Tribes, and nonprofit organizations to implement four program models designed to reconnect children with family members: intensive Family Finding, Family Group Decision Making, residential family treatment, and kinship navigator programs.

History of the Family Finding model

In the interim between ASFA and the Fostering Connections Act, Kevin Campbell, a director at Catholic Community Services in Tacoma, Washington, and colleagues developed the Family Finding model. Over the past decade, this approach has most commonly been used to find and secure supportive family networks for youth who have lingered in the child welfare system. These are typically older youth who have lost connections to their birth family and kin networks as a result of having spent many years in foster care, although the model has also been implemented with families first entering the child welfare system.

The model was inspired by the family-tracing techniques used by agencies such as the Red Cross since the late 1800s to find and reunite family members who had been separated by war, civil disturbance, or natural disaster. Using similar techniques through the use of internet-based services

such as US Search[1], Campbell was able to increase the number of life-long connections for children in foster care in his agency's service area and decrease the number of children in non-relative care. Since Mr. Campbell began training caseworkers in 2000, this model has spread throughout the country and is nationally recognized as a promising approach for finding permanent homes and family connections for many youth in care for whom traditional attempts at finding permanent placements have failed.

The goal of the Family Finding model is to actively find and engage relatives and other kin of children in foster care to provide more options for legal and emotional permanency. Legal permanency may include adoption and guardianship, as well as reunification. Emotional, or relational, permanency refers to establishing a life-long connection with an adult who will unconditionally support and maintain healthy contact with the child, beyond the age of 18. The Family Finding model is comprised of six stages: 1) *discovering* at least 40 family members and important people in the child's life through an extensive review of a child's case file, through interviewing the youth (if appropriate) in addition to family members and other supportive people, and through the use of internet search tools; 2) *engaging* as many family members and supportive adults as possible through in-person interviews, phone conversations, and written letters and emails with the goal of identifying the child's extended family and identifying a group of family members and supportive adults, as appropriate, willing to participate in a planning meeting on how to keep the child safely connected to family members; 3) *planning* for the successful future of the child with the participation of family members and others important to the child by convening family meetings; 4) *making decisions* during the family meeting that support the legal and emotional permanency of the child; 5) *evaluating* the permanency plans developed for the child; and 6) providing *follow-up supports* to ensure that the child and his/her family can access and receive informal and formal supports essential to maintaining permanency for the child (Campbell, 2005; 2010a, 2010b). In addition to the intensive nature of the Family Finding model, a set of central beliefs and values underlie the model. These include:

- All individuals have between 100 and 300 family members.
- Knowledge of the whereabouts and well-being of family members is a basic human need essential for the restoration of dignity.
- Children need a sense of belonging and unconditional love for health, growth, and development.
- Loneliness is often at the heart of suffering for children in the foster care system, as they lose contact and connection with family members over time and with multiple placement moves.

---

[1] US Search is a paid internet-based search engine used to help locate people.

- Even the best treatment modalities will not be effective in addressing emotional and behavioral difficulties when children are suffering from loneliness. Connection is a crucial first step to healing.
- Respectful, collaborative engagement with family members is central to the successful planning for permanency and support for children, whose lives have been disrupted by trauma.
- Families, not government or private agencies, take care of children best.
- Parents need connections and supports to provide adequate care for their children.
- Parents and families want the best for their children, even when factors interfere with their ability to provide it for them directly.

In 2008, Child Trends conducted an exhaustive review of existing programs and found more than 50 agencies (state, local, and private) in 22 states that were implementing or planning to implement the Family Finding model. Since that time the number has undoubtedly increased with the passage of the federal Fostering Connections legislation and subsequent Family Connection Grant Announcements with intensive Family Finding designated as a priority.

Unlike many traditional child welfare approaches in which the public agency (or a contracting agency) provides services to the youth, the aim of Family Finding is to develop a family-based context for supporting children's needs and ensuring their future permanency. Ideally, this supportive context will be more enduring than agency-based services, which typically end with a youth's involvement in the child welfare system. Additionally, since many former foster youth return to their birth families upon aging out of foster care (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006), expanding and strengthening the family network beyond birth parents appears likely to benefit youth.

Prior Family Finding research

Due to the relatively recent development of the Family Finding model, published evaluation literature is limited. Evaluations of the California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP), which merged with Kevin Campbell's Center for Family Finding and Youth Connectedness in 2010, have examined the success of the program in securing permanent connections between foster youth and caring adults, as well as explored how these connections are located, formed, and supported. Permanent adult connections are described as relationships where the adult "consistently states and demonstrates that s/he has entered an unconditional life-long parent-like relationship with the youth [and] the youth agrees that the adult will play this role in his/her life"(California Permanency for Youth Project, 2010, p. 4). The 2008 report

covers youth outcomes for 10 counties (Contra Costa, Fresno, Humboldt, Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, and Sonoma) from 2006-2008, while the 2010 report chronicles outcomes for a total of six sites (Madera, San Bernardino, Solano, and Riverside Counties, as well as Pomona and Santa Clarita in Los Angeles) from 2008-2009 (California Permanency for Youth Project, 2008; 2010).

The majority of youth receiving services through both the 2008 and 2010 evaluation sites had established permanent connections (76% and 71%, respectively). Of the 126 youth participating in 2008, 15 youth achieved permanency through reunification, guardianship, or adoption; 14 youth were in the process of establishing legal permanency with a connection; and 62 youth had formed a permanent connection but the adult connections were not seeking legal permanency (California Permanency for Youth Project, 2008). In 2010, 110 youth participated, and by the end of the program, 20 achieved legal permanency, 18 had a permanent connection pursuing legal permanence, and 40 had a permanent connection but were not pursuing legal permanence (California Permanency for Youth Project, 2010). Caseworkers for youth with a permanent connection were asked whether that connection was a result of program participation; 64 percent of caseworkers in 2008 and 53 percent of caseworkers in 2010 reported that the permanent connection "probably occurred because of our work with CPYP" (as opposed to "probably would have occurred anyway") (California Permanency for Youth Project, 2008; 2010).

Neither of these recent reports compares outcomes for youth participating in CPYP Family Finding services with a comparison or control group. However, one county (San Bernardino) completed its own evaluation and found that relative to a comparison group, youth participating in CPYP services were more likely to have family and friends located and contacted (85%, compared with 13%), have a potential permanent connection identified during the course of the program (73 percent, compared with 4%), and have an established permanent connection by the end of the program (75%, compared with 4%) (Wakcher, 2010).

While the research base for Family Finding services is still developing, forthcoming evaluation results for the Family Connections grants authorized by the Fostering Connections Act of 2008 will provide critical insight into program implementation and outcomes in several sites throughout the United States. Final evaluation results at the individual site and cross-site levels are expected to be released in late 2012 as the three-year grant projects are completed. Combined with results from Child Trends' evaluations, these evaluation findings will provide critical information for the evidence base of

this program model.[2] This evaluation report, as well as a few of the federal Family Connections evaluations, examines outcomes when Family Finding is used with a nontraditional population—namely, children just entering the child welfare system.

Given the limited extant literature on the effectiveness of Family Finding services specifically, findings from evaluations of other programs and services for foster youth can help to inform our understanding of the success of these types of interventions. Formal evidence on the effectiveness of interventions for children who are likely to age out of the foster care system is limited as well (Montgomery et al., 2006) and existing evaluations have found limited or no success. The Chafee Independent Living Evaluation has, thus far, found similar results (U.S. DHHS, 2008).This lack of positive findings may in part be due to the lack of intensity of the interventions, as well as low numbers of youth who engaged in the services. In contrast, program planners are optimistic about the potential for finding positive impacts of the Family Finding model on child permanency due to the intensity of its services and the uniqueness of the service components. Additionally, since the Family Finding program does not rely on active participation or engagement of the youth, but rather on the activities of the Family Finding worker, program planners expect that larger numbers of youth assigned to the services will receive the services.

With regard to family supports positively affecting reunification, evidence is mixed regarding whether children in kinship placements are more or less likely to be reunified, with several studies indicating that children placed with kin are less likely to reunify with their parents, compared to children in non-relative foster care (Cuddeback, 2004). However, continued research in this area is needed as other studies have found no difference in reunification rates between the two groups (Wells & Guo, 1999), and there is also evidence of a selection bias (Kaylor, 2001). While current evidence is inconclusive as to whether or not placement with kin facilitates or inhibits reunification efforts, research does suggest that birth parents are more likely to visit with children in kinship care than children in non-relative foster care and those visits are more informal and frequent (Berrick, Barth, & Needell, 1994). Placement with kin may therefore strengthen the parent-child relationship, and frequency of visits has been found to be predictive of reunification (Leathers, 2002).

Similar to the intensive family search component of the Family Finding model, some localities have implemented more in-depth search processes. For example, Gibson and Rinkel (2012) offer a case study of one county's approach to kin searches and note five overarching themes: (1) kinship searches

---

[2] This report describes findings from Child Trends' evaluation of Family Finding in San Francisco County, California. Results from Child Trends' evaluation of Family Finding in North Carolina are forthcoming.

should be started early; (2) a wider definition of kin yields broader results; (3) kinship care can be an important factor in promoting family preservation and child well-being; (4) biological fathers should be viewed as a resource; and (5) barriers to the search process exist on the individual (staff, birth parent, and family member) and system levels. The authors note, however, that more evidence is needed.

Once family members have been identified, other programs have used similar approaches to Family Finding to engage family members and identify needed services. Family Group Decision-Making (FGDM), for example, utilizes a family meeting model that, like Family Finding, brings family members together to plan for the child in a more self-directed way (American Humane Association, 2010). While this approach has been used internationally for several years, the evaluation literature in the United States is still growing, and evidence of the efficacy of this approach is mixed. Some evaluations (e.g., Berzin, 2006) found no significant differences in child welfare outcomes for children whose families participated in FGDM, while other evaluations (e.g., Weigensberg et al., 2009) indicate that families participating in FGDM initially receive significantly more family and child supports but differences in service receipt shrink over time and become insignificant.

Finally, Avery (2010) evaluated an intensive recruitment program designed to improve permanent placement rates for adolescents in foster care in New York City. Similar to Family Finding, this approach included an emphasis on identifying individuals previously known to the child. Compared with adults recruited for the program who did not know a specific teen at the start of the training program, adults who had a previous connection to the teen were more likely to complete the training (81%, compared with 33%), complete the homestudy (54%, compared with 11 %), and have the youth placed with them (53%, compared with 4%) (Avery, 2010). Although a small scale study, this points to the value of engaging adults who have an existing connection with and commitment to a young person in foster care, a key element of Family Finding services.

These findings are impressive (especially given the fact that these agencies targeted the hardest-to-serve youth in their system), but the Family Finding model had yet to undergo a rigorous evaluation to assess its true impact. Given the substantial anecdotal evidence of the program's success and the extent to which the model is currently being replicated on a national scale, the time was right for an experimental evaluation. Subsequently, Child Trends received funding from the Stuart Foundation to evaluate Family Finding in San Francisco County, California. The Seneca Family of Agencies was providing Family Finding services under contract to San Francisco County Human Services Agency (HSA) and serving older children who had been in out-of-home care for a lengthy period of time. At the time, HSA and Seneca staff expressed an interest in implementing Family Finding "at the front end" of a case—as

soon as a child is removed from their home. The impetus for implementing Family Finding with a new population was a belief among program administrators that if Family Finding had been provided at the front end, many of the older youth served would not have been left without family connections. A rigorous evaluation was then designed to examine the impact of Family Finding on these types of cases.

PROGRAM CONTEXT

The shift in the target population for the Family Finding intervention affected both the types of children served and the type of HSA child welfare worker who would need to be involved in the services. The shift in target population also affected the way in which Family Finding was implemented. The intervention as well as the evaluation needed to include all child welfare workers in the investigative, court dependency, and family services units of the San Francisco HSA – Family and Children's Services Department, with a total of approximately 70 staff. Seneca dedicated a Family Finding project manager and three Family Finding specialists to carry out the services. The kick-off of the evaluation was in May 2008 and Family Finding specialists and other staff were hired and completed training by the end of 2008.

As originally conceived, the Family Finding specialist would partner with the child welfare workers on all stages of the process, though the Family Finding specialists would likely work more intensively on the discovery and engagement stages while the child welfare worker would work more intensively on the planning, decision-making, evaluation and follow-up stages. Each Family Finding specialist would hold five to seven cases (which could include siblings) at any given time, with an expected case duration of 90 days. The intervention was intended to be short-term to build the capacity of the family to support the parent and the child, and allow the child welfare worker to continue the work that the specialist initiated. Below we describe how children were referred to the program, the training staff received, and how the project was managed.

- Referral/target population. The project manager worked with county staff to develop a process for creating and maintaining a list of all children who came into foster care and were in the court dependency process. Sibling groups were considered one case and for the purposes of the study were not separated. At the start of the project, Seneca staff were co-located at the central Family and Children's Services office and within five months Seneca staff were able to access the automated case records.

- Training. All staff participating in the project were required to have extensive training on the adapted Family Finding model. The HSA and Seneca staff were trained together to underscore the importance of Family Finding, to promote common understanding of what was expected and to create working partnerships. Seneca staff also periodically attended child welfare unit meetings to

review these elements, respond to questions and address concerns with social workers in the front end units.

- Project oversight. The Seneca Family Finding project manager was hired to be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the study, including supervision of Seneca staff; coordination of all six steps of Family Finding as carried out by HSA and Seneca staff; working with Child Trends to document study results and maintain quality assurance; and preparing monthly written reports on the progress to date. A Family Finding oversight committee comprised of HSA, Child Trends, and Seneca staff met regularly to review the status of the study and resolve problems as they arose.

Targeting children new to out-of-home care broadened the focus of the intervention to include creating supports for the parent in addition to the child. When children first enter out-of-home care, the permanency goal is usually reunification; indeed, that was the case for 71 percent of children in the evaluation. Thus, when implementing Family Finding, it made sense to provide services that would support that goal. In most cases, and typically when the child is young, Family Finding at the front end evolved into creating supports for the parent to reach reunification faster and to build a family network focused on helping the parent reach success.

When interviewed, caseworkers and Family Finding specialists saw promise in implementing Family Finding with children first entering care. They felt that the service could minimize the conflict that arises when relative placements are found after children have resided in stable foster placements and have developed attachments to foster parents. They also mentioned that family dynamics and communication styles would be uncovered early on, allowing for more productive family engagement. Interestingly, during site visits, relatives indicated that Family Finding could be more useful if services began before children were removed from their homes, reinforcing the idea of engaging relatives from the very beginning. The relatives felt that the services should be merged with the CPS intake process and the specialists should help build up supports then. Also, caseworkers noted that the case's referral immediately after the most tumultuous time of the case made it difficult for them to focus and concentrate on coordinating with Family Finding staff. The case could be quickly transferred to different units at the start of the case, which made it difficult for Family Finding specialists to start their work.

EVALUATION DESIGN

The evaluation of Family Finding services in San Francisco County involved a rigorous impact evaluation and an accompanying process study to examine outputs, outcomes, and linkages between the project components and other contextual factors. The experimental design of the impact evaluation involved random assignment of children to a treatment or control group. The treatment group received Family

Finding services in addition to traditional child welfare services while the control group received traditional child welfare services only.

Research questions

Several research questions guided the impact evaluation including: (1) How, if at all, do Family Finding services impact the likelihood of achieving reunification and/or a child's goal being changed to something other than reunification for children first entering out-of-home care; (2) how, if at all, do Family Finding services impact the length of time children are in foster care before achieving reunification; and (3) how, if at all, do Family Finding services impact the likelihood that children first entering foster care get placed with relatives? In addition to the primary research questions above, the safety (measured as re-entries into care) and placement stability of children were examined.

The research questions were developed based on a conceptual framework developed to assess the potential impacts of the Family Finding model (see Appendix A, Logic Model). The model is based on the underlying belief that building a stronger family network around the parent and a child in foster care helps to create successful child outcomes. The impact evaluation's primary focus was on the placement of children with their parents or relatives. In particular, we hypothesized that the treatment effects of Family Finding services would positively impact the rate and timeliness of children reunified with their parents, and the number of children placed in foster care with relatives. The model suggests that building a supportive family network for parents in the child welfare system will create stronger, longer-lasting supports and resources to increase reunification rates and reduce time to reunification.

The process evaluation was conducted to examine whether any differences (or lack thereof) in the children's safety and permanency outcomes between treatment and control groups are attributable to the implementation of the Family Finding model and any other contextual factors. It is also important to document the "services as usual" in the evaluation site and to measure whether the traditional child welfare services resemble the activities implemented through Family Finding. The process study was guided by two main research questions: (1) how is each component of the Family Finding model implemented; and (2) how similar are Family Finding services with the "services as usual" received by all children?

Random assignment

Random assignment of cases began in September 2008 and ended in February 2011, comprising a 25-month total intake period. During this period, children were randomly assigned from a waitlist of eligible

children recently detained by the court, either to receive Family Finding services (the treatment group) or to receive "services as usual" (the control group) prior to the beginning of treatment.[3] Random assignment decreases the likelihood that the differences between the two groups are due to other factors and dynamics, and increases the likelihood that differences are due to the effect of the treatment. Random selection was carried out at the child level. All in all, 239 children were randomly assigned into the evaluation; 123 into the control group, and 116 children into the treatment group.

The Family Finding supervisor monitored Family Finding specialists' caseloads on a regular basis. When an opening occurred on a specialist's caseload, the supervisor identified at least two eligible cases within the most recent two-week period.[4] All children entering foster care for the first time, or those who were siblings of a child who had never entered out-of-home care were eligible to receive Family Finding. Any ineligible children (children who previously entered out-of-home care) were not randomly assigned and received typical child welfare services.

It is worth noting that approximately nine percent of the eligible sample was reunified before Family Finding services began; these children were eliminated from the sample. Additional children were reunified in the weeks following the start of Family Finding services, but before the intervention could have been expected to have had an effect. However, the early reunification of some children should not bias our estimates of the impact of the intervention on reunification, as this early reunification should have been equally likely to have occurred in the treatment and control groups. To eliminate children from the study who were able to reunify relatively easily, random assignment could have occurred at some later time point in a child's case, such as after they had been in care for a few months. Had a later random assignment occurred, however, the Family Finding intervention would not have been implemented as planned; that is, the intervention was designed to be implemented as soon as possible once a child entered foster care, and at that time it is impossible to distinguish with certainty which children will remain in care for extended periods from those that will reunify quickly.

---

[3] HSA staff indicated that due to the success of the earlier Family Finding services targeting older youth, there was some likelihood that caseworkers would implement the components of the Family Finding model, which could impact the outcomes measured in Child Trends' evaluation. However, during interviews and focus groups conducted as part of the process/implementation study, Child Trends found little evidence that HSA child welfare workers were implementing services similar to Family Finding.

[4] Each day, a child welfare administrator at HSA was emailed a list of children who were detained by the court (this occurred after the detention hearing but prior to the jurisdictional and dispositional hearings). In turn, the administrator emailed the Family Finding supervisor weekly with the list of detained children. The Family Finding supervisor accessed the state automated child welfare information system (CWS/CMS) to review the detention reports and placement histories to determine if the child was eligible to be enrolled in the program. When an opening occurred on a specialist's caseload, the supervisor would review the detainee list for the two weeks prior.

Once eligibility was determined, the Family Finding supervisor entered eligible cases into the Family Finding database.[5] Eligibility was based on a particular focal child; however, sibling groups were treated as one case to ensure that siblings were not lost to each other and that the benefit of Family Finding was maximized for all family members. While the intention was to refer children who were new to the system (i.e., no prior foster care spells), it is possible that siblings served in the same case as the focal child had prior foster care spells. The supervisor then conducted the random assignment using the Family Finding database, which randomly assigned one case to either the treatment or control group.

Depending on the number of cases on the eligibility list, the supervisor could conduct random assignment on multiple cases at once; in this situation, the Family Finding database assigned half to the treatment group and half to the control group. If the supervisor entered an odd number of cases into the system, it would randomly select one case to remain on the eligibility list, such that an equal number of cases would be assigned to the treatment and control groups. Alternatively, the supervisor could choose pairs of cases to randomly assign, understanding that one case would be assigned to the treatment and the other to the control group. The aim was to randomly assign those newly detained (within a two-week period) in order to truly capture children who had just entered foster care. Once children were assigned to the treatment group, the Family Finding supervisor assigned a specialist the new treatment group case(s).

