

MRS Conference Call Notes
September 2010

Counties Participating 9/21: Alamance, Beaufort, Buncombe, Dare, Davidson, Gaston, Harnett, Jackson, Lee, Martin, McDowell, Nash, New Hanover, Pitt, Randolph, Washington, Wilson.

Counties Participating 9/29: Chatham, Caswell, Catawba, Durham, Graham, Macon, Onslow, Rockingham, Scotland, Surry, Union.

Counties Participating 9/30: Anson, Beaufort, Burke, Davidson, Davie, Forsyth, Gaston, Halifax, Hoke, Moore, Northampton, Orange, Person, Randolph, Rutherford, Watauga, Wayne.

Agenda

Announcements from Raleigh

Family Finders Presentation

Share your best tools for finding absent parents and other relatives

Overview of RIL – Q & A with Terri Reichert

Are you able to combine any meetings with other agencies (i.e. IEP, Treatment Team, CFT, etc...) if time allows

News from Raleigh

Letters:

- 8/26 – RIL forms are now available on the forms site
- 8/31 – IVE review tool
- 9/1 – Changes to the SIS manual – added some codes for Family Violence Prevention Fund, deleted some Work First codes
- 9/16 – Memo regarding a foster parent training survey
- 9/16 – National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) regarding training on this database
- 9/17 – MRS database may be slow due to high usage
- 9/23 – New policy in section 1304 – adoption exchange (formerly NC Kids)
- 9/27 – Change notice for Chapter 13, Section 16 - Adoption Assistance
- Reminder from Tom Smith to consider making referrals to IFPS and Reunification programs, especially for Reunification since we have changed the model and it is more intensive now.

Family Finding Presentation – power point presentation sent out with MRS email

9/21: Christy Thompson from New Hanover

9/27: Ty Simon from Catawba

9/30: Larissa and Mandy from Mecklenburg

What Is Family Finding????? (slide 2)

Family Finding is a set of strategies being used to find lifelong supports for children and youth in foster care.

- Family Finding provides a starting point for a foster child to build a relationship with healthy adults who can have an ongoing, meaningful presence in his/her life. Once one vital family link is found, often that individual can provide connections to other family members. Even if the family linkages don't lead to permanent placements, they can provide a foster child with an important sense of belonging

What Is Family Finding????? (cont. – slide 3)

- The 6 key strategies are:
 - 1) **Identify** a minimum of 40 relatives
 - 2) Contact and **engage** relatives
 - 3) Create a team of family and others important to the youth to **plan** for their future
 - 4) **Decision-making** with the team, caseworker, and possibly youth to determine how to integrate the youth safely into a relationship with family and determine what is needed for lifelong connection
 - 5) **Evaluate**—are there at least 3 plans to achieve legal and emotional permanence
 - 6) **Follow-up supports** are identified in the family and the community for the youth and the family

Guiding Principles to Family Finding (slide 4 and 5)

(taken from Six Steps to Find a Family, California Permanency For Youth Project)

- Finding a Family is a *youth* driven process
- Every youth deserves, and can have, a permanent family
- Youth have the right to know about their family members; family members have the right to know about their youth
- Youth should have connections with the biological family, **regardless of whether they will live with them**, unless there is a compelling reason not to
- With support, most youth can live in a home rather than in foster care or institutions
- The goal of Family Finding is permanency, through reunification, guardianship, adoption, or another form of permanent commitment – **Long Term Placement in Foster Care is NOT a permanent plan!!!**

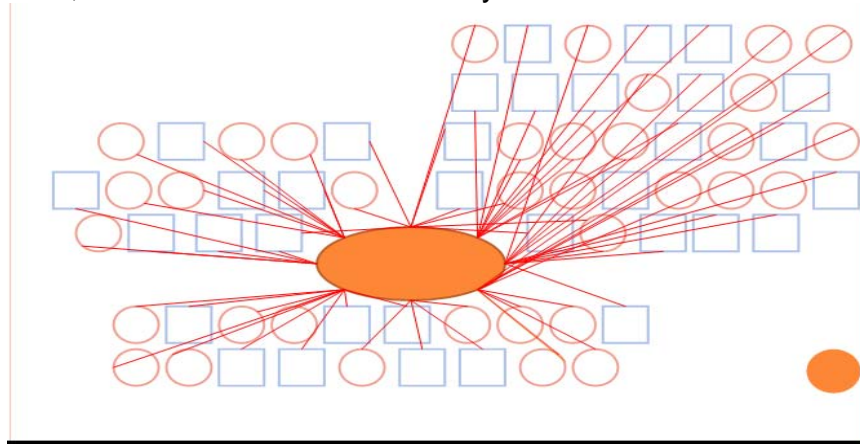
Why Family Finding? (slide 6, 7 and 8)