Data collection methods and data sources

To measure the model's impact on the children's safety and permanency outcomes, we collected county administrative data on all children enrolled in the evaluation. We obtained outcome data from the state automated child welfare information system (CWS/CMS) for children as of January 31, 2012. The county data department supplied several data items related to safety and permanency outcomes for the children in the evaluation. (See Appendix B for a list of data items obtained.) We worked extensively with the public agency's data department to identify measures to best capture the intended outcomes and to learn how the data elements are collected and coded in the "front end" interface of the system. The county provided placement data which included the start and end dates of every placement for every removal episode, as well as information about the type of placement (e.g. foster family home, group home, etc). We received variables that identified whether children were placed with relatives or

---

[5] A web-based database was developed to document Family Finding activities including the number and types of family members discovered, engaged, and meeting participation. The database also captured pertinent information on the child and siblings and measured the length of time Family Finding services were provided.

fictive kin. The state also sent information about each child's removal episode including dates and reasons for removal, as well as dates of discharge from the foster care system, if applicable.

The process evaluation components describe how implementation occurred including any barriers and facilitators to implementation, documented factors that influenced permanency and safety outcomes, and documented similar services to Family Finding. We used two main sources of data for the process evaluation: annual program site visits and the Family Finding database.

Qualitative information for the process study was obtained during three annual visits between the years 2009-2011. Child Trends developed semi-structured interview and focus group guides to address the process research questions (See Appendix C). We interviewed Family Finding and child welfare agency staff to learn about their experiences and opinions concerning Family Finding, to document implementation, and to learn about the local context within which the program operates. In particular, we interviewed the staff at the Family Finding agency to gather, in detail, the Family Finding process from case referral to case closure. We also inquired about any barriers and facilitators to program implementation. When possible, the researchers conducted observations of Family Finding activities to gather additional data on program implementation.

We also interviewed the child welfare program managers at HSA and conducted focus groups with supervisors to gather information about barriers and facilitators to program implementation, public agency buy-in of the model, similar services to Family Finding, as well as information about the Family Finding agency's relationship with the child welfare agency. We conducted focus groups with caseworkers with experience with the Family Finding program, as well as those who had no prior experience. The groups were used to gather experiences with the program (if applicable), identify any barriers or facilitators to program implementation, and to gather opinions, values, and barriers to achieving legal and emotional permanency for children in foster care. In some instances, the public agency provided services similar to components of the model (e.g., public agencies often conduct family team meetings, to bring families together to determine a plan of action for a child). We also gathered information about when these others services began in the locality, the level to which they were accessed by caseworkers and children, the target population for the services, and eligibility for the services.

In the second and third round of site visits, we conducted focus groups with parents and relatives of children assigned to the evaluation to gather information from their perspectives. Researchers have stated the importance of having a better understanding of clients' experiences with child welfare services, so that services can be more engaging and valuable (Drake, 1996; Dumbrill, 2006).

15

These focus groups were designed to gather information on their experiences and opinions of the program, and to inquire about barriers and facilitators to program implementation from their unique perspective. Detailed information on the number and types of site visits participants is presented in Appendix D.

In addition to the annual site visits, we developed an extensive web-based database to document Family Finding activities. Family Finding specialists entered program data into the database capturing child characteristics; number and types of family members and other kin[6] at the start of Family Finding and those discovered through Family Finding, including their relationship to the child (maternal, paternal, sibling, or other); number of two-way contacts[7] that Family Finding specialists had with family members; number of family meetings, including those invited and attending the meetings; and results of the meetings. The database also captured the duration of the Family Finding activities and the degree to which Family Finding activities were implemented.

In designing the web-based database for the evaluation, we consulted with Kevin Campbell and Family Finding specialists to obtain their input on model components and program outputs of interest. The database screens reflect the key components of the model while minimizing the burden of data entry. In order to minimize missing and inaccurate data in the database, we provided ongoing training and technical support for data entry, and conducted regular audits of the data to ensure the completeness and accuracy of the information program staff entered. In addition, we developed a system to extract the data from the case management system and conducted regular data exports so analyses could be conducted using the statistical software programs SAS and Stata.

Analytic sample

All data for the impact analyses, with the exception of the indicators that identify the child's experimental group status and the child's start date of services, are derived from administrative data provided from the county child welfare agency. Though limited demographic data and information on the children's placement histories were collected in the Family Finding database, we relied completely on the administrative data for the impact analyses to avoid any bias in our analyses.

---

[6]Family Finding specialists were instructed to add any person related or who had a potential connection to the child into the database. In rare instances, Family Finding specialists added deceased family members (typically parents or grandparents).

[7] Two-way contacts could be in-person visits, phone conversations, reciprocal email correspondence, or letters. Family meetings were not counted as two-way contacts and were counted separately.

Table 1. Analytical sample for impact analysis

	Total	Treatment	Control
Enrolled in study[1]	239	116	123
Received data on key outcome[2]	224	111	113
Served by FF while in foster care[3]	204	102	102

[1] The number of children enrolled in the study was 240; 117 in the treatment group and 123 in the control group. This number was adjusted because one child was accidentally assigned to the treatment group twice. Also, one child originally assigned to the control group subsequently received Family Finding services. We used the child's original assignment when running all analyses.

[2] The key outcome is whether the child was discharged from foster care without a return to foster care within the 6 months following the discharge date.

[3] Some children were referred to Family Finding after having been discharged from foster care. These children were excluded because Family Finding could not have affected their foster care outcomes.

We identified only two instances of random assignment contamination. In the first case, a teenage mother and son were accidentally randomized against each other as they both entered out-of-home care. In the other case, a child selected for the treatment group had already been chosen for the treatment group months before. As shown in Table 1, our sample for impact analysis excluded approximately nine percent of children randomly assigned who, though referred to Family Finding, had already been discharged from foster care prior to the start of Family Finding activities.

Ultimately, our analytic sample was comprised of 204 children, 102 each in the treatment and control groups. These children represent 156 cases (recall that children with siblings were assigned together, so a case may include a single child or a sibling group.) Case size averaged 1.3 children. The 156 cases were evenly divided between the treatment and control groups.

We examined county-level data from 2008 through 2011 (the evaluation study period) in order to assess the similarity of our sample with the general child welfare population in San Francisco County. (See Table 2.) On average during the years of the evaluation, just over half (52%) of all new entries into foster care were five years and younger, compared with just under half (46%) of children enrolled in the evaluation. However, when looking at more narrow age groups, a few differences are apparent—for example, our analytical sample included no infants under 1 year of age, whereas 29 percent of San Francisco County children new to foster care are under age 1. Exactly half of all children new to foster care in San Francisco County were male, and the share was very similar for the evaluation sample (48%). The distribution of all children entering foster care in San Francisco County by race and Hispanic origin and that in our analytical sample is strikingly similar. We also found that in San Francisco as a whole, 38 percent of all children new to foster care reunified within 12 months of being in care, compared with 41 percent of our analytical sample. In summary, based on the data available, the analytical sample for the

impact evaluation seems reasonably representative of the broader population of San Francisco County children new to foster care.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics and reunification within one year among children new to foster care: San Francisco County Child Welfare Population, 2008-2011 and impact analytical sample

	Children new to foster care: San Francisco County child welfare population[1]					Analytical impact evaluation sample (n=204) (%)
	2008 (%)	2009 (%)	2010 (%)	2011 (%)	4-year average (%)	
Male	50	50	50	50	50	48
Age						
Under 1 year	31	33	27	26	29	34
1-2 years	13	11	11	10	11	14
3-5 years	12	9	9	16	12	9
6-10 years	13	12	20	20	16	16
11-15 years	19	24	21	21	21	16
16-20 years*	13	12	11	7	11	11
Race						
Black	46	38	45	40	46	47
White	13	17	15	11	13	15
Hispanic	28	26	30	33	28	28
Asian/Pacific Islander	13	8	11	16	13	10
Native American	<1	<1	0	0	<1	0
Discharged to reunification within 12 months	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	38	41

* The analytical impact evaluation sample includes some youth ages 21.
n.a.: Not available.
[1] Data were extracted from the CWS/CMS Direct Reporting System maintained by the Center for Social Services Research at the University of California at Berkeley, at http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/

Analysis methods

Analyses on impacts presented in the next section are intent-to-treat analyses (ITT),[8] meaning that we examined the effect of assignment to the Family Finding intervention on reunification outcomes, length of stay in out-of-home placement, and likelihood of re-entry into care after discharge compared with the effect of assignment to services as usual (i.e., the control group designation). This means that even if children were assigned to receive the Family Finding intervention, but did not do so for any reason, the

---

[8] ITT analyses are frequently used because they maintain the statistical similarities of the treatment and control group, thus maintaining our ability to attribute causality for any observed impacts on outcomes to assignment to the intervention.

child is retained in the treatment group. Recall that, as noted above, we found evidence of very little random assignment contamination.

The findings that follow are based on logistic regression models for all the outcomes, with the exception of the number of placements, which was assessed using a Poisson model appropriate for outcomes that are "counts." Also, using a Poisson model adjusts for the fact that children with longer stays in out of home care have a longer time period during which to experience additional placements. We adjusted the standard errors to account for shared variance at the case, or sibling-group, level.

OUTCOME FINDINGS

Below we first present the findings related to the impact of the intervention on child welfare administrative outcomes such as reunification and length of time in placement. Following this discussion we present additional findings related to implementation of the Family Finding intervention.

With a sufficiently large sample, randomly assigning children to receive the Family Finding intervention or services as usual should result in treatment and control groups of children that are statistically equivalent on characteristics that might affect outcomes of interest. This equivalence of the two groups is what allows one to infer with a high degree of certainty that the intervention, and not some other factor, is responsible for any observed differences in outcomes between the treatment and control groups. Differences that occur by chance can be controlled in the analytic models. Table 3 compares the control group children with treatment group children on child demographics, placements with siblings, reasons for removal into foster care, and disabilities. The only significant difference was related to removal reasons; a greater percentage of children assigned to the treatment group were removed due to neglect compared with the control group (59% compared with 43%).

In Tables 4 and 5, we present descriptive findings regarding the outcomes of interest compared for the treatment and control groups. Similar shares of children assigned to the Family Finding intervention and to the control group reunified within the study period. The ten percentage point difference (57% of the treatment group compared with 47% of the control group) observed within the sample was not statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level.[9] However, for a higher percentage of children assigned to the Family Finding intervention (66%) than children in the control

---

[9] The ability, i.e., power, to detect differences between the two groups is determined by several factors. Specifically, sample size, the size of the difference between the outcome for the treatment and control groups, the variability of an outcome, and general prevalence can affect whether or not differences are detected. The smallest statistically significant impact we could likely have detected, given that 47% of the control group reunified, would have been 22 percentage points (i.e., a minimum of 69% of the treatment group would have had to have reunified). Our power to detect a difference of this size would have been .80. In other words, in 80% of studies involving samples of this size and design, a difference between 47% and 69% would have reflected a true impact and not just a difference that occurred by chance.

group (47%), the most recent goal was related to returning home. Children assigned to the Family Finding intervention also experienced overall fewer placements (mean = 1.8) than those in the control group (mean = 2.2); 67 percent of children in the control group experienced more than two placements compared with 50 percent of children in the experimental group.

Table 3. Characteristics of children included in the impact analyses by experimental group

	n	Experimental group assignment		
		Treatment	Control	
Age 5 or younger	204	57%	59%	
Male	204	48%	49%	
Race	204			
Non-Hispanic white		18%	13%	
Non-Hispanic black		45%	49%	
Non-Hispanic Asian		7%	13%	
Hispanic		30%	25%	
Disability	204			
None		19%	28%	
One or more disability types		69%	61%	
Disability status unknown		13%	11%	
Removal reasons	204			
Neglect		59%	43%	*
Caretaker absence/incapacity		31%	44%	
Physical abuse		5%	6%	
Emotional abuse		2%	2%	
Severe neglect		1%	4%	
Sexual abuse		2%	1%	

*: p<.10 (*), p<.05 (**)
Note: Children missing on key outcomes are excluded from these tabulations.

Table 4. Reunification, number of placements, relative placements, reunification goal

	n	Experimental group assignment		
		Treatment	Control	
Outcomes				
Reunified	204	57%	47%	
Number of placements: >= 2	202	50%	67%	*
Number of placements: Mean	202	1.8	2.2	*
Placement: With relative as of most recent placement	202	48%	52%	
Goal: Most recent goal is related to returning home[1]	182	66%	47%	**

*: p<.10 (*), p<.05 (**)
[1] This measure includes 7 children missing on the key outcome (whether children were reunified without a return to care within 6 months).

While a reduction in emancipations was not an explicit outcome for the study, we found that a somewhat smaller share of the treatment group emancipated, compared with the control group (23% compared with 36%, p<.10). However, the percentage that discharged to adoption did not differ significantly by experimental assignment group; overall 41 percent had an adoption or guardianship finalized. Looking at case goals other than reunification, the second most common goal, regardless of experimental assignment group, was adoption (21% of the sample) and the third most common goal was long term foster care (13%). Seven percent had guardianship as a goal.

As shown in Table 5, a significantly larger percentage of children in the treatment group exited during the study period than did children in the control group. Length of stay in foster care did not vary significantly by experimental group membership among children who had been discharged, nor among children who had not been discharged. Finally, of the children who had been discharged from care, the percentage re-entering did not differ significantly by experimental group membership.

Table 5. Discharge from foster care, length of stay, and re-entries into foster care

		Experimental group assignment		
	n	Treatment	Control	
Discharged from foster care during study period	204	83%	70%	*
Length of stay (months)				
Among children discharged	156	10.3	10.8	
Among children not discharged	48	24.7	22.2	
Re-entered foster care, among those discharged	156	18%	10%	
Re-entered foster care, among those reunified	106	26%	10%	
Discharge reasons, among children discharged from care during study period	156			
Adoption Finalized		14%	14%	
Age of Majority		2%	0%	
Child Adjudged		1%	1%	
Emancipation		5%	8%	
Guardianship		8%	7%	
Incarcerated		0%	1%	
Last recorded case goal, among children not discharged from care during study period	47			
Reunification		35%	40%	
Adoption or guardianship		41%	33%	
Goal not related to permanency		24%	27%	
Permanency outcomes, among children not reunified during study period	98			

Table 5. Discharge from foster care, length of stay, and re-entries into foster care

	n	Experimental group assignment		
		Treatment	Control	
Not discharged		39%	57%	*
Adopted		43%	28%	
Emancipated		14%	11%	

*: p<.10 (*), p<.05 (**)

In addition to the analyses shown above in Table 5, we also estimated logistic regression models for all the outcomes, with the exception of the number of placements, which was assessed using a Poisson model. We ran models controlling for the differences in the treatment and control groups attributed to the children having been referred for neglect—this was the only characteristic that differed significantly across the two groups—as well as bivariate models. The models controlling for neglect yielded nearly identical results to the bivariate models; all the findings were consistent with the findings shown above in Table 5.

Finally, we re-ran analyses shown in Table 5 above, as well as the logistic and Poisson regression models described above, without excluding the children who had exited care prior to the beginning of the study period. Findings from these additional analyses were very similar to the findings described above, with no new statistically significant impacts emerging, or any previously statistically significant impacts present.

In summary, the likelihood of exiting to reunification did not differ significantly for treatment and control group children. Among all children exiting care, regardless of discharge reason, treatment group children were no more likely than control group children to re-enter care. However, among those who did reunify, treatment group children were more likely than control group children to re-enter care. (See Figure 1.)[10] Keep in mind that, while the group who did not reunify includes those who discharged from foster care for reasons other than reunification, it also includes children who remained in foster care at the end of the study period. Specifically, among the children not reunified, 35 percent had been adopted, 12 percent had emancipated, 4 percent were discharged from foster care for other reasons, and 49 percent remained in foster care.

We were also interested to know whether the total number of family connections (discovered) was associated with the likelihood that children would experience positive outcomes, and similarly,

---

[10] This is a non-experimental analysis because randomization did not occur among children who were reunified.

whether the number of connections that had interactions (engaged with the Family Finding specialist) was associated with positive outcomes.[11] It might be expected that the greater the number of

Figure 1. Reunification findings
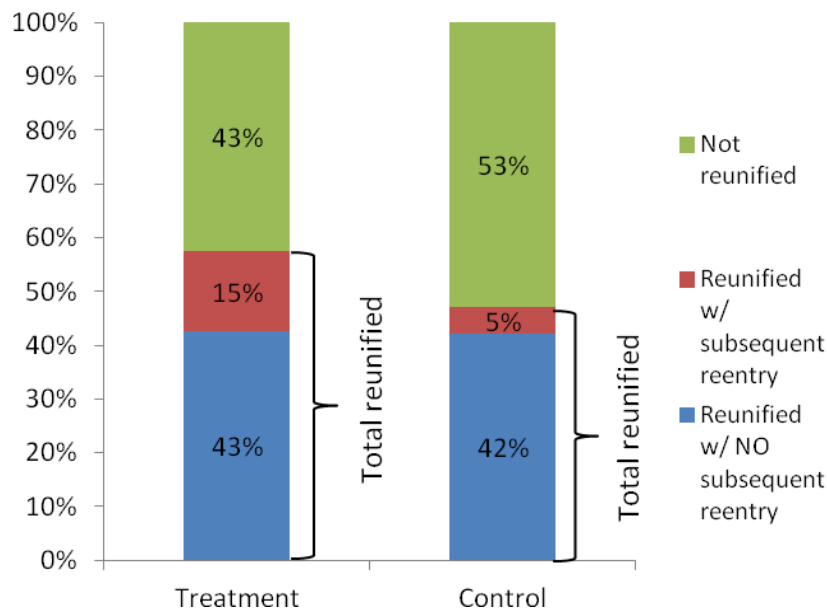
connections identified and engaged, the greater the likelihood of positive permanency outcomes for youth. First, it seems plausible that the larger the pool of connections, the greater the likelihood that the pool includes a connection who can serve as a permanency resource for the child. Second, it may be that the identification and engagement of numerous connections provides a supportive network that enhances children's well-being, making them better prepared for a successful reunification, and also provides a supportive network for the birth parents, enhancing their ability to reunify with the child.

Such an analysis is non-experimental, since it can only be carried out with children who received Family Finding services. As shown in Table 6 on the next page, outcomes do not appear to differ based on whether or not a child had at least 40 total connections, with one exception. Specifically, the percentage of children placed with relatives as of their most recent placement was smaller for children who had at least 40 connections than it was for those who had fewer total connections identified. Additionally, outcomes do not differ depending on whether the child had at least 6 connections that interacted with the FF specialist.

---

[11] As described earlier, the model emphasizes discovering a minimum of 40 family members as a key component. Additionally, during trainings of Family Finding workers, Kevin Campbell, one of the model developers, cites engaging with at least six family connections as another important element of the model. Detailed information on the number and types of family connections discovered and engaged is provided in the next section of this report which describes the study's implementation findings.

Table 6. Reunification, number of placements, relative placements, reunification goal among children in treatment group, by number of connections and by number of connections that had interactions

	Total number of connections		Number of connections that had interactions	
	< 40	>= 40	< 6	>= 6
Reunified	52%	52%	53%	49%
Placement: With relative as of most recent placement	52%	33% *	50%	49%
Goal: Most recent goal is related to returning home	54%	65%	55%	61%
Number of placements: >= 2	56%	59%	56%	59%
Discharged	77%	72%	76%	77%

*: $p<.10$ (*)

We wondered if the number of connections discovered, and/or the number of connections who had engaged (i.e., interactions), might be associated with outcomes, but that perhaps the a priori "tipping points" of 40 (for total connections discovered) and 6 (for connections with interactions) were not appropriate. To examine this, we plotted the number of connections and the number of connections with interactions separately for children who achieved the positive outcomes and those who did not, as shown in Figures 2-5 below. Figures 2 and 3 show how the numbers of connections, and number of connections that had interactions, varies for children who were discharged to reunification and those who were not. There does not appear to be a clear "tipping point" for the number of connections that might matter for the outcome of reunification (Figure 2), nor for the number of connections that had interactions (Figure 3). Graphs were similar for the other outcomes. It is clear from the graphs that many children with fewer connections do achieve reunification, as shown in Figure 2. Figures 4 and 5 show how the number of connections, and number of connections that had interactions, varied for those treatment group children who were discharged from foster care during the study period (regardless of discharge reason). Again, there does not appear to be a clear pattern of association between number of connections and discharge, nor between number of connections that had interactions and discharge.

Figure 2. Number of connections among treatment group children, by whether or not discharged to reunification

Figure 3. Number of connections that had interactions among treatment group children, by whether or not discharged to reunification
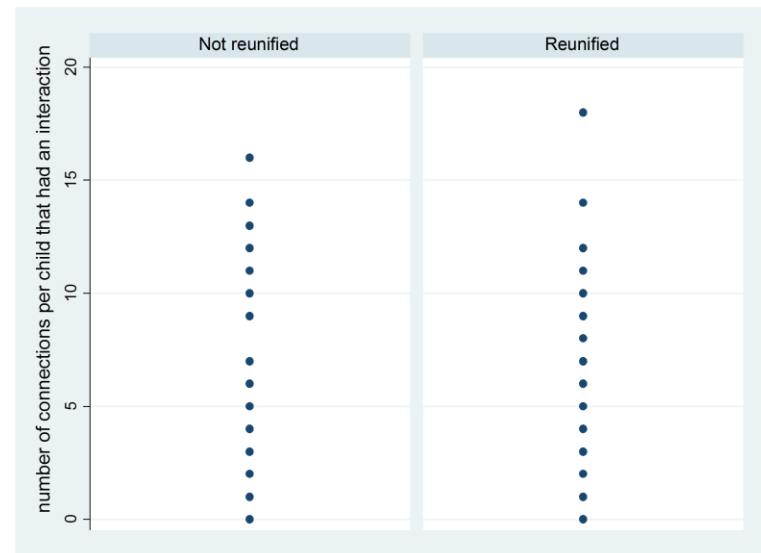
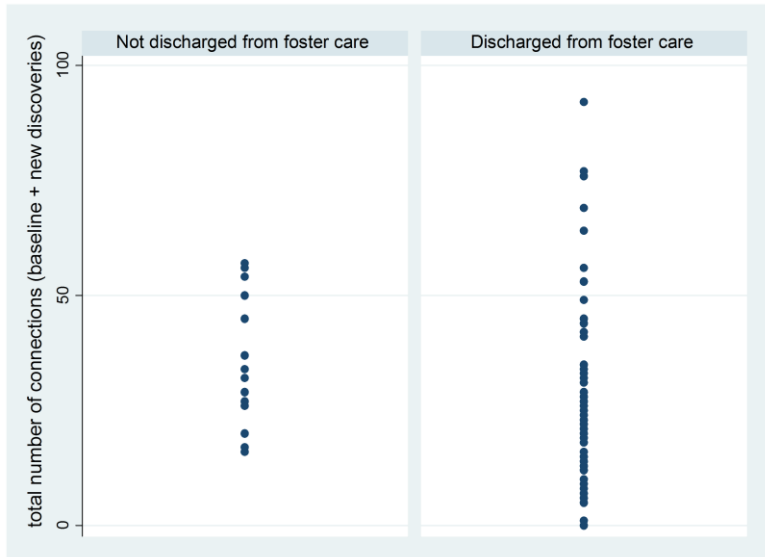**Figure 4. Number of connections among treatment group children, by whether or not discharged from foster care**

Figure 5. Number of connections that had interactions among treatment group, by whether or not discharged from foster care
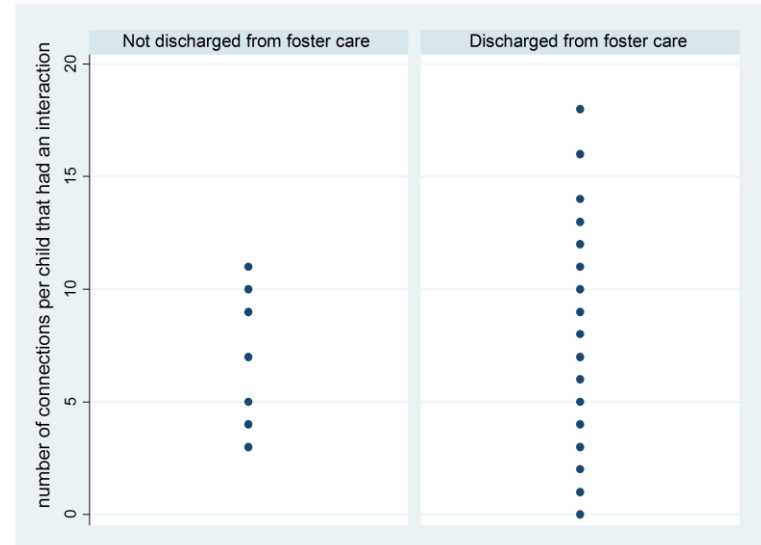
IMPLEMENTATION FINDINGS

Program description

Family Finding components. Throughout the evaluation, the Family Finding model was implemented by a Family Finding specialist, who is not a case carrying worker. Each child who received Family Finding services was first assigned to an emergency response worker who transfers the case to a court dependency worker who oversees the case through the initial court hearings. During the Family Finding service period, the case could be transferred again to a family services worker depending on the case goals. Below we describe how each of the Family Finding components—discovery, engagement, planning, decision-making, evaluation, and follow-up supports—was implemented. Information on the length of family finding services is also presented.

Discovery. During the discovery phase, the Family Finding specialists used a variety of methods to attempt to discover at least 40 family members or other adult supports for each child on their caseloads. Figure 6 shows the number of family connections known at the beginning of the case,[12] and those newly discovered as a result of Family Finding.

Figure 6. Number of family connections at start of Family Finding and found during Family Finding, n=116
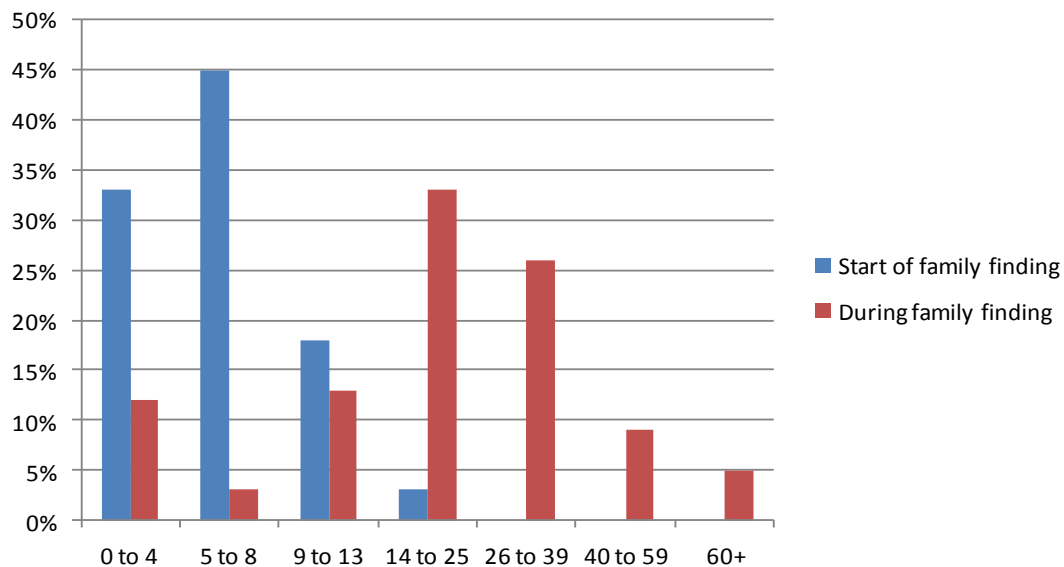
* Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

---

[12] These connections were referred to as 'baseline connections' in the Family Finding database, , to determine whom the agency was already aware of. Baseline connections are those discovered as a result of the first conversation with the child's caseworker. Any persons found subsequently were considered new discoveries.

For a vast majority of cases (96%), 13 connections or less were known at the start of the case. After the Family Finding services were initiated, in a large majority (87%) of the cases, specialists found up to 40 connections. On average, a total of 30 family connections were discovered for each case. Also on average, six family connections were already known at the beginning of the Family Finding case, and 23 new family connections were discovered during Family Finding. However, there was a large range, and some specialists found up to 92 family connections for each of their cases. Maternal family members were discovered more often than paternal relatives, full siblings, or other[13] connections. On average, it took 30 days from random assignment for Family Finding specialists to make a new discovery.

Table 7. Average number of family members known at start of case and discovered during Family Finding, by relationship type, n =116

Relationship Type	Start of Family Finding	During Family Finding	Total
Maternal	3	12	14
Paternal	1	8	9
Full Siblings	1	<1	1
Other	1	4	5
Total	**6**	**23**	**30**

Immediately after a child was assigned to receive services, the specialist set up a meeting with the child's caseworker to start gathering relevant information about the case. The goal was to conduct the first meeting within one week of the child's enrollment in the services, though in some cases, it was difficult to reach the caseworker within this timeframe. During this meeting the specialist explained the Family Finding project and his or her role, and the purpose of the services. The specialist also collected information about any concerns the worker had, determined the best mode of communication to provide case updates to the worker, gathered information about known family, and documented any other possible leads for finding others.

"I would say that's it helpful and in some cases we've really hit over 40 and I think …when you have that number you really can walk away with a core number emerging as active…keeping that number in your head really makes sure that you don't rush too quickly into making a plan without ensuring you have the people at the table." – Family Finding staff

---

[13] Other connections included those who were not related to the child but potentially could play a supportive role in the child's life.

During the discovery phase, the specialists sent weekly update emails to each caseworker, detailing case progress. However, the specialists followed up closely after discoveries to determine if caseworkers had questions or concerns about family members discovered. Figure 7 details the average percentage of connections discovered using the variety of discovery methods available to the specialists. More connections were discovered through the case file review and engaging with the parents or family members. Internet searches, talking with the child, and talking with the caseworker produced the least amount of connections. Below we describe the various approaches implemented as part of the discovery process.

Figure 7. Average number of family connections found by discovery method, n=116*
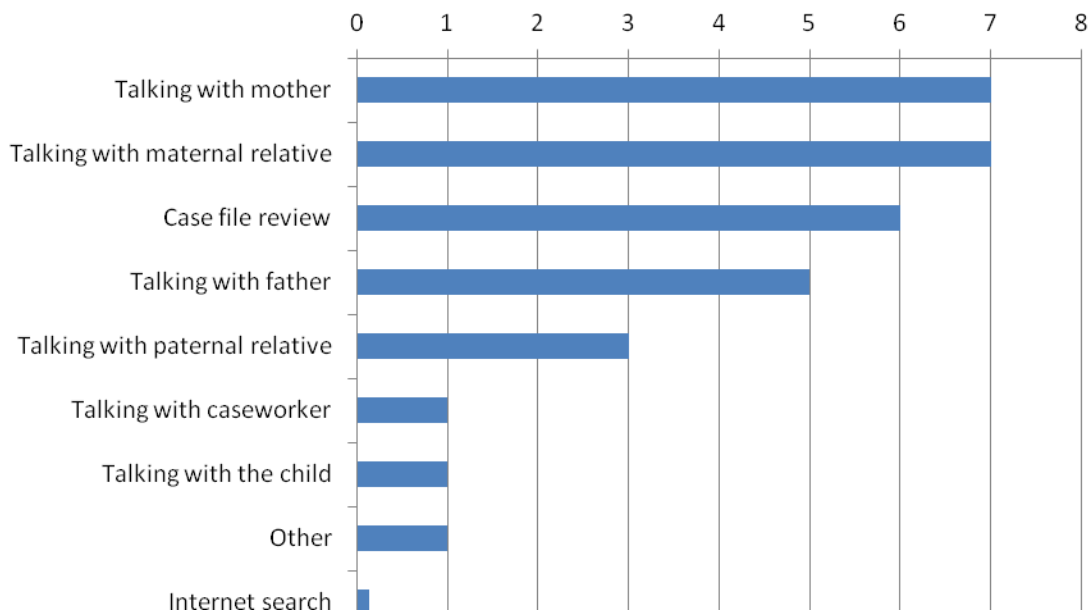
*Categories were not mutually exclusive.

- *Case file review.* The case file review was usually conducted after the first meeting with the caseworker. During the review, the specialists conducted a thorough check of the child welfare record to search for names, contact information, and other clues for discovering additional people. First, the specialists obtained a copy of the "Who's Who" document created by the child's emergency response worker who conducted the investigation of the case. The "Who's Who" form could include information on birth parents or significant relatives, as well as names of other professionals such as attorneys, placement providers and therapists.[14] Specialists reported that the amount of information on this form varied by case but generally contained only a few names of

_____

[14] The family members or others listed on the "Who's Who" form were not counted as having been "discovered" by the Family Finding specialists. These individuals were included as baseline connections.

individuals. The specialist also looked for any safety concerns for visits (e.g., an adult in the home with a history of domestic violence). The specialist may have returned to the case file multiple times to check for updates or to look for information missed during the initial review. The county's state automated child welfare information system (CWS/CMS) was available to search, but the specialists noted that it was not useful in gathering information on family members.

- *Internet searches.* The specialists utilized free and paid online searches[15] to discover family members but used US Search or other paid resources as a last resort if free searches were unsuccessful. The specialists discovered that international search engines were limited and found it best to make direct contacts with people for help. When searching internationally, the specialists contacted local social service agencies and community organizations for assistance. Email proved to be more effective than phone calls for international searches because some families did not have phones.

- *Interviewing children and parents.* The Family Finding specialists asked youth (if old enough) and their parents directly about any known family. The Family Finding specialists reported that it took a number of conversations to build rapport with birth parents and to explain the purpose of the Family Finding services. The parents often needed time to fully process their child's removal from home and get used to the number of professionals with whom they suddenly had contact. For incarcerated parents, the specialists conducted in-person visits to talk about potential family connections. In other instances, the specialists assisted birth parents by providing transportation for parent-child visits and used the opportunity to engage the parent.

  Parents who participated in a focus group indicated that during the discovery phase, the Family Finding specialists explained that they would try to find family members. Some parents indicated they initially were unaware that one of the program's purposes is to find family members to be a back-up plan in case reunification efforts were not successful. Some parents reported that the inclusion of relatives in their case plan undermined the work they were trying to do to reunite with their children. Despite this, parents noted that their first impressions of the specialists were "good" and that the specialists made them feel comfortable enough to share information with them. Family Finding specialists indicated that birth parents had mixed reactions to providing information about relatives. Some parents were excited to find family and welcomed the support of Family Finding services, while others were not as open to reconnect with family members from whom they may have intentionally disconnected.

- *Interviewing family members.* The Family Finding specialists noted that family members identified early on through the "Who's Who" document or discovered through conversations with the parent, youth, and caseworker were used as resources for identifying more family. Specialists interviewed family members to get a sense of the larger family network if the family member was willing to share this information. Specialists would attempt to collect full names, relationship to the child, and contact information about other family members.

---

[15] Internet searches included US Search, birth records, zabasearch.com, 411.com, whitepages.com, google/googlephone, pipl.com, seekyou.com, Facebook, and other Internet search engines.

Engagement. The Family Finding specialists' responsibilities for engaging relatives and other caring adults included making initial contact with these individuals, explaining to them what the services involved, and answering their questions. On average, it took 30 days to begin engaging family members and on average, the specialists engaged with 5 persons (17% of all family connections) per child, out of the 30 total family connections typically found. Specialists engaged most frequently with maternal family members; on average, engaging with three maternal family members versus one paternal family member. The total average number of interactions that a Family Finding specialist had (across all 5 connections typically engaged with) on each case, was 16.

"This agency [Seneca] is neutral, they're not representing CPS, not the kids, not me. It's a good sounding board. Sometimes you just need to talk and just listen. We already know we messed up, we sometimes just need to vent so we don't snap. That part helps right there." –Parent

Family Finding specialists attempted to contact all persons for whom they had contact information. The specialists targeted connections that were readily able and willing to be a support for the child and parent, which was determined by the connections' responses to their outreach. Even when connections were inappropriate or the child welfare agency advised against certain connections having contact with the child and the birth parent, the specialist still contacted them to gather information about the family. The specialists typically kept the caseworkers abreast of all communication with family connections, informing the caseworker which connections would be contacted and not contacting those the caseworker objected.

"[It's] consistent engagement and being available. Because we're not just doing Family Finding, but offering rides, supports, trying to garner other resources, or point them to resources. A lot of communication goes on, with the family, the client depending on the situation. So we've built some significant relationships with both the parents and the relatives." – Family Finding staff

When first approaching family members, the specialists explained that the child was in foster care, and let them know that they were working with the parents to contact others who could be a support, and that they wanted to get a sense of how big the family is. The specialists explained their roles and differentiated themselves from the public agency caseworker. Family members in the focus group noted that the specialists told them that the goal was to find out which family members can give

support to a child and be a support system for the parent so that foster care is not the only option. The specialist did not divulge any details about the case; if the relative inquired, he or she would be directed to the child's caseworker. Specialists tried to create comfortable environments and often met family in their own homes. The specialists reported using food, pictures of the child, small gifts, cards, and flowers to engage the family members. At times, specialists would sit with family members for long periods of time listening to their stories. They reported that family appreciated being able to share information without feeling rushed or judged.

During the engagement phase, the specialists had ongoing communication with the caseworker, so they were aware of the case's progress and which connections were being contacted. Parents were able to express which family members they did not want to be contacted, though if this became a stumbling block to the services, the child's caseworker had the final say on which family members would be contacted. Family members and parents noted that the specialists typically kept weekly contact with them. The specialists tended to have a hands-on approach. They played a large role in supporting parents and relatives by offering services such as transportation or visitation, trying to obtain other needed resources, and referring them to needed resources. Relatives and parents mentioned that Family Finding specialists coordinated visits with the children, assisted in planning events for the family, and provided transportation to appointments or meetings. A parent advocate employed by Seneca was also an additional support for the parents. The advocate specialized in engaging parents dealing with drug and alcohol addictions and the Family Finding specialists noted that the advocate was often able to engage parents battling those issues better than the specialists.

Planning. During the planning component, the Family Finding specialists held meetings with family members they successfully engaged with in an attempt to identify three viable plans to support the child and parent. There was no set number of planning meetings that occurred and the number of meetings varied by case. On average two family meetings were held per child and most of the meetings were facilitated by the Family Finding specialist and did not include the caseworker. On average, three family connections were invited and attended family meetings. Two maternal connections were invited and one attended on average, while one paternal and "other" family member was invited and attended on average. Ten percent of all connections for a child were invited and 9 percent of all connections

attended at least one meeting. The average time to the first meeting was held after random assignment was 69 days.[16]

The goal of the meeting was to detail the child and parent's needs and begin identifying ways the family can support them. The end goal was to pick a family team leader whose job it was to represent the family with the public agency and gather the team together in times of need in the future, without a professional's help. Caseworkers were invited to every family meeting, though specialists noted that few attended. The specialists attempted to schedule meetings at times and locations that were amenable to the family, which included evening hours or weekends. If needed, the

"It's really important to be balanced there because we can't come across to the social worker as pro-family, or to the family, as pro-system. So it's navigating and it's tricky…..I personally find there's a facilitating from the sidelines kind of role." – Family Finding staff

specialists provided transportation to ensure that everyone was able to participate. When caseworkers were present at family meetings facilitated by the specialists, they were there as a support to the Family Finding specialist. Caseworkers were also there to answer families' questions, typically about legal issues, solidify roles that family will play moving forward, and provide information about the foster care system and public agency processes.

The Family Finding specialists reported that they typically participated in one formal public agency-run meeting – the Team Decision Meeting (TDM). In preparation for these meetings, the specialist would meet with small groups of family members to gauge their commitment level and prepare them for the TDM process. Typically a limited number of family members participated in the TDMs. The TDMs were facilitated by a TDM facilitator who was not the child's caseworker, and were held every time there was a placement change. The Family Finding specialists were not routinely notified of these meetings, so their attendance at these meetings was sporadic.

During the TDM, Family Finding specialists reported their role to be a neutral party between the family and the agency representatives. The specialists reported that they facilitated from the sidelines, allowing the facilitator to have a driving role; they were there to fill in missing information or speak up to clarify issues when necessary, since they typically were the closest with the family.

Decision-making. During the decision-making component, which often was combined with the planning component, the Family Finding specialists helped the family develop a series of plans for the child and

---

[16] The median time to the first meeting was 43 days.

the parent, but the decision ultimately rested with the child's caseworker who determined the next steps for the case. The specialists reported that some caseworkers were not open to collaborating with the specialists to make decisions for the family, while others were willing to include the specialists in the process. The specialists tracked the commitments that family members made toward legal permanency, physical permanency, as well as emotional permanency, or "relational permanency." Legal permanency was tracked by the connection's willingness to engage in the steps to become a permanent placement if reunification was not the goal. Family connections were also documented as alternatives if reunification efforts were not successful.