- Research shows that lifelong, loving connections are the single most significant predictor of future success for children in the child welfare system
- Federal Legislation recognizing the need for focus on fostering connections for foster children
- Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act signed into law by President Bush in 2008 provides for grants for programs such as Family Finding, Kinship Navigator, etc.
- NC Child Welfare policy changed effective February 2010 – mandates notice to all relatives of a child who is brought into foster care within 30 days

- Emphasis not just on placement resources but as connections and support resources
- According to a new report (5/07) by The Pew Charitable Trusts' Kids Are Waiting campaign & the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative – while the total number of children in foster care has decreased, the number who "age out" of the system *has grown by 41% since 1998*

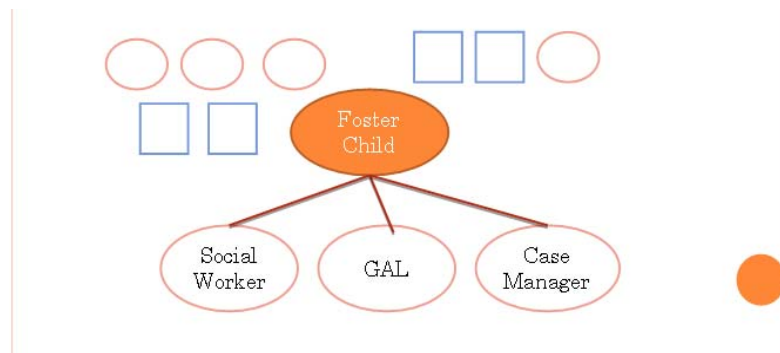
Connect-O-Gram (slide 9)

For a "Typical, Wonderful, Healthy" 12 year old; This illustration represents all of the supports, relatives, connections who are actively involved in her life.

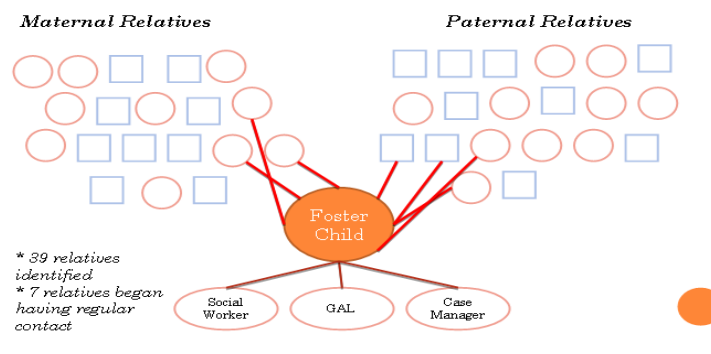


Connect-O-Gram (slide 10)

W/M Foster Child; Age 13, In custody for 9+ years; 33 placements; 8 relatives identified at time of referral to Family Finding



Connect-O-Gram (slide 11) After Family Finding Began



For Children who age out of foster care without significant connections: (slide 12)

- One in four will be incarcerated within two years of leaving foster care;
- 1 in 5 will become homeless;
- Only one-half will graduate from high school;
- Less than 3 percent receive college degrees

Family Finding Pilot Program (slide 13)

- Funded by the Duke Endowment
- Research and evaluation are being conducted by Child Trends Social Science Research
- Pilot Program will end August 2011

FAMILY FINDING PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS (slide 14)

- NC DHHS, Buncombe County, Catawba County, Children's Home Society, Child Trends, Cumberland County, Durham County, Gaston County, Guilford County, Mecklenburg County, New Hanover County, Wake County

Family Finding Pilot Program (cont. slide 15 and 16)

Each county set their own criteria for eligible cases. In general, most met the following criteria:

- Youth, ages as young as 10 up to 21
- No plan of reunification with birth parents or had a concurrent plan that was not reunification
- Had no permanent resource identified as placement
- Younger siblings could also be served if they met the same criteria of the older sibling

The Family Finding Program is a study.