Throughout the evaluation period, the specialists and the project's oversight committee worked collaboratively toward making emotional permanency goals more concrete and measureable for each connection. For example, instead of attempting to document that a family connection was willing to support a family, they attempted to measure in what ways and how often. Family members may have agreed to provide respite for the parent, provide help to parents with transportation for meetings, conduct regular day or overnight visits with the child, or keep ongoing contact with the child. One parent noted that after she was reunified with her child, the child's foster parent became an extension of the family, and helped to provide respite and other support. Figure 8 shows the plans agreed upon by family connections.

Figure 8. Type of plans that family connections agreed to, n=116
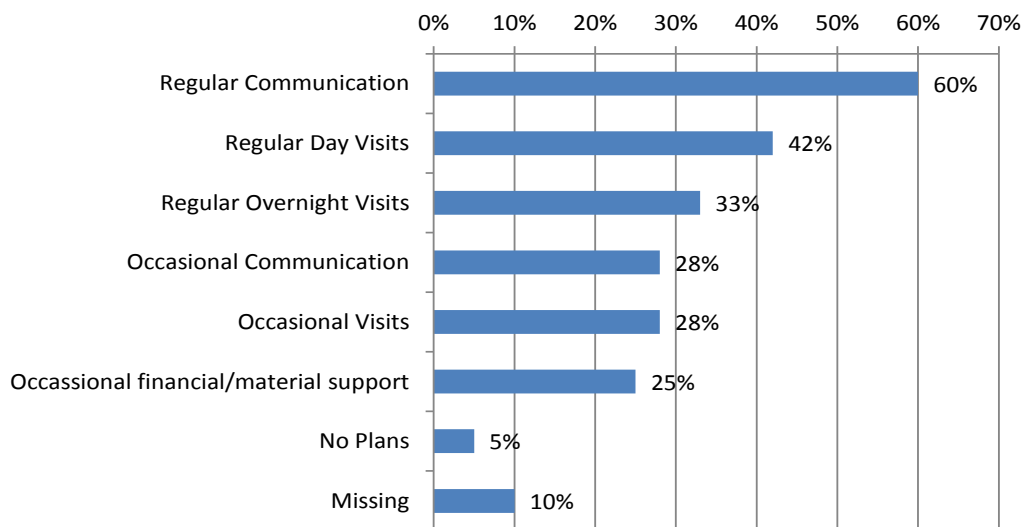
* Family connections could agree to more than one type of plan.

Eighty-five percent of the children served had family members commit to ongoing contact after the Family Finding case ended.[17] Figure 9 shows the number of family connections that committed to family plans. Most of the cases had permanency goals of reunification, with timelines longer than the length of time the Family Finding specialist was working with the case, so legal permanency could often not be addressed yet with the family. If it appeared that a parent was not likely to commit to the reunification plan, the specialists may have pushed to pursue legal permanency. Even with a case goal of reunification, the specialists stressed that a back-up plan was needed to ensure that the parent had enough support to prevent reentry into the foster care system. They tried to strike a delicate balance between giving the family a voice in case planning and being respectful of the reunification process by being supportive of the birth parent. On average, two individuals agreed to be a placement resource for the child.

Figure 9. Percentage of children with family plans developed, n=116
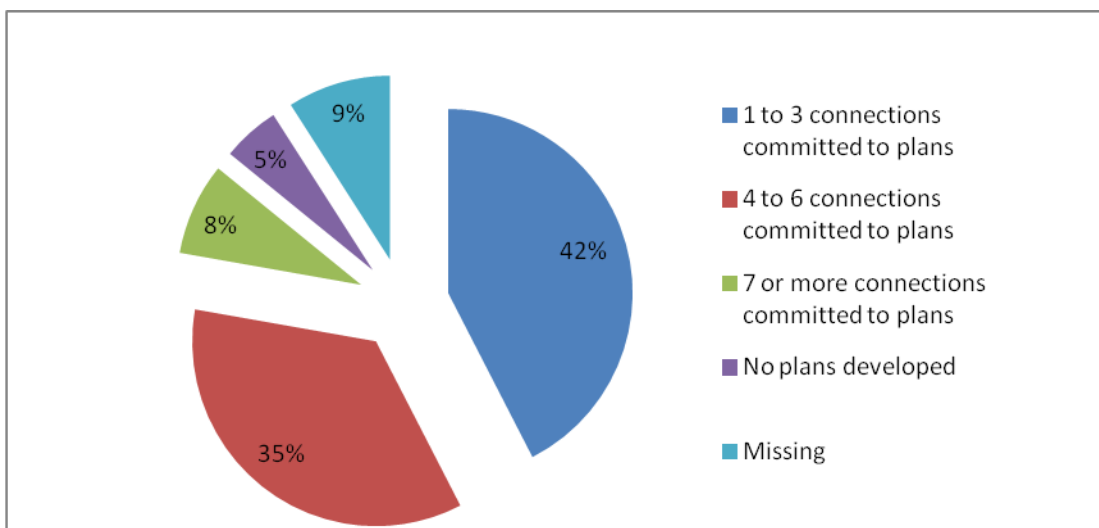
Evaluation and follow-up supports. The Family Finding specialists did not implement these components of the model in a systematic way and thus did not regularly participate in providing any follow-up supports for the family or in any evaluation of the plans that were developed. However, the Family Finding supervisor developed a monthly update of active Family Finding cases, which was shared with the management at the public agency to review the progress of each case. The monthly update provided information on plans developed to achieve physical, emotional, and legal permanency. Each

---

[17] This question in the Family Finding database, which asked if any family committed to supporting the child, was added to the database several months after the start of the evaluation, so this information is missing on several cases.

commitment was tracked to determine if the family made any progress towards achieving these goals. In addition, there were instances where the public agency or the family asked the Family Finding specialists to resume services if needed and the specialists were available after Family Finding case closure for the family to call for support.

Family Finding case length. On average, a Family Finding case lasted slightly less than six months (5.7 months). The Family Finding staff struggled to determine the best indicator of time to close the Family Finding case during the evaluation. Cases were served longer than the anticipated goal of 3 months, and the first set of cases were open on average, for over six months (6.6 months). Throughout the evaluation period, Family Finding staff worked on articulating the case goals to determine case closure.

By the second year of the evaluation, Family Finding staff reported that when a family leader, strong family team, and family plans were established, it was time to terminate services. If a plan had not been clearly established, the Family Finding specialist would continue working the case to ensure a plan was laid out for the child. After plans were established, the specialists could continue to provide services or referrals to services to help stabilize the family (e.g., helping the family find housing). If other issues arose, the specialists were still available and could be reached by phone after case closure.

Challenges and facilitators

There were many challenges and facilitators to implementing Family Finding, several of which were unique to serving children at the front end of the child welfare service system. Below we describe first the challenges related to engaging the caseworker, then those related to engaging the families. Finally, we list the overall facilitators to the success of the program.

- *Ongoing communication and education*. The Family Finding specialists noted difficulties making initial contact with the child's caseworker. When a case was assigned to a different worker or unit, this information was often not communicated to the Family Finding specialist, which often postponed the start of services. Also during focus groups, caseworkers expressed confusion about the purpose of the program and how to process the information Family Finding staff provided them. Early on in the evaluation, caseworkers were not clear of the purpose of the services, and some were not aware that the services were available. Some caseworkers expected only the discovery component, or did not understand that the services had two adjoining goals: legal permanency as well as emotional permanency. During the evaluation period, the public agency suffered staff layoffs making it difficult to identify the assigned worker as there were often delays in reassignment of cases. Also, it took some time to develop a system to inform caseworkers of the progress of the case. Over the evaluation period, Seneca and HSA worked together to refine this process so it could better meet the caseworkers' needs.

- *Stability versus family engagement.* The Family Finding specialists and some public agency staff noted that some caseworkers did not see the value of building a strong family support network if the child was already in a stable placement. They reported not wanting to move a child and risk re-traumatizing the child simply because family was found. Caseworkers felt that some of the cases selected to receive the intervention were inappropriate in that the children were already placed with a relative, or were already connected with family. This in turn, would create additional effort for which the caseworkers were not prepared. For example, if the caseworker developed a plan of action for already identified family, and the Family Finding services introduced new family, the caseworkers had to reengage more family members and reevaluate their plans. Family Finding staff mentioned the difficulty they experienced having discussions with some caseworkers about back-up plans and the value of including more family in the case if decisions had already been made about how the case will proceed. If family visits were established, some caseworkers expressed frustration that Family Finding specialists were unable to do the follow-up in terms of setting up visits between relatives and the child.[18]

- *Transition of Family Finding case.* Site visit participants expressed concerns about transitioning the Family Finding work to the caseworker. They noted that it would be a more seamless process if the caseworker was more involved with Family Finding from the beginning. Family Finding staff admitted that it was often difficult to get caseworkers involved in engaging family members on their own or participating in family meetings.[19] Public agency staff also voiced concerns about how to transition the information gathered by Family Finding staff from unit to unit since at the time of the evaluation, the Family Finding specialists were unable to enter any data into CWS/CMS other than names of collateral contacts.

During the site visits, challenges specifically related to working with the children, their parents and relatives were mentioned as described below:

- *Confusion about purpose of services.* Some family members initially thought that the sole purpose of the services was to find a placement resource for the child, and some were intimidated by this notion and less willing to engage if they had to commit to this plan. Some parents indicated that they were not initially aware that the services intended to find back-up plans for reunification. During the evaluation period, the specialists became more skilled at communicating the two adjoining goals of building a family support network and securing back-up placement resources if reunification plans failed in the future.

- *Establishing paternity.* Several site visit participants reported difficulty in verifying the paternity of alleged fathers. Mothers may have been unaware of the child's paternity, or paternity may have not been legally established. If legal paternity was not yet established, the Family Finding specialists could not engage with paternal family members, which prolonged the case or prevented engagement with paternal family entirely.

- *Unaccompanied and undocumented minors.* A subgroup of the children receiving Family Finding was unaccompanied and undocumented minors reportedly drawn to San Francisco because of its

---

[18] Family Finding specialists do not have authority to establish visitation.
[19] Families were more available outside of the city and on weekends, which made it difficult for public agency staff to attend.

sanctuary city designation.[20] Family Finding staff noted that it was difficult to reach out to family members from their home countries when youth were guarded about this information because of fear of deportation. Site visit participants purported that some youth were coached by agency attorneys about what to say so authorities would not deport them. It created a challenge for the Family Finding staff to link the youth with family connections with limited information. Also, international searches took much effort and time in order to support unaccompanied and undocumented minors, as there were few international search resources available.

> *"I think as family finders we wedge ourselves into intimate places in people's lives. It's painful to open that stuff up and not have support for the families so they can work through it. Ultimately, something much deeper has to do with that, and that's why the family is disjointed. Finding [family] is not enough. I need to hook them up with someone who can help them mend. I think having this role, we end up being part therapist, and part family finder and it can be heavy for us." –Family Finding staff*

- *Family reluctance.* The Family Finding specialists reported the reluctance of family members to open up and participate in the Family Finding process. Some family members were not interested in being involved for various reasons. Some of the relatives had been supporting the birth families for some time, and were overwhelmed and overburdened. In some instances, relatives were taking care of the siblings of the child who was brought into agency custody and they did not have the resources to care for more children. Family Finding staff also reported that many of the relatives were guarded and did not like "airing their dirty laundry" to strangers.

- *Sensitive and therapeutic nature of the services.* Family Finding staff mentioned struggling with their role in dealing with sensitive family issues. They often were the mediator among family members or between the family and the public agency, and they struggled with how to handle delicate matters. They also mentioned being fearful of triggering more emotional stress or "digging up" painful memories by reconnecting family. Family Finding staff also mentioned tensions between the birth parents and relatives because parents may have felt threatened by the presence of family members who the public agency may think can take better care of their children. In a focus group of relatives, it was also mentioned that families may have deeply rooted differences and conflicts that cannot be resolved by one family meeting. Family Finding staff also mentioned that it can be difficult to convince families that the primary goal of Family Finding is not just to seek placement but also to be a support to the child and the parent.

- *Boundaries.* Some public agency staff noted that the Family Finding staff at times became too enmeshed in family dynamics and become overprotective of the families. They explained that because the Family Finding staff worked so closely with the families, they often become entangled in family issues when caseworkers felt they should have been more objective. Some caseworkers noted that Family Finding staff sometimes withheld family information from them. Caseworkers perceived this division, and this potentially could have affected their willingness to participating in the Family Finding process.

---

[20] Sanctuary city is a term given to a city that protects illegal immigrants. The city does not allow police or other municipal employees to inquire about a person's immigration status.

- *Pace of Family Finding cases*. Some birth parents indicated that the intervention was rushed at times and that the Family Finding staff could be too persistent. The urgent nature of the case could conflict with birth parents because they felt pressure from many systems including the public agency and the courts. The Family Finding staff also noted that they felt the birth parents needed more time to process the circumstances of the case and the idea of reconnecting with relatives. They felt the original three-month case duration may have been too quick of a timeframe to serve cases. Also, caseworkers reported that sometimes Family Finding staff were too aggressive with families and inappropriately pushed to gather information or engage when family were not interested in participating.

Site visit respondents mentioned several facilitators that contributed to the implementation of the program:

- *Family Finding specialists' approach with families.* Family Finding staff reported that the breadth of services[21] that the Family Finding specialists provided and their hands-on approach appeared to help the specialists better engage parents and other family members. The additional support helped develop a stronger bond and trust with families, and the additional services they secured helped to bolster placements in efforts to help ensure that children did not reenter the foster care system. Parents and relatives often commented that the Family Finding specialists were culturally competent and nonjudgmental in their interactions with them. They noted that the specialists worked hard at encouraging a welcoming environment in which they were free to share information without fear of being judged.

- *Caseworker buy-in.* Family Finding staff noted that one of the biggest facilitators to the success of a Family Finding case is gaining buy-in of the process from the caseworker. It is the caseworker's responsibility to carry the family's plans forward, and without the caseworker's agreement, the Family Finding case will most likely stagnate. Caseworkers commented that the specialists were accommodating, presented themselves as a support, were willing to go at the worker's pace and consult with them to determine best approaches. Whenever problems were reported by caseworkers, Seneca worked promptly to address and resolve the issues. This collaborative approach was lauded by public agency staff members.

- *Dedicated specialist position.* Site visit participants stressed the importance of having a separate worker whose primary job was to carry out Family Finding. This way the specialist could devote significantly more time to discovering and engaging with family members. Respondents noted that it would be difficult for the full Family Finding intervention to be done by a child's caseworker in addition to their other case responsibilities.

- *Parent advocate.* A parent advocate, who was a Seneca employee, was available to engage parents who struggled with substance abuse and to be an additional support for families with whom the Family Finding specialist was having difficulty connecting. The advocate had first-hand experience as

---

[21] Services for children, parents, or family members included transportation to appointments and or family meetings, access to a parent advocate, coordination of parent/child or sibling visits or other family events, and referrals or assistance with obtaining resources such as housing or employment supports.

a parent in the child welfare system and could help relate better to the parents, or make them more comfortable with participating in the services.

- *Relationship between Seneca and HSA.* Site visit respondents reported that the strong relationship between Seneca and the public agency facilitated the overall implementation of the Family Finding program. Seneca has a strong reputation for providing quality services to youth through numerous contracts with the public agency. Due to their strong track record, public agency staff were more receptive to Family Finding. Also, the project's oversight committee, which was comprised of key staff from the public agency and Seneca, provided guidance for measuring data outputs and outcomes which helped in defining success for the program.

- *Co-location.* A cubicle for Family Finding staff was set up at the public agency to allow better access to caseworkers. Instead of phone calls, the Family Finding specialists could walk to the caseworkers' cubicles and track them down more easily. The cubicle also helped increase program visibility to other workers.

Description of similar services

During interviews and focus groups with public agency staff, we examined in-depth the available service context within which Family Finding was being implemented to determine how similar Family Finding services were to the "services as usual" received by all children. Overall, during the evaluation period, there were no available services similar to Family Finding for the target population of the evaluation.[22]

Caseworkers reported providing some services similar to (1) discovery and engagement and (2) planning and decision-making components of the Family Finding model. However, caseworkers noted the services they provided were less intense than Family Finding and implemented inconsistently.

> *"It's huge for a young person to feel like they belong somewhere, with someone who 'gets them.' As kids get older and the farther you get from your family of origin, you try to create that for yourself and it's not always healthy." – Public agency caseworker*

Services similar to discovery and engagement. The emergency response (ER) worker is the first to engage the family when the child enters the system. This worker does the upfront work of interviewing the child, the parents, and other family members to determine what type of connections to family the child currently has. The ER worker usually holds the case for one to two weeks and then the case is

---

[22] During the evaluation period, a private adoption agency, Family Builders by Adoption, provided Family Finding services for older youth who had been in care for extended periods of time. Youth with a goal of adoption, or for whom reunification was no longer an option, were referred to this agency. This grant had strong focus on legal permanency due to the extended time youth had been in foster care. As of the end of the evaluation period, this grant was discontinued.

transferred to the Child Dependency Unit (CDU). Site visit participants noted that initial family information was typically collected by ER workers on standard documents to be stored in the child's hard copy file. However, participants reported that the information was not consistently documented and that the information was at times lost when the case was transferred to the CDU unit. Throughout the evaluation period, the public agency made attempts at standardizing the practice of recording family information. Notably during the evaluation period, the county enacted a policy for children first entering foster care to have all known relatives searched for and contacted within 30 days of the child's removal from home. In line with the Fostering Connections legislation, the county hired a Seneca staff person to contact known relatives to make them aware that the child is in foster care and to notify them of their options to participate in the care and placement of the child.

The CDU workers are responsible for conducting more extensive searches for family members who can provide placements for the child. CDU workers may lose the opportunity to engage certain family members or recapture this information from the family because of the lapse in time between the child's initial removal from home and when the case is referred to them.

Participants noted that it is agency culture to search for relatives. They mentioned different search methods that were available, such as internet searches, if there was a need. Public agency staff noted that they often rely on school staff to learn more information about families and their backgrounds, and they also ask for hospital records. The caseworkers reported that they review case records of all their cases, yet admitted that they do not have the time to conduct follow-up with all names that are discovered. When attending court hearings, judges ask CDU workers about discovered family and will ask for updates on any placements that are made with relatives. Despite this, public agency staff noted that caseworkers will not continue searching past immediate family or family who are not in close geographical proximity to the child. The searching often ends once a relative is found and considered for placement, and there are no further attempts to find and engage additional family members.[23]

The public agency has a diligent search unit that is responsible for searching for biological parents of children in custody. The search is done to notify parents of the child protection involvement of the other parent and so that their parental rights may be terminated if the child's permanency goal changes to adoption. The diligent search unit has access to jail records, court documents, and other

---

[23] It is worth noting that parents of children referred for Family Finding services (participating in our focus groups) noted that they were never asked to identify other relatives in order to help build a supportive network, and that to their knowledge, their relatives were never contacted by any public agency workers.

government databases (such as food stamps, child support, income support) that the Family Finding specialists do not have access to. In addition, caseworkers mentioned that the adoption unit will conduct searches for relatives when a child is made available for adoption, and independent living workers search for family to connect youth who are close to aging out. These services are generally not targeted towards children who first enter the foster care system.

Services similar to planning and decision-making

There are a few planning team meetings that are utilized during the course of a child welfare case. Team Decision Meetings (TDMs) are held when the child enters care and when there are any further placement changes. The TDMs are facilitated by a TDM facilitator who is not the child's caseworker. At these meetings, decisions are made about the direction of the case. Parents are encouraged to invite family members to the meetings.

Family conferencing meetings are facilitated by a separate public agency worker. The meeting is attended by the caseworker, the family, and representatives for support services such as a therapist. In the meeting they determine the permanent plan for the child and whether the parent has taken the necessary steps to be reunified with his or her child. Other family members can also be identified in this meeting as potential placements if the parent cannot care for the child. This process is facilitated by the public agency but driven by the family, who are encouraged to make their own decisions about the case. The parents identify family members to participate in the process, and it is up to the facilitator, with support from the caseworker, to locate and contact family members who have been identified. Family conferences are not held on a consistent basis, and the caseworkers determine when they are needed. During the second year of the evaluation, the public agency implemented a new initiative entitled, Meetings to Assess Permanency (MAP), which began in March 2010.[24]

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Family Finding has gained momentum across the country as state and local child welfare agencies have embraced the idea of increased family involvement and engagement. Research findings have been mixed on the added benefits of family involvement in child welfare practice. However, federal grant

---

[24] The MAP meeting is a forum for child welfare workers to present one of their cases each week to a committee of HSA supervisors and community-based agencies that focus on permanency planning (adoption, permanency mediation, Family Finding). The goal is to consult on individual youth and their long term plan for legal, relational and physical permanency. The individual worker and their supervisor leave the MAP meeting with ideas on how to move towards a greater level of permanency for the youth. Each youth's case is intended to be presented in a MAP meeting; the Family Finding supervisor also attends each meeting that is convened. Implementation of the MAP meetings was expected to shift attitudes, culture, and practice related to Family Finding and permanency within HSA.

awards and funding from private foundations have stimulated policy and practice to move in that direction for the past several years. The experimental evaluation in San Francisco was conducted to contribute to the growing evidence base of family involvement and engagement and marks the first experimental evaluation of Family Finding to date.

Program developers and managers were encouraged by anecdotal evidence and non-experimental research findings that showed children were reconnecting with family members and finding permanent homes with their relatives. San Francisco County experienced success in implementing Family Finding for older youth in foster care and sought, through this study, to examine how the intervention would work for all children new to out-of-home care, i.e., immediately following removal from their homes. In broadening the target population for the intervention to the "front end" of the system, San Francisco hoped to increase the frequency and timeliness of reunification and, if reunification was not possible, to place more children with relatives due to the efforts of Family Finding.

Unfortunately, the impact findings do not align with initial expectations. The likelihood of exiting to reunification did not differ significantly for the treatment and control group children, though a larger percentage of the treatment group was reunified during the study period. Children in the Family Finding group were significantly more likely to have a goal of reunification (than a goal of adoption) and experienced significantly fewer placements than those in the control group, but they also were more likely to return to care after being reunified. The last finding is concerning and raises the possibility that there may be a tradeoff between increasing connections to family members and risk of a failed reunification. While returning to placement is rarely (if ever) perceived as a good outcome in terms of permanency, it could be that the presence and engagement of family members allows caseworkers greater opportunities for relative placements, easing their decision to remove the child from their home yet again. While the numbers of children reentering care were too small in this study to explore this question further, future research on family engagement practices should do so.

It is important to note that qualitative findings indicated multiple barriers to full implementation of the six-step Family Finding model and, for the most part, the children and families served, i.e., the treatment group, did not receive the full complement of services. In particular, two components— evaluating permanency plans and providing follow-up supports—were not implemented by the Family Finding specialists in a systematic way. Further, while it was anticipated that the child's caseworker would "take up" where the Family Finding specialist left off through early collaboration in the Family Finding process, this did not often occur. While caseworkers received general training on Family Finding, they did not receive standardized training on how to implement the remaining steps to the model nor

were they required or expected to implement the remaining steps in a consistent or measurable manner. Unfortunately, we do not know to what degree, if any, this lack of full implementation of the model affected the findings.

While the impact findings are disappointing, the evaluation found impressive increases in family networks—both the numbers of family connections discovered and engaged as well as the plans developed for family members' continuing contact and support—for children in the Family Finding intervention group. However, these data were not part of the experimental design and no comparable data were collected for the control group. Due to these limitations, we were unable to compare differences in the size of social support networks for the children and their parents in the treatment and control groups.

Below we discuss the study's implications for future research and evaluation of family engagement interventions that will inform development and replication of Family Finding intervention programs.

Implications

Further analysis of the family circumstances and casework context that lead to successful reunifications and the role of Family Finding within this context may assist in the clarification of the findings. While it was hypothesized that engaging family members at the start of a case—at the time the child first enters out-of-home care—would enhance reunification, it may be that the goals of Family Finding need to be more explicitly aligned with the activities and steps necessary for a child to be successfully discharged to reunification.

First, it may be necessary to more closely examine the services and supports that are generally in place prior to a reunification occurring. Are the services and supports offered and provided by engaging family members actually needed for successful reunification when the child has only recently been removed from the home? Family Finding specialists were highly supportive of the birth parent— acting as a parent advocate while also being the liaison between the birth parent and the newly engaged family members. How do the advocacy efforts and supports provided to the birth parent by the Family Finding specialist directly relate to reunification efforts? And, perhaps more importantly, do the Family Finding specialists themselves have an impact on reunification, does the network of family members the specialists have engaged and nurtured have an impact, or is it some combination of both? Finally, family members were often engaged only as potential "back up" placement resources, in the event that reunification efforts failed, rather than as active participants in reunification efforts. Therefore, their

engagement may not have been expected to increase the likelihood of reunification yet would be expected to increase the likelihood of the child being placed with a relative.

Examining the intervention's impact on reunification highlights the differing directives and timelines of the Family Finding specialists and child caseworkers. Family Finding program staff and county child welfare managers knew that there would be challenges engaging caseworkers assigned to children at the "front end" due to a number of factors. First, a child's case shifts to different caseworkers during the first few weeks and months of the case—from emergency response workers to court dependency workers to the family service unit. In addition, caseworkers at the front end have a myriad of timelines to adhere to, contrasting with the caseworkers assigned to older children who have been in care a number of years.[25] Perhaps Family Finding efforts—either actual progress made by the birth parent toward meeting reunification requirements due to family engagement and support or the Family Finding specialists' advocacy work with the child's caseworker on behalf of the birth parent—have an impact on establishing a permanency goal of reunification (as this study found), but do not translate into an impact on the actual reunification event.

Another important aspect to consider in examining the findings is that timelines for reunification are typically 12 to 18 months, while Family Finding specialists were only involved in the case for a small portion of that time (the first six months). Family Finding specialists phased out of the case after the family meetings occurred and relied on the child's caseworker to carry out the plans developed. As noted earlier, we found that in general caseworkers did not continue carrying out the Family Finding efforts to the degree the Family Finding specialists would have liked. Family Finding specialists would actively provide supports, such as transportation, so family members could visit the child and attend family meetings, while caseworkers did not feel they had the time to provide that level of support and felt that family members should take the initiative on their own.

The challenges to full implementation of the model suggest that more research is needed to determine whether and how fidelity to the model can be attained. Specifically, the child's caseworker must be fully engaged in the services, and the continuity of services after Family Finding case closure should be ensured. In addition, the specification of timing of the start of Family Finding services proved difficult, in part due to the different assignments of caseworkers. Program staff suggested initiating Family Finding efforts prior to a child's removal, during provision of in-home services, thus, eliminating the transfer of the case from worker to worker.

---

[25] Older youth were the target population for San Francisco County's earlier Family Finding intervention.

In addition to examining the findings within a "reunification" context, Family Finding is also being implemented in a context where multiple placement moves are avoided as much as possible. Interviews with Family Finding specialists provided qualitative evidence that children's caseworkers were hesitant to move children from an initial placement setting, even if the placement change meant the child would move from a non-relative foster home to a relative's home. Placement stability was viewed as an important practice goal, and placement moves were to be avoided. Further examination of how decisions regarding placement moves are made in the context of Family Finding practice is warranted.

Other challenges raised include the difficulty Family Finding specialists faced in discovering 40 new family connections when targeting children new to out of home care. Our analyses of program outputs found that cases in which 40 or more family connections were discovered were neither more nor less likely to be associated with positive permanency outcomes, including reunification. A possible explanation for the lack of association could be that workers "ease off" on identifying connections, or on encouraging connections to become engaged, once they have identified or engaged connections they perceive to be key connections for the child. It seems plausible that for some children, such a key connection might be the first connection identified, or s/he might only be identified after numerous other connections have been identified. If success in finding key connections is in fact associated with the amount of continued effort put into finding and documenting connections, then one would not expect to find a tipping point in the data, nor, for that matter, any positive association between the number of documented connections and later outcomes.

Qualitative evidence from our site visits indicates that, while they faced challenges in meeting the goal of 40 new connections, for the most part, Family Finding specialists seemed intent on discovering a large network of connections rather than stopping after they discovered a few promising connections. A goal of the intervention was to create a family tree so that the child could have an understanding and awareness of his or her entire family network and easing up on discovery once a key connection was identified would have impeded this goal. The Family Finding specialists took to heart the training they received that directed them not to stop identifying connections until they had identified at least 40.

Further examination of the correlation between numbers of family members discovered and engaged and resulting permanency outcomes is needed. Given the many demands on all staff working in child welfare agencies, it is important to better understand whether the time and effort expended on expanding the numbers of family connections would be better spent on workers' efforts to support

44

existing relationships between already discovered family members. In addition, our analyses of the discovery and engagement components of the Family Finding model found that paternal relatives were less likely to be discovered and engaged than maternal relatives. Continued efforts to develop innovative father and paternal relative engagement are needed as part of Family Finding efforts.

Overall, our qualitative findings point to considerable growth and development across the various units in the county agency regarding family engagement policies and practices. While likely largely the result of the Family Finding efforts, we cannot discount the role that the federal Fostering Connections legislation had as well. The county implemented new relative notification policies and practices toward the end of the study period.

An important question for future evaluations is whether reunification is appropriate as a key outcome for Family Finding or other family search and engagement models. Children who received Family Finding were significantly more likely to be discharged from care than children in the control group, yet the treatment group and control group had the same proportions of children who were discharged to reunification and for other reasons, such as adoption, guardianship, emancipation, and incarceration. There were no differences between the treatment group and the control group in the percentage of children discharged to relative guardianship. As family search and engagement practice continues to evolve, program developers and implementers, together with researchers, should examine further the linkages between the desired program outputs and permanency outcomes for the children and families served.

Conclusions

Research on family support and engagement conducted throughout the past two decades has generally shown positive effects on children and families served by child welfare agencies. Over the same period, significant increases in the use of kinship care for foster children is evidence that practitioners, program administrators, and policymakers believe it to be best practice. During the last decade, Family Finding has become a popular intervention for states despite the lack of empirical evidence of effectiveness in impacting permanency outcomes as well as limited understanding of its effects on children, families, staff, and systems. San Francisco County had experienced some success implementing Family Finding with older youth and sought to test its application to children and families new to the child welfare system. "Front end" application of Family Finding proved to have more implementation challenges than serving older youth in foster care. In particular, the fast pace of casework, and assignment of cases to

different caseworkers in the early weeks and months of the case, likely affected the degree to which caseworkers were able to engage with the Family Finding specialists.

In addition, engaging family members to provide support to the children <u>and</u> parents during the early stages of out-of-home placement was intrinsically different than engaging family members to provide support to older youth previously disconnected from family. The complex and often turbulent interpersonal relationships between the adults in the families served by child welfare agencies required Family Finding specialists to hone their therapeutic skills.

This evaluation provides important insights into what conditions and practices contribute to successful "front end" application of Family Finding and which ones impede it. These findings are by no means conclusive. Coupled with other Family Finding evaluations, they raise a host of important future research and evaluation questions for Family Finding programs as well as other programs implemented in child welfare service systems. Most importantly, they raise questions related to which program components and elements directly impact on children's permanency outcomes, namely reunification. And, if Family Finding and engagement programs seek to impact permanency, findings raise the question of whether there more direct links that can be made through more specialized training of workers, clearer guidance on the various supports to family members and better communication with family members so they fully understand the purpose of the engagement.

The rich information gathered from this evaluation has laid the foundation for the Family Finding evidence base. This evaluation represents a significant step in beginning a conversation based on evidence, to help further examine the conditions in which Family Finding is and is not effective. Along with other evaluations currently being implemented, this evaluation makes an important contribution to the overall knowledge base focused on improved family engagement within child welfare practices, programs, and policies.

REFERENCES

American Humane Association (2010). *Guidelines for Family Group Decision Making in Child Welfare.* Englewood, CO: American Humane Association.

Andersson, G. (2005). Family relations, adjustment and well-being in a longitudinal study of children in care. *Child and Family Social Work, 10*, 43-56.

Avery, R.J. (2010). An examination of theory and promising practice for achieving permanency for teens before they age out of foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 32*, 399-408.

Berkman, L. F. (1983). The assessment of social networks and social support in the elderly. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, 31*, 743-749.

Berrick, J.D., Barth, R.P., Needell, B. (1994). A comparison of kinship foster homes and foster family homes: Implications for kinship foster care as family preservation. *Children and Youth Services Review, 16*(1/2), 33-63.

Berzin, S.C. (2006). Using sibling data to understand the impact of family group decision-making on child welfare outcomes. *Children and Youth Services Review, 28*, 1449-1458.

Breland-Noble, A.M., Farmer, E.M.Z., Dubs, M.S., Potter, E., & Burns, B.J. (2005). Mental health and other service use by youth in therapeutic foster care and group homes. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 14*(2), 167-180.

Campbell, K. (2005). *Six Steps for Family Finding*. Center for Family Finding and Youth Connectedness. Resource Documents.

Campbell, Kevin (2010a). *Basic Family Finding Practice Scaffold*. National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness, Seneca Center. Resource Documents.

Campbell, Kevin (2010b). *Family Finding Quality and Fidelity Index*. National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness, Seneca Center. Resource Documents.

California Permanency for Youth Project (2010). *Project Evaluation*. Retrieved from http://www.senecacenter.org/perm_evaluation.

California Permanency for Youth Project (2008). *Project Evaluation*. Retrieved from http://www.senecacenter.org/perm_evaluation.

Collins, M.E., Paris, R., & Ward, R.L. (2008). The permanence of family ties: Implications for youth transitioning from foster care. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 78*(1), 54-62.

Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., Brown, A., Cary, C., Love, K., & Vorhies, V. (2011). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 26*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Courtney, M.E., & Dworsky, A. (2006). Early outcomes for young adults transitioning from out-of-home care in the USA. *Child & Family Social Work, 11*(3), 209-219.

Cuddeback, G.S. (2004). Kinship family foster care: A methodological and substantive synthesis of research. *Children and Youth Services Review, 26*, 623-639.

Drake, B. (1996). Consumer and worker perceptions of key child welfare competencies. *Children and Youth Services Review, 18*(3), 261-279.

Dumbrill, G. C. (2006). Parental experience of child protection intervention: A qualitative study. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 30*, 27-37.

Dworsky, A., & Courtney, M.E. (2000). *Self-Sufficiency of Former Foster Youth in Wisconsin: Analysis of Unemployment Insurance Wage Data and Public Assistance Data*. Madison, WI: IRP.

Farmer, E. (1996). Family reunification with high risk children: Lessons from research. *Children and Youth Services Review, 18*(4/5), 403-424.

Festinger, T. (1996). Going home and returning to foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review, 18*(4/5), 383-402.

Furstenberg, F. F. (2010). On a new schedule: Transitions to adulthood and family change. *The Future of Children, 20*(1), 67-87.

George, R., Bilaver, L., Joo Lee, B., Needell, B., Brookhart, A., & Jackman, W. (2002). *Employment Outcomes for Youth Aging out of Foster Care*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

Gibson, P. A., & Rinkel, M. (2012). Increased attention to the search process improves the chances of foster kinship placements. *Journal of Family Social Work, 15*, 141-156.

Hines, A.M. (1997). Divorce-related transitions, adolescent development, and the role of the parent-child relationship: A review of the literature. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 59*, 375-388.

Karoll, B.R., & Poertner, J. (2002). Judges', caseworkers', and substance abuse counselors' indicators of family reunification with substance-affected parents. *Child Welfare, 81*(2), 249-269.

Kaylor, A.G. (2001). The effect of initial placement into kinship foster care on reunification from foster care. *Journal of Social Service Research, 27*(4), 1-31.

Kessler, R.C., & McLeod, J.D. (1985). Social support and mental health in community samples. In S. Cohen and S.L. Syme (Eds.) *Social Support and Health*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Kovalesky, A. (2001). Factors affecting mother-child visiting identified by women with histories of substance abuse and child custody loss. *Child Welfare, 80*(6), 749-768.

Leathers, S.J. (2002). Parental visiting and family reunification: Could inclusive practice make a difference? *Child Welfare, 81*(4), 595-616.

Lietz, C.A., Lacasse, J.R., & Cacciatore, J. (2011). Social support in family reunification: A qualitative study. *Journal of Family Social Work, 14*, 3-20.

Maluccio, A. N.. Fein, E. & Olmstead, K. A. (1986). *Permanency planning for children: Concepts and methods*. New York: Tavistock.

McCoy-Roth, M., DeVooght, K., & Fletcher, M. (2011). *Number of Youth Aging out of Foster Care Drops below 28,000 in 2010*. Analysis No. 5. Washington, DC: Fostering Connections Resource Center.

Montgomery, P., Donkoh, C., Underhill, K. (2006). Independent living programs for young people leaving the care system: The state of the evidence. *Children and Youth Services Review, 28* (12), 1435-1448.

Pecora, P.J., Kessler, R.C., Williams, J., O'Brien, K., Downs, A.C., English, D., White, J., Hiripi, E., White, C.R., Wiggins, T., & Holmes, K. (2005). *Improving Family Foster Care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study*. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs.

Perry, B.L. (2006). Understanding social network disruption: The case of youth in foster care. *Social Problems, 53*(3), 371-391.

Swartz, T. T., Kim, M., Uno, M., Mortimer, J., O'Brien, K. B. (2011). Safety nets and scaffolds: Parental support in the transition to adulthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 73*(2), 414-429.

U.S. DHHS (2008). Administration of Children and Families. *Evaluation of the Life Skills Training Program: Los Angeles County.*

U.S. DHHS (2011). *The AFCARS Report: Preliminary FY 2010 Estimates as of June 2011*.

Wakcher, S. (2010). *San Bernardino County's California Permanency for Youth Project Evaluation.* Retrieved from http://www.senecacenter.org/perm_evaluation.

Weigensberg, E.C., Barth, R.P., & Guo, S. (2009). Family group decision making: A propensity score analysis to evaluate child and family services at baseline and after 36 months. *Children and Youth Services Review, 31*, 383-390.

Wells, K., Guo, S. (1999). Reunification and reentry of foster children. *Children and Youth Services Review, 21*(4), 273-294.