- Youth meeting the criteria are placed in a database pool and randomly assigned to either the work or control group
- These youth will also be interviewed at least twice in the 2 years following the program about their experiences in foster care
- Data is maintained by each family finding coordinator on each case for the evaluation in a database created by Child Trends

What do the Family Finding Coordinators Do once a Case is Assigned? (slide 17 and 18)

- File mining—review the foster care records, CPS records, perhaps service records
- Complete mobility mapping with the youth and learn who is important to them
- Utilize a number of resources to locate and identify the relatives and fictive kin of the youth
- Contact relatives/fictive kin to both engage and acquire more information about the family—phone calls, letters, and home visits
- Goal is to identify a **minimum** of 40 relatives
- Engage family/fictive kin to join a team to plan for the youth by inviting them to a meeting
- Facilitate a meeting with family—goal is to have 8 to 12 attend
- In the meeting, help family understand youth's strengths and needs with largest need being permanence and connections
- Ask family present to speak with others who didn't attend or suggest who else to invite, especially if 8 to 12 are not participating yet
- Schedule and facilitate at least 2 more meetings with the family
- At these meetings, work on plans to reconnect family with youth in appropriate ways
- With the team, identify at least 3, preferably 6 plans that could resolve the legal and emotional permanence of the youth
- Develop a timeline of steps for these plans to be implemented
- Identify 2 team members to become the co-leaders in the future planning

Individual County Updates: (slide 19)

- Actual case examples from county
- Successes?
- Challenges?
- Status of selection pool?

Overall Impressions: (slide 20)

- Family's response
- Children's response
- Well being
- Placement vs. connections

STATUS OF PILOT PROJECT: (slide 21)

- Total cases served or being served amongst all sites (including CHS) – 230
- Total of cases to be served once pilot has concluded (including CHS) – 450
- Average number of known connections at referral (baseline) – 7
- Average number of newly discovered connections – 30

POSITIVES FROM FAMILY FINDING (slide 22)

- Time would not have allowed me to do this.
- Could not have accessed this information.
- At least there will be visiting resource, cards and gifts, photos, connections
- Therapeutic for the youth to know what happened to mom/dad/significant relative
- Gives youth hope that they can have a different/better outcome.
- Gives families answers

FAMILY FINDING MISCONCEPTIONS AND CHALLENGES (slide 23)

- The apple doesn't fall far from the tree
- Where has the family been?
- The youth is doing fine, rather not participate
- High expectations of relatives
- Tend to focus on one person/placement option rather than concurrent planning
- Incorporating family into child's team when not a placement option

FAMILY FINDING PRACTICE IMPACTS (slide 24)

- 1) Concurrent Planning
- 2) Interview children and youth
- 3) Locate numbers of relatives
- 4) Engage relatives
- 5) Focus on connections as well as placement
- 6) Create natural community supports

Final Thoughts: (slide 25)

What will "successful" Family Finding look like?

- A potential permanent home being identified for a child.
- A child having information about his or her family that he did not have before, i.e. – Who do I look like? Who are my family members? What was my mother/father like as a child? Information CAN improve a child's well being without causing safety concerns for the child.
- Establishing connections and relationships that child has not previously had.
- Agency able to show true diligent efforts to locate possible relatives/kin.

Family Finding is ONE resource for helping achieve permanence for a child.

Discussion 9/21:

What do you do if there are people that want to be involved but cannot make it to meetings (incarcerated or out of town too far)?

- New Hanover has had conference calls, assisted with people that live out of town but not too far in getting to the meetings, and also do videos so that the child can actually see the relatives and vice versa.

What if it has been determined that contact with Mom is detrimental to child's welfare and the relatives are in close contact with mom, do you still seek out those relatives?