APPENDIX A

Logic Model

Family Finding Logic Model

Resources/ Inputs	Implementation Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Family Setting Outcomes	Interim Family Setting Outcomes	Well-Being Outcomes

Problem:

Many children age out of the foster care system each year without a home or sense of connection to family

- Trained Family Finding staff
- Funding
  Referrals to Family Finding program
- Agency/ organizational support for Family Finding program model
- Ongoing technical assistance & coaching for trained staff
- Buy-in from key systems partners, such as the courts

Discover → Identification of at least 40 family members/adults who have known the child in the past → Increase number of known family connections

Engage → Engagement of (#) identified individuals who know the child best → Children have increased knowledge of family history

Plan → (#) meetings with parents, family members, & other key individuals important to the child → Children have increased sense of connectedness & belonging

Decide → Decisions made for emotional & legal permanency of the child

Evaluate → Development of emotional & legal permanency plans for the child

Support → Development of plan for providing follow-up services & supports → (Re-)establish a relationship between children and one or more adults with known family connection

Interim Family Setting Outcomes:

Increase number of children with permanent, legal placements with family members

Increase number of children in less-restrictive placement settings

Increase number of children with meaningful, enduring connections with family that will support them across life span

Reduce number of children experiencing maltreatment

Well-Being Outcomes:

- Children maintain physical & mental health
- Increase in children's knowledge & skills/readiness to attain self-sufficiency
  - educational readiness
  - employment readiness
- Increase in children's social & interpersonal skills
- Decrease in children's high risk behaviors
- Children increase sense of self-efficacy

Contextual factors
Current family & peer supports (material, social, & emotional); Local service system; Job market; Child characteristics (including presenting problems and placement history); Legal system (including laws defining adulthood)

APPENDIX B

List of Administrative Data Elements

List of Administrative Data Elements

Child SACWIS ID Number
Child birth date
Sex
Ethnicity (not mutually exclusive) • American Indian • Black • Cambodian* • Central American • Chinese • Filipino • Hispanic • Japanese • Mexican • Samoan • White • White – European • White - Middle Eastern
Hispanic
Type of disability (not mutually exclusive) • behavioral • emotional • physical health
Specific type of disability (examples listed below) • Allergies • Anemia • Asthma • Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder • Bronchiolitis • Cavities / Dental Caries • Cerebral Palsy
Use of psychotropic drugs
Removal (#) (all removal episodes included)
Total number of removals
Removal date
Removal reason (not mutually exclusive) • Care Taker Absence/Incapacity • Childs Disability or Handicap • Emotional Abuse • General Neglect • Physical Abuse • Sexual Abuse • Severe Neglect
Type of Substantiated Allegations of Abuse/Neglect • At Risk, Sibling Abused • Caretaker Absence/Incapacity • Emotional Abuse • General Neglect • Physical Abuse

• Severe Neglect • Sexual Abuse • Substantial Risk
Perpetrator (not mutually exclusive) • Brother/Brother • Daughter/Father (Adoptive) • Daughter/Father (Alleged) • Daughter/Father (Birth) • Daughter/Father (Presumed) • Daughter/Father (Step) • Daughter/Mother (Adoptive) • Daughter/Mother (Birth) • Daughter/Mother (Foster) • Granddaughter/Grandparent (Maternal) • Granddaughter/Grandparent (Paternal) • Grandson/Grandparent (Maternal) • Mother/Daughter (Birth) • No Relation/No Relation • Perp Not Identified • Significant Other/Significant Other • Sister/Brother (Half) • Son/Father (Adoptive) • Son/Father (Alleged) • Son/Father (Birth) • Son/Father (Presumed) • Son/Father (Step) • Son/Mother (Adoptive) • Son/Mother (Alleged) • Son/Mother (Birth)
Discharge date for removal
Discharge reason • Reunification with parent(s) or primary caretaker(s) • living with other relative(s) • adoption • emancipation • guardianship • transfer to another agency • runaway • death of child
Placement (#) *Note: Placement-specific information is obtained for each placement*
Placement date
Placement type • Foster Family Agency Certified Home • Foster Family Home • Group Home • Guardian Home • Relative/NREFM Home
Child's relationship to placement provider
Indicator that child stayed in same school with placement move

Out of state placement
Placed with sibling(s) and reasons for not placing with sibling
Exit from placement date
Reason for placement change
Total number of placements
All case plan goal and dates, including concurrent goals • Adoption • Adoption With Siblings(s) • Legal Guardianship • Long Term Foster Care With Non-Relative • Long Term Foster Care With Relative • Maintain minor with Guardian • Self-Maintenance
Service objective (targeted case plan objectives for guardian of child)

APPENDIX C

Semi-structured Interview and Focus Group Guides

Family Finding Worker Interview

INTRODUCTION
Thank you very much for agreeing to meet with me today. I'm _____ and this is _____ from Child Trends, an organization in Washington, DC that performs research to improve programs and services for children and youth. Child Trends has been contracted to evaluate the Family Finding or [insert local name] services here in [insert local area] and in several other areas across the country. Our evaluation will seek to explore the impact of these services on child welfare outcomes and child well-being. As part of the evaluation we are conducting site visits to better understand the operation of the Family Finding or [insert local name] services in different locations around the country, and the local context within which the program operates.

You will notice that we are taking notes and recording our conversation so that we can accurately report your opinions, but your responses will not be linked with your name in any way -- everything will be anonymous. We will use the recording to fill in our written notes, but then the recording will be destroyed. If at any time you would like to say something that you do not want to be recorded, just say so and we will turn off the recorder.

I want to reiterate that what you say will be kept confidential. We will be writing reports to our various funders on what we learn from all of our site visits, but we will not be discussing specific programs and we will never identify who has said what.

Do you have any questions for us before we begin?

[If Family Finding services are used in front end, use the term "foster children and youth". If services are used in the back end, use the term "foster youth"]

BACKGROUND
First, I'd like to ask you some questions about your background.

1. How long have you been a family finding worker or [insert local title]?

    Probes:
    - What interested you in applying for this position?
    - Were you hired specifically for this position or were you already an agency employee?
    - Can you describe your child welfare experience prior to your current position?

CASELOAD AND REFERRAL PROCESS
Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about the referral process and your caseload.

2. At what point in a case is it assigned to you?

3. Can you describe how a case becomes a part of (is referred to) your caseload?

4. Are there any characteristics of the children you serve that make it particularly difficult to achieve permanency for them?

If yes, probe:
- What are they?
- What strategies have you (or someone else at the agency) used to try to overcome these barriers?
- Which strategies were effective in assisting these children in achieving permanency which ones were not effective?

5. I**f Using Front End Approach**: Are there any characteristics of the parents you serve that make it particularly difficult to achieve permanency for their children?

If yes, probe:
- What are they?
- What strategies have you (or someone else at the agency) used to try to overcome these barriers?
- Which strategies were effective in assisting these children in achieving permanency which ones were not effective?

6. **If Using Back End Approach**: Are the children who have been and are currently on your caseload the same as what you had expected? (e.g. age, background, placement history, etc.) Why or why not?

7. **If Using Front End Approach**: Are the families who have been and are currently on your caseload the same as what you had expected? Why or why not?

8. Do you feel that the number of children on your caseload is an appropriate number? Why or why not?

9. On average, how long do you "carry" a case?

- Does the case length differ from what you originally expected or planned? If so, why do you think this has occurred?

10. Have you had any problems with getting cases or maintaining a full caseload?

- What types of problems have you encountered?
- What, if anything, has been done to address these barriers?

11. How do you manage your caseload both in terms of time as well as adding new cases or closing out cases?

FAMILY FINDING ACTIVITIES
I am now going to focus on your responsibilities as a [insert local title], starting from the very beginning of a case and going through to when your work with the case ends.

12. Once a child is assigned to your caseload, what do you do first?

13. Do you have contact with the child's primary caseworker?

- When does this contact occur?
- What occurs during this initial contact?

Discovery

14. What happens after the initial contact with the caseworker?

15. [If respondent does not mention this earlier] Is reviewing the case file part of your responsibilities?

- How often does this happen?
- Do you have full access to the file or only portions?

16. What are you trying to accomplish through the case review?

- What types of information are you looking for in the file?
- Why is that information important?
- Do you use a case review form to document information you find during your review of a case file?

17. After the initial review, do you ever go back to the case record? Why or why not?

18. Do you ask the (**If Using Front End Approach**: family) (**If Using Back End Approach**: child(ren)) directly about relatives, kin, or other people that play or have played a significant role in their lives? Why or why not?

19. How many people are you typically able to identify as connections or potential life-long connections for the (**If Using Front End Approach**: family) (**If Using Back End Approach**: child)?

20. How do you find or attempt to find the whereabouts of those who you have identified as connections or potential life-long connections for a (**If Using Front End Approach**: family) (**If Using Back End Approach**: child)?

- What types of search tools do you use? (e.g. US Search, Accurint, Yellow pages, obituaries, etc)
- Do you conduct the internet searches yourself?
  (If no)Who performs the searches? How do you retrieve the results?

21. How many individuals are typically found using these search efforts? Do you think the search efforts have been worthwhile? Why or why not?

22. Have you experienced any challenges in searching for and identifying relatives, kin or other caring adults for a child?

If yes, probe:
- What challenges have you experienced?
- What have you (or someone else at the agency) done to try to overcome these challenges or problems?

- Which strategies were effective in resolving the problems and which ones were not effective?

Engagement

23. Can you explain what your responsibilities are in terms of engaging relatives and other connections.

24. Do you attempt to engage all individuals that you identify in the discovery stage?

   If no, probe:
   - Why not?
   - How many individuals do you typically engage for each child? Are there guidelines you try to follow?
   - If it varies by child, what are the characteristics of children that guide your practice?

25. How do you contact these people initially? (e.g. phone or letter)

26. What is the general goal of that first contact?

27. I**f Using Back End Approach**: Do you inform the child of your efforts? Why or why not?

   - Do you inform the child before you initiate your efforts? Why or why not?
   - Do you inform the child of your progress? Why or why not?

28. Have you experienced any challenges or barriers in engaging individuals to serve as support network (**If Using Back End Approach**: and/or a placement resource for a child)? (e.g. lack of resources to foster connections, resistance from court personnel, foster children, primary caseworkers, child's current caregiver, or relatives or involvement that dwindles overtime)

   If yes, probe:
   - What challenges have you experienced?
   - What have you (or someone else at the agency) done to try to overcome these challenges or problems?

- Which strategies were effective in resolving the problems and which ones were not effective?

Planning

29. What happens after you have engaged a number of relatives or other supportive adults?

30. Are you routinely involved in any <u>formal agency-run</u> planning meetings? Why or why not?

    Probes:
- Who facilitates these meetings?
- [Regardless of whether respondent is involved in agency planning meetings, ASK:] Does the agency utilize a particular approach to their planning meetings—for example, FGDM, TDM, family unity, etc.)?
- What is the general goal of these planning meetings?
- [If respondent is involved in agency planning meetings], what are you asked to contribute to the meeting?
- Are you generally pleased with your level of involvement in agency-run meetings?

31. Do <u>you</u> coordinate any meetings with the relatives and other adult supports who have been discovered and engaged? Why or why not?

    Probes:
- How many meetings are typically held for each child?
- How many family members attend the meetings (in-person or via phone)?
- Outside of family members, who else is usually invited to these meetings?
- How many of these individuals usually attend the meetings?
- Is there an "official" approach used in convening these meetings? (e.g. FGDM, TDM, etc.)
- What is the general goal of these planning meetings?
- What types of things are discussed during these meetings?
- Have you experienced any challenges in convening these meetings? (e.g. lack of resources to assist those not in the area to attend the meetings, keeping the discussions on track, lack of skills needed to facilitate the meeting, etc.)

    If yes, probe:
- What challenges have you experienced?
- What have you (or someone else at the agency) done to try to overcome these challenges or problems?
- Which strategies were effective in resolving the problems and which ones were not

o effective?

Decision-making

32. How do you and the planning team come to decisions regarding the child's emotional and legal permanency (**If Using the Front End Approach**: and how the family will secure a life-long supportive network)?

- Do these decisions typically include a primary plan as well as back-up plans?
- Do you document the decisions made during the team meetings on a form? (Interviewer: request a copy of this form if one is used)

33. **If Using Back End Approach**: How are decisions made regarding a child's need for a life-long supportive network versus (perhaps immediate or long-term legal) placement needs?

Probes:
- Is one given a higher priority than the other? Why or why not?
- How and when might you (or the facilitator of the meetings) intervene when an agreement cannot be reached?

34. Have you and the planning teams experienced any challenges making decisions about a child's emotional and legal permanency (**If Using the Front End Approach**: and how the family will secure a life-long supportive network)?

If yes, probe:
- What challenges have you experienced?
- What have you (or someone else at the agency) done to try to overcome these challenges or problems?
- Which strategies were effective in resolving the problems and which ones were not effective?

Evaluation

35. How do you and the teams evaluate the plan created for the legal and emotional permanency of a child (**If Using the Front End Approach**: and a life-long supportive network for the family)?

Probes:
- Do you and the team explore whether you have identified and engaged an adequate number of people to ensure the success of the plan?

- Do you and the team explore whether the failure of your plan would result in the child remaining or returning to the foster care system?
- Do you and the team explore whether the plan includes individuals who are willing to offer their support if the plan is unsuccessful?
- Is there a form that you and the team use to facilitate the evaluation process? (Interviewer: request a copy of this form if one is used)

36. Is a timeline typically developed for completion of the plan?

37. How individualized is the plan?

38. Have you and/or the team experienced any challenges with evaluating the plan for a child's emotional and legal permanency (**If Using the Front End Approach**: and a life-long supportive network for the family)?

If yes, probe:

- What challenges have you experienced?
- What have you (or someone else at the agency) done to try to overcome these challenges or problems?
- Which strategies were effective in resolving the problems and which ones were not effective?

Follow Up Support

39. How well do you feel the teams provide ongoing support to the child and (**If Using Back End Approach:** caregiver)(**If Using the Front End Approach**: parent)?

40. Is there an emphasis on providing informal supports rather than supports that require payment? Why or why not?

If yes, probe:
- Please give examples of informal supports and supports requiring payments that you or the team have provided.

41. Have you and/or the team experienced any challenges with actively supporting the child and (**If Using Back End Approach:** caregiver) (**If Using the Front End Approach**: and parent) in

accessing services and supports as needed? (e.g. grief and loss feelings surface after placement, child lacks skills needed to maintain positive relationships, lack of resources in the community)

If yes, probe:
- What challenges have you experienced?
- What have you (or someone else at the agency) done to try to overcome these challenges or problems?
- Which strategies were effective in resolving the problems and which ones were not effective?

42. Does the level of intensity in terms of your involvement on a case change over time?

43. How do you know when your involvement in a case should end?

Probes:
- What are the conditions for "closing" a family finding case?
- Are there other reasons why you may close out a case?

WORKING WITH PRIMARY CASEWORKER
Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about your interactions with primary caseworkers.

44. How closely do you work with the primary caseworkers while providing Family Finding (or [insert local title]) services?

- Does this vary based on the activity being performed? (If yes) How so?
- Does this vary based on the caseworker? (If yes) How so?
- Does this vary based on the needs of the child? (If yes) How so?

45. Is case information routinely shared between you and the primary caseworker (e.g. case updates)?

- How is this done?
- If the primary caseworker changes, how is information passed to new worker?

46. Have you experienced any challenges working with or communicating with primary caseworkers?

If yes, probe:
- What are they?
- What strategies have you (or someone else at the agency) used to try to overcome these barriers?
- Which strategies were effective in assisting these children in achieving permanency which ones were not effective?

DOCUMENTATION OF SERVICES
Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about how you document your work.

47. What types of documentation do you complete during your work? (e.g. documenting contacts made and progress towards and completion of activities)

- What types of contacts do you document? (e.g. phone, in-person and e-mail)
- In what format do you document your work (manual forms, automated database)?
- How often do you enter information?
- Do you document your case activities into the case record? (**If yes**) How so?
- **If private agency worker, probe**: Do you have access to automated child welfare system? (**If not**) Why not?

SUPERVISION
Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about the supervision and support you receive.

48. How often do you meet with or speak with your supervisor?

49. Is there a regularly established time or do you meet on an as-needed basis?

If on as-needed basis, probe:
- Who usually initiates these meetings?
- What kinds of situations would result in your requesting a meeting?

50. Do you feel that the amount of supervision you receive is adequate?

OTHER RESPONSIBLITIES
51. Do you have other duties outside of your role as a [insert local title]?

If yes, probe:
- What other duties do you have?

- How much time during a given week do you spend on these other duties?
- Do you have any difficulty balancing these additional duties with your responsibilities as a Family Finding (or [insert local title]) worker?

  (**If yes**) Could you tell me more about that?

TRAINING

Now, I'd like to ask you a little bit about your training.

52. What, if any, formal training did you receive on the Family Finding model and how to implement Family Finding (or [insert local title]) services <u>before</u> you were assigned a caseload of children?

- Who conducted the training?
- How long was the training?

If reported receiving no or limited training, **probe**:

- Why do you think your training has been limited?
- Have you expressed a concern about this to anyone at your agency?
        (**If yes**) Who did you express this concern to? What was their response?
- Are there any particular components of the model that are less clear?
     (**If yes**) Have you received any additional training/assistance to assist you in understanding this/these components?

53. Did you receive training on any other models or interventions to prepare you for your role <u>before</u> you were assigned a caseload? (e.g. 3-5-7 grief and loss model, other permanency interventions, etc.)

54. What, if any, additional training have you received from your agency <u>since</u> being assigned a caseload?

Probe:
- Who conducted the training(s)?
- How long was the training(s)?
- What was/were the topic(s) of the training(s)?

OPINIONS

55. In general, how do you think Family Finding or [insert local name] services are different from the permanency services foster children/youth receive from traditional caseworkers?

56. In your opinion, have there been barriers (that you have not yet mentioned) to the success of the Family Finding (or [insert local name]) services overall?

o   What about child welfare agency practices or procedures?

57. In your opinion, what have been the greatest facilitators of the Family Finding (or [insert local name]) services?

58. Are there particular elements or components of the model that you believe are critical for it to succeed?

59. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a [insert local title] worker?

We've come to the end of the interview. Thank you so much for your time today. The information you provided will be an important part of our evaluation.

Family Finding Supervisor

INTRODUCTION
Thank you very much for agreeing to meet with me today. I'm _____ and this is _____ from Child Trends, an organization in Washington, DC that performs research to improve programs and services for children and youth. Child Trends has been contracted to evaluate the Family Finding or [insert local name] services here in [insert local area] and in several other areas across the country. Our evaluation will seek to explore the impact of these services on child welfare outcomes and child well-being. As part of the evaluation we are conducting site visits to better understand the operation of the Family Finding or [insert local name] services in different locations around the country, and the local context within which the program operates.

You will notice that we are taking notes and recording our conversation so that we can accurately report your opinions, but your responses will not be linked with your name in any way -- everything will be anonymous. We will use the recording to fill in our written notes, but then the recording will be destroyed. If at any time you would like to say something that you do not want to be recorded, just say so and we will turn off the recorder.

I want to reiterate that what you say will be kept confidential. We will be writing reports to our various funders on what we learn from all of our site visits, but we will not be discussing specific programs and we will never identify who has said what.

Do you have any questions for us before we begin?

[If Family Finding services are used in front end, use the term "foster children and youth". If services are used in the back end, use the term "foster youth"]

BACKGROUND
First, I'd like to ask you some questions about your background.

2. How long have you been a family finding supervisor or [insert local title]?

    Probes:
    - What interested you in applying for this position?
    - Were you hired specifically for this position or were you already an agency employee?
    - Can you describe your child welfare experience prior to your current position?

CASELOAD AND REFERRAL PROCESS

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about the referral process and your caseload.

2. At what point in a case is it assigned to you?

3. Can you describe how a case becomes a part of (is referred to) the Family Finding worker's [or local agency's name for worker] caseload?

4. Are there any characteristics of the children on the Family Finding worker's caseload that make it particularly difficult to achieve permanency for them?

> **If yes, probe:**
- What are they?
- What strategies have you (or someone else at the agency) used to try to
- overcome these barriers?
- Which strategies were effective in assisting these children in achieving
- permanency which ones were not effective?

5. I**f Using Front End Approach**: Are there any characteristics of the parents on the Family Finding worker's caseload that make it particularly difficult to achieve permanency for their children?

> **If yes, probe:**
- What are they?
- What strategies have you (or someone else at the agency) used to try to
- overcome these barriers?
- Which strategies were effective in assisting these children in achieving permanency which ones were not effective?

6. **If Using Back End Approach**: Are the children who have been and are currently on the Family Finding worker's caseload the same as what you had expected? (e.g. age, background, placement history, etc.) Why or why not?

7. **If Using Front End Approach**: Are the families who have been and are currently on the Family Finding worker's caseload the same as what you had expected? Why or why not?

8. Do you feel that the number of children on the caseloads is an appropriate number? Why or why not?

9. On average, how long do Family Finding workers "carry" a case?

- Does the case length differ from what you originally expected or planned? If so, why do you think this has occurred?

10. Have workers' had any problems with getting cases or maintaining a full caseload?

- What types of problems have they encountered?
- What, if anything, has been done to address these barriers?

11. How does the Family Finding worker manage their caseload both in terms of time as well as adding new cases or closing out cases?

FAMILY FINDING ACTIVITIES
I am now going to focus on the Family Finding worker's responsibilities starting from the very beginning of a case and going through to when the Family Finding work with the case ends.

12. Once a child is assigned to the Family Finding worker's caseload, what is done first?

13. Does the Family Finding worker have contact with the child's primary caseworker?

- When does this contact occur?
- What occurs during this initial contact?
- Do you, as the supervisor, also have contact with the caseworker—why or why not? In what situations might this occur?

Discovery

14. What happens after the initial contact with the caseworker?

15. [If respondent does not mention this earlier] Is reviewing the case file part of the Family Finding worker's responsibilities?

- How often does this happen?
- Do you have full access to the file or only portions?

16. What are they trying to accomplish through the case review?

- What types of information are you looking for in the file?
- Why is that information important?
- Do you use a case review form to document information you find during your review of a case file?

17. After the initial review, does the Family Finding worker ever go back to the case record? Why or why not?

18. Does the Family Finding worker ask the (**If Using Front End Approach**: family) (**If Using Back End Approach**: child(ren)) directly about relatives, kin, or other people that play or have played a significant role in their lives? Why or why not?

19. How many people are they typically able to identify as connections or potential life-long connections for the (**If Using Front End Approach**: family) (**If Using Back End Approach**: child)?

20. How does the Family Finding worker find or attempt to find the whereabouts of those who you have identified as connections or potential life-long connections for a (**If Using Front End Approach**: family) (**If Using Back End Approach**: child)?

- What types of search tools are used? (e.g. US Search, Accurint, Yellow pages, obituaries, etc)
- Who conducts the internet searches?

21. How many individuals are typically found using these search efforts? Do you think the search efforts have been worthwhile? Why or why not?

22. Have there been challenges in searching for and identifying relatives, kin or other caring adults for a child?

       If yes, probe:
- What challenges?
- What have you (or someone else at the agency) done to try to overcome these challenges or problems?
- Which strategies were effective in resolving the problems and which ones were not effective?

Engagement

23. Can you explain what the Family Finding worker's responsibilities are in terms of engaging relatives and other connections.

24. Does the Family Finding worker attempt to engage all individuals identified in the discovery stage?

      If no, probe:
- Why not?
- How many individuals are typically engaged for each child? Are there guidelines to follow?
- If it varies by child, what are the characteristics of children that guide your practice?

25. How are the people contacted initially? (e.g. phone or letter)

26. What is the general goal of that first contact?

27. **If Using Back End Approach**: Is the child informed of these efforts? Why or why not?

- Is the child informed before efforts are initiated? Why or why not?
- Is the child informed of progress? Why or why not?

28. Have there been any challenges or barriers in engaging individuals to serve as a support network (**If Using Back End Approach**: and/or a placement resource for a child)? (e.g. lack of resources to foster connections, resistance from court personnel, foster children, primary caseworkers, child's current caregiver, or relatives or involvement that dwindles overtime)

    If yes, probe:
- What challenges?
- What have you (or someone else at the agency) done to try to overcome these challenges or problems?
- Which strategies were effective in resolving the problems and which ones were not effective?

Planning

29. What happens after a number of relatives or other supportive adults are engaged?

30. Are you or the Family Finding worker routinely involved in any <u>formal agency-run</u> planning meetings? Why or why not?

    Probes:
- Who facilitates these meetings?
- [Regardless of whether respondent is involved in agency planning meetings, ask:] Does the agency utilize a particular approach to their planning meetings—for example, FGDM, TDM, family unity, etc.)?
- What is the general goal of these planning meetings?
- [If respondent or Family Finding worker is involved in agency planning meetings, ask:] What are you or the Family Finding worker asked to contribute to the meeting?
- Are you generally pleased with your and the Family Finding worker's level of involvement in agency-run meetings?

31. Does the Family Finding worker coordinate any meetings with the relatives and other adult supports who have been discovered and engaged? Why or why not?

    Probes:
- How many meetings are typically held for each child?

- How many family members attend the meetings (in-person or via phone)?
- Outside of family members, who else is usually invited to these meetings?
- How many of these other individuals usually attend the meetings?
- Is there an "official" approach used in convening these meetings? (e.g. FGDM, TDM, etc.)
- What is the general goal of these planning meetings?
- What types of things are discussed during these meetings?
- Has the Family Finding worker experienced any challenges in convening these meetings? (e.g. lack of resources to assist those not in the area to attend the meetings, keeping the discussions on track, lack of skills needed to facilitate the meeting, etc.)

If yes, probe:
- What challenges have they experienced?
- What have you (or someone else at the agency) done to try to overcome these challenges or problems?
- Which strategies were effective in resolving the problems and which ones were not effective?

Decision-making

32. How does the Family Finding worker and the planning team come to decisions regarding the child's emotional and legal permanency (**If Using the Front End Approach**: and how the family will secure a life-long supportive network)?

- Do these decisions typically include a primary plan as well as back-up plans?
- Do you document the decisions made during the team meetings on a form? **(Interviewer: request a copy of this form if one is used)**

33. **If Using Back End Approach**: How are decisions made regarding a child's need for a life-long supportive network versus (perhaps immediate or long-term legal) placement needs?

Probes:
- Is one given a higher priority than the other? Why or why not?
- How and when might you (or the facilitator of the meetings) intervene when an agreement cannot be reached?

34. Have the Family Finding worker and the planning teams experienced any challenges making decisions about a child's emotional and legal permanency (**If Using the Front End Approach**: and how the family will secure a life-long supportive network)?

If yes, probe:
- What challenges have they experienced?
- What have you (or someone else at the agency) done to try to overcome these challenges or problems?
- Which strategies were effective in resolving the problems and which ones were not effective?

Evaluation

35. How does the Family Finding worker and the teams evaluate the plan created for the legal and emotional permanency of a child (**If Using the Front End Approach**: and a life-long supportive network for the family)?

    Probes:
- Do they explore whether an adequate number of people have been identified and engaged to ensure the success of the plan?
- Do they explore whether the failure of the plan would result in the child remaining or returning to the foster care system?
- Do they explore whether the plan includes individuals who are willing to offer their support if the plan is unsuccessful?
- Is there a form or forms used to facilitate the evaluation process? (Interviewer: request a copy of this form if one is used)

36. Is a timeline typically developed for completion of the plan?

37. How individualized is the plan?

38. Have the Family Finding worker and/or the team experienced any challenges with evaluating the plan for a child's emotional and legal permanency (**If Using the Front End Approach**: and a life-long supportive network for the family)?

If yes, probe:
- What challenges have they experienced?
- What have you (or someone else at the agency) done to try to overcome these challenges or problems?
- Which strategies were effective in resolving the problems and which ones were not effective?

Follow Up Support

39. How well do you feel the teams provide ongoing support to the child and (**If Using Back End Approach:** caregiver)(**If Using the Front End Approach**: parent)?

40. Is there an emphasis on providing informal supports rather than supports that require payment? Why or why not?

    If yes, probe:
- Please give examples of informal supports and supports requiring payments.

41. Have the Family Finding worker and/or the team experienced any challenges with actively supporting the child and (**If Using Back End Approach:** caregiver) (**If Using the Front End Approach**: and parent) in accessing services and supports as needed? (e.g. grief and loss feelings surface after placement, child lacks skills needed to maintain positive relationships, lack of resources in the community, etc.)

    If yes, probe:
- What challenges have they experienced?
- What have you (or someone else at the agency) done to try to overcome these challenges or problems?
- Which strategies were effective in resolving the problems and which ones were not effective?

42. Does the level of intensity in terms of your involvement on a case change over time?

43. How do you know when the Family Finding worker's involvement in a case should end?

    Probes:
- What are the conditions for "closing" a family finding case?
- Are there other reasons why you may close out a case?

WORKING WITH PRIMARY CASEWORKER

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about the Family Finding worker's interactions with the primary caseworker.

44. How closely does the Family Finding worker work with the primary caseworkers while providing Family Finding (or [insert local title]) services?

- Does this vary based on the activity being performed? (**If yes**) How so?
- Does this vary based on the caseworker? (**If yes**) How so?
- Does this vary based on the needs of the child? (**If yes**) How so?

45. Is case information routinely shared between the Family Finding worker and the primary caseworker (e.g. case updates)?

- How is this done?
- If the primary caseworker changes, how is information passed to the new worker?

46. Has the Family Finding worker experienced any challenges working with or communicating with primary caseworkers?

If yes, probe:
- What are they?
- What strategies have you (or someone else at the agency) used to try to
- overcome these barriers?
- Which strategies were effective in assisting these children in achieving permanency? Which ones were not effective?

DOCUMENTATION OF SERVICES

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about how the Family Finding worker documents his/her work.

47. What types of documentation is the Family Finding worker expected to complete? (e.g. to document contacts made and progress towards and completion of activities)

Probes:
- What types of contacts is the Family Finding worker expected to document? (e.g. phone, in-person and e-mail)
- In what format (manual forms, automated database)?
- How often should they enter information?

- Are they expected to document their case activities in the case record? (**If yes**) How so?
- **If private agency worker, probe**: Do your workers have access to the automated child welfare system? (**If not**) Why not?

SUPERVISION

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about supervision and support.

48. How often do you meet with or speak with the family finding or [insert local title] worker?

49. Is there a regularly established time or do you meet on an as-needed basis?

If on as-needed basis, probe:

- Who usually initiates these meetings?
- What kinds of situations would result in your requesting a meeting?

50. How knowledgeable do you feel you are about the Family Finding model?

51. Other than you, is there anyone else that the [insert local title] worker receives consultation or support from to perform his/her duties?

If yes, probe:

- Who else do they speak to?
- What kinds of situations would result in them requesting consultation or support from this/these person/people?

52. Do you feel management is supportive of the work of you and your workers? Why or why not?

OTHER RESPONSIBLITIES

53. Do you have other duties outside of your role as a [insert local title] supervisor?

If yes, probe:

- What other duties do you have?
- How much time during a given week do you spend on these other duties?
- Do you have any difficulty balancing these additional duties with your responsibilities as supervisor to the Family Finding (or [insert local title]) worker?

TRAINING

Now, I'd like to ask you a little bit about your training.

54. What, if any, formal training did you receive on the Family Finding model and how to implement Family Finding (or [insert local title]) services <u>before</u> you were assigned a caseload of children?

    Probes:
- Who conducted the training?
- How long was the training?

If reported receiving no or limited training, **probe**:

- Why do you think your training has been limited?
- Have you expressed a concern about this to anyone at your agency?
  - (**If yes**) Who did you express this concern to? What was their response?
- Are there any particular components of the model that are less clear?
  - (**If yes**) What are these components? Have you received any additional training/assistance to assist you in understanding this/these components?

55. Did you receive training on any other models or interventions to prepare you for your role <u>before</u> you were assigned a caseload? (e.g. 3-5-7 grief and loss model, other permanency interventions, etc.)

56. What, if any, ongoing training have you received from your agency related to Family Finding?

OPINIONS

57. In general, how do you think Family Finding (or [insert local name]) services are different from the permanency services foster children/youth receive from traditional caseworkers?

58. Have there been any changes in agency policies or practices that are the result of your agency's implementation of Family Finding (or [insert local title]) services?

59. In your opinion, have there been barriers (that you have not yet mentioned) to the success of the Family Finding (or [insert local title]) services overall?

60. In your opinion, what have been the greatest facilitators of the Family Finding (or [insert local title]) services?

61. Are there particular elements or components of the model that you believe are critical for it to succeed?

62. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a [insert local title] supervisor?

We've come to the end of the interview. Thank you so much for your time today. The information you provided will be an important part of our evaluation.

Family Finding Administrator Interview

INTRODUCTION

Thank you very much for agreeing to meet with me today. I'm _____ and this is _____ from Child Trends, an organization in Washington, DC that performs research to improve programs and services for children and youth. Child Trends has been contracted to evaluate the Family Finding or [insert local name] services here in [insert local area] and in several other areas across the country. Our evaluation will seek to explore the impact of these services on child welfare outcomes and child well-being. As part of the evaluation we are conducting site visits to better understand the operation of the Family Finding or [insert local name] services in different locations around the country, and the local context within which the program operates.

You will notice that we are taking notes and recording our conversation so that we can accurately report your opinions, but your responses will not be linked with your name in any way -- everything will be anonymous. We will use the recording to fill in our written notes, but then the recording will be destroyed. If at any time you would like to say something that you do not want to be recorded, just say so and we will turn off the recorder.

I want to reiterate that what you say will be kept confidential. We will be writing reports to our various funders on what we learn from all of our site visits, but we will not be discussing specific programs and we will never identify who has said what.

Do you have any questions for us before we begin?

[If Family Finding services are used in front end, use the term "foster children and youth". If services are used in the back end, use the term "foster youth"]

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

First, I'd like to ask you a little about your background.

1. How long have you been with [name of agency]?

2. What is your involvement in the Family Finding or [insert local title] program?

    a. Do you supervise any of the Family Finding workers?

FAMILY FINDING SERVICES

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about the Family Finding or [insert local title] services that are provided at your agency.

3. When did the agency first implement Family Finding?

4. Why did the agency implement Family Finding?

5. What types of children were targeted to receive Family Finding? Has the type of children targeted changed over time?

6. What, if any, kinds of barriers or problems has the Family Finding program experienced? How were the barriers resolved?

7. Are there components of the model that are particularly challenging to implement?

   (**If yes**) What are they? What makes them challenging?

8. Do you think that the [insert local title] supervisors and workers received the training that they need to implement the Family Finding model? What types of training have they received? Are there plans for continued training?

9. Are there any services similar to Family Finding that are provided by your agency (or provided under subcontract with a private agency)?

   Probe: Are these services targeted to the same type of children as the Family Finding services?

RELATIONSHIP WITH PUBLIC AGENCY
Now, I'm going to ask you some questions about your relationship with the public child welfare agency (*or the other units within the public child welfare agency, if the Family Finding program is housed in the public agency*).

10. Can you describe the current relationship between the Family Finding or [insert local title] services at your agency and the public child welfare agency (*or the other units within the public child welfare agency, if the Family Finding program is housed in the public agency*)?

11. How does the relationship impact the work of the Family Finding or [insert local title] program?

12. Have there been any changes in the public agency's policies or practices that are the result of your agency's implementation of Family Finding or [insert local name] services?

OPINIONS

13. In general, how do you think Family Finding or [insert local name] services are different from the permanency services foster children/youth receive from traditional caseworkers?

14. In your opinion, have there been barriers (that you have not yet mentioned) to the success of the Family Finding services overall?

     a. What about child welfare agency practices or procedures?

15. In your opinion, what have been the greatest facilitators of the Family Finding or [insert local name] services?

16. Are there particular elements or components of the model that you believe are critical for it to succeed?

17. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience about your work with the Family Finding or [insert local name] program?

We've come to the end of the interview. Thank you so much for your time today. The information you provided will be an important part of our evaluation.

Referring Caseworker Focus Group

INTRODUCTION

Thank you very much for agreeing to meet with me today. I'm _____ and this is _____ from Child Trends, an organization in Washington, DC that performs research to improve programs and services for children and youth. Child Trends has been contracted to evaluate the Family Finding or [insert local name] services here in [insert local area] and in several other areas across the country. Our evaluation will seek to explore the impact of these services on child welfare outcomes and child well-being. As part of the evaluation we are conducting site visits to better understand the operation of the Family Finding or [insert local name] services in different locations around the country, and the local context within which the program operates.

We have asked you to participate in this focus group to understand your experiences and opinions concerning permanency planning for foster children and youth and to find out your impressions of the Family Finding (or [insert local name]) services and any experiences you have had with these services.

I will be your facilitator for this session and _____ will be taking notes. We are taking notes and recording the session so that we can accurately report your opinions, but your responses will not be linked with your name in any way -- everything will be anonymous. No one from the child welfare agency or the Family Finding (or [insert local name]) unit/program will know who said what in this meeting. We **strongly request** that you and all other focus group participants not discuss what is said in this group today with others outside of the group. However, we cannot guarantee that all focus group participants will adhere to our request. We will use the recording to fill in our written notes, but then the recording will be destroyed. If at any time you would like to say something that you do not want to be recorded, just say so and we will turn off the recorder.

I'm not sure how many of you have participated in a focus group before, but let me give a brief overview of how this will work. As the facilitator, I will be asking questions, but I want the interaction to flow among you – let's have lots of open discussion. I encourage you to talk to and ask questions of each other. There may be times when I need to interrupt the conversation -- either to ask you to clarify something you may have said or to move the discussion on to another topic. Most people say they really enjoy participating in these groups, so we hope that you have fun.

I want to reiterate that what you say will be kept confidential. We will be writing reports to our various funders on what we learn from all of our site visits, but we will not be discussing specific programs and we will never identify who has said what.

Again, we are very pleased to have you here today, and we thank you for your time and your opinions.

Do you have any questions for us before we begin?

[If Family Finding services are used in front end, use the term "foster children and youth". If services are used in the back end, use the term "foster youth"]

Let's start by going around the room and giving your names and job positions. Tell us how long you've been in your position.

FAMILY FINDING SERVICES

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about the Family Finding (or [insert local title]) services in your area.

1. How familiar are you all with the Family Finding (or [insert local title]) services that are offered at your agency? (*If some or all are not familiar, Interviewer can briefly review the Family Finding model*)

    For those who are unfamiliar, probe:

    a. Now that you've gotten a sense of what these services are about, what are your impressions of these services?
    b. Would you refer children on your caseload to receive these services?

       (**If no**) Why not?

    For those who are familiar, probe:

    a. How did you learn about these services?
    b. What are your impressions of the services?

2. Has anyone here ever referred a child to receive these services before?

    If yes, probe:

    a. Could you tell me about your experience? How were you involved in the services?
    b. Could you tell me about the child's experience?
    c. Did the services result in securing a supportive network for your child and/or a permanent placement for a child?

d. What, if any, barriers or challenges were faced in achieving legal and emotional permanency for child(ren)?

Were these barriers or challenges addressed?

(**If yes**) Who addressed them? How were they addressed?

PERMANENCY SERVICES

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about permanency for foster children/youth and the services offered in your community that support permanency efforts.

3. How important is it that foster children/youth on your caseload achieve emotional permanency or secure a life-long supportive network?

4. What types of services do you provide the foster children/youth on your caseload to assist them in securing such a network?

5. Are there services in your local community that assist with securing such a network for foster children/youth?

6. How important is it that the foster children/youth on your caseload achieve legal permanency?

7. What types of services do you provide the foster children/youth on your caseload to assist them in achieving legal permanency?

8. Are there any services that you perform that are similar to Family Finding (or [insert local name]) services? (e.g. case record reviews, internet searches, convening permanency planning meetings, etc)

9. Are there services in your local community that assist you with achieving permanency for foster children/youth?

    a. Are any of them similar to Family Finding (or [insert local name]) services?

    If yes, probe:

    a. What are they?
    b. Do you regularly refer foster children/youth to receive these services?

BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO PERMANENCY

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about barriers and facilitators to achieving permanency for the foster children/youth on your caseloads.

10. Have you experienced barriers or challenges to achieving legal and emotional permanency for foster children/youth on your caseload?

    If yes, probe:

    a. What strategies have you (or someone else at the agency) used to try to overcome these barriers?
    b. Which strategies were effective in assisting these children in achieving permanency which ones were not effective?

11. Are there any characteristics of the foster children/youth you serve that make it particularly difficult to achieve permanency for them?

    If yes, probe:

    a. What are they?
    b. What strategies have you (or someone else at the agency) used to try to overcome these barriers?
    c. Which strategies were effective in working with these parents and which ones were not effective?

12. In your opinion, what have been the greatest facilitators of achieving permanency for foster children/youth?

We've come to the end of the focus group. Thank you so much for your time today. The information you provided will be an important part of our evaluation.

Family Finding Evaluation
Birth Parent Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

Thank you very much for agreeing to speak with us today. My name is _____ and I'm with Child Trends, an organization in Washington, DC that performs research to improve programs and services for children and youth. With me today is _____, also with Child Trends.

We're conducting a study of the family finding services provided by Seneca Center for Children and Families. The goal of the study is to learn about the family finding services. In particular, the focus group is designed to allow parents like you to provide input into whether family finding is an effective approach for child welfare agencies to use and whether these services result in better outcomes for children.

I will be your facilitator for this session and _____ will be taking notes. We are taking notes and recording the session so that we can accurately report your opinions but your responses will not be linked with your name in any way -- everything will be anonymous. No one from [San Francisco County or Seneca Center] will know who said what in this group. To protect the identity of others, I ask that when talking about someone, you only use their first name, nickname, or call them by a title such as "sister, cousin, or brother."

We would like to point out that we do not expect or require that you discuss personal circumstances about your case with DSS such as why DSS became involved We are only seeking to get your impressions of family finding services. We **strongly request** that you and all other focus group participants not discuss what is said today with others outside of the group. However, we cannot guarantee that all focus group participants will adhere to our request. We will use the recording to fill in our written notes, but then the recording will be destroyed. If at any time you would like to say something that you do not want to be recorded, just say so and we will turn off the recorder.

Your participation today is voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate in the focus group. Nothing bad will happen because you decide not to be in the study and you are not giving up any rights. Also, once we begin the focus group, you may choose to terminate your participation in the group at any time. You may choose to respond or not respond at any point during the discussion.

I'm not sure how many of you have participated in a focus group before, but let me give a brief overview. As the facilitator, I will be asking questions, but I want the interaction to flow among you – let's have lots of open discussion. I encourage you to talk to and ask questions of each other. There may be times when I need to interrupt the conversation -- either to ask you to clarify something you may have said or to move the discussion on to another topic. Most people say they enjoy participating in these groups.

Do you have any questions for me right now? If you have any questions later, you can call Karin Malm at Child Trends and she will be happy to answer your questions. And if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in our talk today, you are welcome to call our Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office. You should have a copy of all the information we just went over, which has phone numbers for each of these people that you can contact if you ever have questions. Now that I've gone over this information with you, would you still like to participate?

(If yes) Ok, are you ready to begin?

(If no) Ok, that's no problem at all. I want to thank you for letting me tell you about our study.

Again, we are very pleased to have you here today, and we thank you for your time and your opinions.

Introduction—Ice Breaker
I'd like to start by going around the room and asking that you give your first name (nicknames are fine), and say one thing that you enjoy about the San Francisco Bay Area. I'll start, my name is [Karin], I don't live here but I love the weather. . .

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about your involvement in the family finding process [interactions with the Seneca Center staff].

Initial Impressions of Family Finding

1. How did you first learn about family finding?

   Probes:
   - Who (what worker) first talked to you about "family finding"?
   - What type of contact was the initial contact—phone, in-person?
   - What were you told about family finding during this first contact?
     - What were you told about the purpose or goal of these services?
   - When did you first have contact with the family finding specialist, [name]?
     - What types of things did the family finding specialist share that made you interested in speaking with her?
     - Is there anything that wasn't shared that you thought would have been important to know?
   - What were your first impressions of the services?
     - Did you think these services might be helpful to you and your children? Why or why not?

[IF PARTICIPANTS DO NOT KNOW OR UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE OF FAMILY FINDING, FACILIATOR SHOULD BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE MODEL BEFORE GOING ON WITH ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS.]

Experiences with Seneca Family Finding Specialist

2. After the first contact, what types of contact have you [and other family members] had with the family finding specialist?

   Probes:
   - What topics are discussed?
   - Did family members ever get asked to be a placement resource, that is, provide full-time care for your child/ren?
   - Did you (or another family member) ever get asked if you would like to visit with the child/ren?
   - Did you (or another family member) ever get asked if you'd like to call/email the child/ren?

- Was "emotional permanency" or putting together a life-long supportive network ever discussed? If so, what were you talk about this?

3. Did you and other family members ever meet as a group?

Probes:
- Who facilitated the meeting-DSS or the family finding specialist?
- Was the family finding specialist at the meeting(s)?
- What was the purpose of the meeting(s)?
- Did all family members who were invited attend the meetings—why or why not?
- Did you feel your voice was heard in the meeting(s)?
- What was your role in the meeting(s)?
- What were you told about the meetings before attending?
  - Was it what you expected when you came?
  - Was there a team approach to making decisions?
- Did the meeting have a successful outcome?
  - Did any of those that attended agree to serve as a lifetime connection for the child?
  - Were there unresolved issues or other challenges that occurred during the meeting? If so, how were they resolved?
  - Was there anything that you feel could have been done differently?
- If meetings were held, where were they held?
  - Was this place convenient for you and others that participated?
- Were the meetings convenient for your schedule?

If no participation, ask: What do you feel could have been done to ensure that you were able to participate in the meetings?

4. How often did you speak or communicate with the Family Finding specialist?

Probes:
- Would you have wanted more or less contact with the family finding specialist?
- What has been your role in the process, for example did you contact other family members? Did another family member contact you?

5. Were there any challenges to working with the Family Finding specialist? If so, describe.

Probes:

- Are there any characteristics of the Family Finding specialist that made it easy or difficult to work with them?
- Were there challenges to scheduling or attending time with the family finding specialist? Time for family meetings?

6. Do you think anything could have been done differently to help get you and other family members become more involved in the overall child welfare case process as well as more specifically family finding?

7. What were some things that helped the family finding process?

8. Has the family finding specialist provided any resources or services to you or other family members? If yes, can you describe.

Experiences with DSS

9. What contact have you had with the county child welfare agency?

> Probes:

- Was "emotional permanency" or putting together a life-long supportive network ever discussed? If so, what is your understanding of this?

10. What is your general impression of DSS and its workers?

> Probes:
- Has DSS (DSS caseworkers) generally been helpful to your family? Why or why not?
- How do you think DSS could be more helpful to families? Families in need of some support?
- How do you think DSS could be more helpful to parents like you?
- If you participated in DSS-led meetings, were these helpful? Did you feel your voice was heard?

Okay, we've come to the end of the questions. Do you have anything else you'd like to tell us about family finding? Thank you all so much for taking the time to participate in the focus group.

Family Finding Evaluation
Relative Focus Group Protocol

<u>Introduction</u>
Thank you very much for agreeing to speak with us today. My name is _____ and I'm with Child Trends, an organization in Washington, DC that performs research to improve programs and services for children and youth. With me today is _____, also with Child Trends.

We're conducting a study of the family finding services provided by Seneca Center for Children and Families. The goal of the study is to learn about the family finding services. In particular, the focus group is designed to allow relatives to provide input into whether family finding is an effective approach for child welfare agencies to use and whether these services result in better outcomes for children.

I will be your facilitator for this session and _____ will be taking notes. We are taking notes and recording the session so that we can accurately report your opinions. To protect the identity of others, I ask that when talking about someone, you only use their first name, nickname, or call them by a title such as "sister, cousin, or brother." We will be taking notes during the interview so we can accurately report your responses but your responses will not be linked with your name in any way -- everything will be anonymous. No one from [San Francisco County or Seneca Center] will know who said what in this group.

We would like to point out that we do not expect or require that you discuss personal circumstances about the children or parents involved with DSS such as why the children were removed from their home or the status of their cases. We are only seeking to get your impressions of family finding services. We **strongly request** that you and all other focus group participants not discuss what is said in this group today with others outside of the group. However, we cannot guarantee that all focus group participants will adhere to our request. We will use the recording to fill in our written notes, but then the recording will be destroyed. If at any time you would like to say something that you do not want to be recorded, just say so and we will turn off the recorder.

Your participation today is voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate in the focus group. Nothing bad will happen because you decide not to be in the study and you are not giving up any rights. Also, once we begin the focus group, you may choose to terminate your participation in the group at any time. You may choose to respond or not respond at any point during the discussion.

I'm not sure how many of you have participated in a focus group before, but let me give a brief overview. As the facilitator, I will be asking questions, but I want the interaction to flow among you – let's have lots of open discussion. I encourage you to talk to and ask questions of each other. There may be times when I need to interrupt the conversation -- either to ask you to clarify something you may have said or to move the discussion on to another topic. Most people say they enjoy participating in these groups.

Do you have any questions for me right now? If you have any questions later, you can call Karin Malm at Child Trends and she will be happy to answer your questions. And if you have any questions about your rights as a participant in our talk today, you are welcome to call our Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office. You should have a copy of all the information we just went over, which has phone numbers for each of these people that you can contact if you ever have questions. Now that I've gone over this information with you, would you still like to participate?

(If yes) Ok, are you ready to begin?

(If no) Ok, that's no problem at all. I want to thank you for letting me tell you about our study.

Again, we are very pleased to have you here today, and we thank you for your time and your opinions.

Introduction—Ice Breaker
I'd like to start by going around the room and asking that you give your first name (nicknames are fine), and say one thing that you enjoy about the San Francisco Bay Area. I'll start, my name is [Karin], I don't live here but I love the weather. . .

Now, I'd like to ask you some questions about your involvement in the family finding process [interactions with the Seneca Center staff].

Initial Impressions of Family Finding

2. How did you first learn about family finding?

    Probes:
    - Who (what worker) first talked to you about "family finding"?
    - What type of contact was the initial contact—phone, in-person?
    - What were you told about family finding during this first contact?
        o   What were you told about the purpose or goal of these services?
    - When did you first have contact with the family finding specialist, [name]?
        o   What types of things did the family finding specialist share that made you interested in speaking with her?
        o   Is there anything that wasn't shared that you thought would have been important to know?
    - What were your first impressions of the services?
        o   Did you think these services might be helpful to the family members (children, birth parents)? Why or why not?

[IF PARTICIPANTS DO NOT KNOW OR UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE OF FAMILY FINDING, FACILIATOR SHOULD BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE MODEL BEFORE GOING ON WITH ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS.]

Experiences with Seneca Family Finding Specialist

2. After the first contact, what types of contact have you [and other family members] had with the family finding specialist?

    Probes:
    - What topics are discussed?
    - Did you (or another family member) ever get asked to be a placement resource, that is, provide full-time care for the child/ren?
    - Did you (or another family member) ever get asked if you would like to visit with the child/ren?
    - Did you (or another family member) ever get asked if you'd like to call/email the child/ren?

- Was "emotional permanency" or putting together a life-long supportive network ever discussed? If so, what were you talk about this?

3. Did you and other family members ever meet as a group?

   Probes:
   - Was the family finding specialist at the meeting(s)?
   - What was the purpose of the meeting(s)?
   - Did all family members who were invited attend the meetings—why or why not?
   - Did you feel your voice was heard in the meeting(s)?
   - What was your role in the meeting(s)?
   - What were you told about the meetings before attending?
     - Was it what you expected when you came?
     - Was there a team approach to making decisions?
   - Did the meeting have a successful outcome?
     - Did any of those that attended agree to serve as a lifetime connection for the child?
     - Were there unresolved issues or other challenges that occurred during the meeting? If so, how were they resolved?
     - Was there anything that you feel could have been done differently?
   - If meetings were held, where were they held?
     - Was this place convenient for you and others that participated?
   - Were the meetings convenient for your schedule?

   If no participation, ask: What do you feel could have been done to ensure that you were able to participate in the meetings?

4. How often did you speak or communicate with the Family Finding specialist?

   Probes:
   - Would you have wanted more or less contact with the family finding specialist?
   - What has been your role in the process, for example did you contact other family members? Did another family member contact you?

5. Were there any challenges to working with the Family Finding specialist? If so, describe.

   Probes:

   - Are there any characteristics of the Family Finding specialist that made it easy or difficult to work with them?
   - Were there challenges to scheduling or attending meetings, making contact with the family finding specialist?

6. Do you think anything could have been done differently to help get you and other family members more involved with the case process or family finding?

7. What were some things that helped the family finding process?

8. Has the family finding specialist provided any resources or services to you or other family members? If yes, can you describe.

Experiences with DSS

9. What, if any, contact have you (or other family members) had with the county child welfare agency?

    Probes:

    - Did you (or another family member) ever get asked to be a placement resource, that is, care for the children on a full-time basis?
    - Did you (or another family member) ever get asked if you would like to visit with the child/ren?
    - Did you (or another family member) ever get asked if you'd like to call/email the child/ren?
    - Were you ever asked to be involved in planning for the future of the child/ren?
    - Was "emotional permanency" or putting together a life-long supportive network ever discussed? If so, what is your understanding of this?

10. What is your general impression of DSS and its workers?

    Probes:
    - Has DSS (DSS caseworkers) generally been helpful to your family? Why or why not?
    - How do you think DSS could be more helpful to families? Families in need of some support?
    - How do you think DSS could be more helpful to relatives like you?

Okay, we've come to the end of the questions. Do you have anything else you'd like to tell us about family finding? Thank you all so much for taking the time to participate in the focus group.

Overview

As part of the Family Finding evaluation process study, we will be conducting naturalistic observations of the frontline staff of the various programs under evaluation. The observations, while not representative, will allow us to more thoroughly document and describe the Family Finding activities under evaluation. As part of observing (shadowing) Family Finding staff in their daily public activities, research staff will also plan to observe their interactions with youth and families. However, we are not collecting data on these youth and families. The sole purpose of observing these interactions is to provide examples of how program staff implement the Family Finding model. The observations will not be recorded by any means—audio or visual.

This instruction guide outlines the protocol we will be following for the observation component of the process study. Overall, data collected during the site observations will be used to explore how the Family Finding Model is being implemented.

The observations will be conducted one-on-one, that is one researcher observing one Family Finding staff member. In each program site, a member of the research team will shadow a Family Finding worker for 2-4 hours.

Conducting the Site Observations

1. Prior to conducting the first observation, familiarize yourself with the Family Finding model and any written materials about the Family Finding services at the local site where the observation will take place.

2. We will be observing office and field activities, and then recording our observations via tape recorder afterwards. The first section of the Site Observation Fieldguide should be used to briefly describe the physical setting, Family Finding worker, any clients observed (e.g. youth, family members or other caring adults), and the program activity. The second section of the Fieldguide contains a set of observation topics and probes to be used as memory triggers when completing your observation audionotes. It is important to memorize the observation topics and probes prior to conducting the first observation, so that your attention is more likely to be alerted when a given behavior occurs.

3. Plan to arrive at the program site 15 minutes prior to the beginning of the session. Arriving early will allow time to take descriptive notes on the setting and obtain background information on the worker to complete the first page of the site observation field guide. Introduce yourself to the Family Finding worker you will be observing. Be sure to inform the caseworker of the following:

   Thank you so much for allowing me to spend a few hours with you today. I'm observing you today to more thoroughly document and describe the Family Finding (or [insert local title])

services. The sole purpose of observing you is to provide examples of how you and your colleagues use the Family Finding Model to serve children and youth and their families.

I am not tape recording our time together, but I will jot down notes from time to time as reminders for later when I write-up full notes on my observations. You and the families you may come into contact with today will not be identified in the observation notes or any reports that result from these observations.

I will not share my observations with your employer or others beyond the research team. However, if I observe any interactions between you and a youth that causes concern about the youth's safety, I will release this information to the youth welfare agency and I will inform your employer.

4. As the Family Finding worker begins his/her activities, pick an unobtrusive spot to observe. Make note of the physical appearance and dress, general mood and attitude, and other relevant details about the program staff member observed. For each of the activities observed, note the description of the physical settings, the elapsed time for each type of activity, goal/purpose of activity, and sequence of steps in the activity. Also, make mental notes about the Family Finding worker's approach and skills, use of the Family Finding model, and the quality of the interactions between the worker and the youth and their family. You may also use a small notepad to jot down keywords as reminders for completing your audionotes afterwards, but this should be done as inconspicuously as possible.

5. If the program staff activity involves youth and/or their family members or other adults, introduce yourself to them. Be sure to inform them of the following:

My name is _____ and I work for Child Trends. Child Trends is conducting an evaluation of the Family Finding (or [insert local title]) services and as part of this evaluation I am spending some time today with {name of Family Finding staff member} to more thoroughly document and describe the Family Finding (or [insert local title]) services. The sole purpose is to provide examples of how {program staff member} assists you and your family. I am not collecting any information on you.

I am not recording our time together, but I will jot down notes as reminders for later when I write-up full notes on my observations. You will not be identified in the notes or any reports.

I will not share my observations with others, such as the {local public youth welfare agency}. I will only share my observations with the research team. (**IF A YOUTH, ADD**: However, if I observe anything between you and {program staff member} that seems harmful to you, I will report it to {local public youth welfare agency}).

If you do not want me to watch and listen while {name of program staff member} works with you today that is okay. Choosing not to be observed will not affect the assistance you receive from {name of program staff member} or any other agencies that may assist you now or in the future. If you choose not to be observed, I will move away so I cannot overhear your conversation. Is it okay if I observe you and {name of program staff member} today?

6. If the activity involves a youth and/or their family members note the physical appearance and dress, general mood and attitude, and other relevant details about the individual(s) observed. Be aware of the program staff member's efforts to engage the individual during the observation as well as the individual's level of engagement during the observation. If observing a youth, take note of the emotional quality of adult-youth interaction during the observation and the youth's responsiveness to the program staff member. Be able to describe the responsiveness of the program staff member towards each individual and his/her needs. Finally, if observing a youth, note the opportunities for the youth to make his/her own decisions during the observation. Take special note of any unusual or extreme behaviors, responses, or events that occur during the activity. You may also use a small notepad to jot down keywords as reminders for completing your audionotes afterwards, but this should be done as inconspicuously as possible.

7. Following each observation, the researcher should audiotape their description of what occurred during the field activity, using the fieldguide topics and probes as memory triggers and incorporating as much descriptive detail as possible. It is important to describe what you see, hear, smell, taste, and touch without merely summarizing or adding your interpretation or analysis of what is occurring. For these observations, the primary purpose is to describe WHAT is happening rather than WHY it is happening.

Family Finding Evaluation
Process Study
Site Observation Field Guide

Site Name: _____   Observer Name: _____

Date:_____   Start Time: _____

                                                                    End Time: _____

Number of Youth observed:
                                                    Male   _____

                                                    Female _____

Number of Relatives or other caring adults:

                                                    Male   _____

                                                    Female _____

Length of time as FF worker:

Years of experience in child welfare:

Highest level of education: Discipline:

Description of Physical Setting:
(note size of space, cleanliness, state of repair, materials and equipment, lighting, temperature, noise level, and other relevant details)

Description/Impressions of Family Finding Worker:
(note physical appearance and dress, general mood and attitude, and other relevant details)

If Relevant, Description/Impressions of Youth, Relatives, or Other Caring Adults:
(note physical appearance and dress, general mood and attitude, and other relevant details)

Description of Activity:
(note the stage in the Family Finding model that best represents the activity conducted, goal/purpose of activity, sequence of steps in the activity, the amount of time to complete the activity, any challenges encountered, whether the goal/purpose of the activity was achieved, and other relevant details)

FOR THE OBSERVATION AUDIONOTES:

Describe the sequence of events and interpersonal dynamics you observed during the activity, including as much descriptive detail as you can remember. In describing this sequence, try to touch on the following issues – Family Finding worker's approach and skills, use of the Family Finding model, and the quality of the interactions between the worker and the youth and their family as they occurred during the observation period.

I. Family Finding Staff

Describe the worker's approach and ability to carry out the activity.
- skill level
- ability to handle challenges
- ability to collaborate

If other staff were involved in the activity, describe what their involvement was.

II. Family Finding Model

Describe the worker's use of the model within the observed activity.
- where the activity fit within the model
- whether the activity and/or how it was carried out represented a modification of the model
- whether the activity reflected the worker's knowledge of the model or a model component
- whether the activity and/or how it was carried out reflected a focus on achieving legal and emotional permanency for the child(ren) on the case

III. Quality of the Worker-Relative Interactions

Describe the responsiveness of the Family Finding worker towards the relative or other caring adult and their needs.
- actively listened to the relative or other caring adult
- showed respect towards relative or other caring adult and their opinions
- seemed to know the individual and/or made efforts to get to know them as individuals
- communicated the value and importance of the activity

Describe relative or other caring adult's responsiveness to the Family Finding Worker.

- listened to worker
- acted respectfully towards worker
- seemed comfortable with worker
- openly shared their feelings and opinions

Describe the emotional quality of worker-relative interaction during the activity.

- appeared to enjoy each other's company
- exchanged positive affect (smiling, laughing, gentle teasing)
- exchanged negative affect (sarcasm, anger)
- amount of eye contact between relative or other caring adult and worker

IV. Quality of the Worker-Youth Interactions

Describe the responsiveness of the Family Finding worker towards youth and their needs.

- actively listened to youth
- showed respect towards youth and their opinions
- verbally recognized youth needs and wants
- seemed to know individual youth and/or made efforts to get to know them as individuals
- communicated the value and importance of the activity

Describe youth responsiveness to the Family Finding Worker.

- listened to worker
- acted respectfully towards worker
- seemed comfortable with worker
- shared their opinions

Describe the emotional quality of worker-youth interaction during the activity.

- appeared to enjoy each other's company
- exchanged positive affect (smiling, laughing, gentle teasing)
- exchanged negative affect (sarcasm, anger)
- amount of eye contact between youth and worker

APPENDIX D

Number of Types and Site Visit Participants

Number and Types of Site Visit Participants*

Participants	1st Site Visit July 2009	2nd Site Visit July 2010	3rd Site Visit June 2011
CW Agency Director	1	1	1
CW Program Administrator/Manager–small group interview	2	4	3
CW Program Unit Supervisors–focus group	7	7	8
Caseworkers with family finding experience–focus group	12	5	7
Caseworkers with no family finding experience–focus group	6	2	3
family finding supervisors–small group interview	1	2	3
family finding specialists–small group interview	4	4	3
Parents–focus group	0	8	11
Relatives–focus group	0	5	5
Family Meeting Attendees–observation	0	9	0
Total	33	47	44

*Participants may have participated in interviews or focus groups in multiple years.