- Yes, and just explained to the relatives what the boundaries are. Christy has had it go both ways – she actually has called the mother in situations like this. Some of them hang up and some realize that also they don't need to have contact with their child but they will give history and also provide her information on relatives so that the SW can hook up with relatives.

How do you ensure the safety of children in our custody that are visiting relatives out of state?

- Christy had one and they contacted the DSS where the grandmother was located. The DSS did a safety assessment of grandmother's home and was very cooperative. Did not go through ICPC for a 2 week visit in that situation. They had the support of the court who wanted her to be able to visit family out of state.

Facebook

- This has been a great resource for finding relatives. She has set up a separate account "Family Finding Coordinator" that she uses. She has a brief description of what she does so that if people see the message form her and wonder who the heck it is they can get an idea. She sends a message only using a first name saying that she believes she has a child in care who may be related to them and would they contact her and gives her number.
- Have not had problems of any kind from using Facebook/Internet.

Discussion 9/29:

What time frame does it take from the referral until they start working with them.

- When they receive the referral they will enter it in the database and if the case is selected to receive services usually meet with the referring SW within the week. However then meeting with the family and getting information may take longer. The goal is to have everything done within 90-120 days, but according to Tom Smith it is now averaging 144 days, so we are taking longer.

When does pilot end?

- August 2011 and there are a variety of things that could happen at that time and we are unsure at this time what all those possibilities will be.

If they end in the control group can you re-refer later

- Not while the pilot is going on

Discussion 9/30:

Can the family finding meetings be combined with CFTs or other required meetings?

- She tries as hard as she can but sometimes you just can't do it.

Documentation – can they speak to what was helpful in the documentation in finding people later on?

- The more information they have the better. Sometimes the records just say "the Aunt Sue called". Dates of birth, full name, and relationship to the family is very helpful, and of course any additional information you can provide is nice.

What have been the most challenging?

- This is something so new, and you have to think in new ways.

The social worker who does this, is this all they do? And also, have you had to deal with feuding family members when they all get together?

- She has never had a family fight over a child – they know what, in reality, they are capable of and those that could take custody step up to the table.
- This is correct, they do not carry the case as a typical “caseload”.

RIL – Terri Reichert

- Only effective on cases where the report was received on or after August 20th, so far have not had any case decisions come in under the new RIL process.
- Biggest difference is that names will only go on the RIL after some type of judicial determination has happened or the individual has failed to request review.
- 3 ways that a person can get on RIL:
 - 1) Person does not file a petition for review within 15 days
 - 2) If after making the case decision, a judicial review petition was filed
 - The judicial review looks at the correctness of the placement on the RIL as well as the Case Decision.
 - In this case the Director will receive notice and will review record to determine correctness of case decision. If Director upholds case decision the review will go forward.
 - If Director changes case decision, they will send a letter to the court saying that they are changing the decision and desire for placement and the hearing will be cancelled and there will be no placement on RIL.
 - If the judge determines they should not be on the RIL, then you will not be able to place them on the list.
 - The policy (and the first call) implied that we could not work with the family at all if the judge overturns your request to place them on RIL and the case decision.
 - This is not entirely true. Policy will be revised. But (for example) you could have one parent subbed on abuse and one parent on neglect (not serious). The judge overturns the abuse finding, but you have still substantiated neglect on the other parent and therefore can still work with the family. Or judge may say it is not serious neglect, but it is neglect, so you would still be able to work with them.
 - 3) Prior to a case decision a juvenile petition is filed, then you are going through an adjudication process, and that process will determine if the person is placed on the RIL
- Automation has not caught up, we are working on it. So, currently, you will enter 5104's as usual. Will be bringing back the RIL indicator (field 39). If this is a case where you will place someone on RIL you will be completing a 5104a – on paper.
 - Currently Terri is tracking that at the Division. When the process is complete so that you know for sure that the name can be on the list (court order has been signed, or the time has passed and they have failed to file a petition), you will send Terri the 5104, 5104a, and the documentation that allows them to be placed on the RIL. Don't send originals, send copies.

- When the automation system is completed counties will enter it for themselves again. Division will key the ones that had been sent to Terri so counties will not have to go back and key those.

Discussion 9/21:

Asked if they felt like they needed to work with the family and don't want to risk being told to walk away by the court should they change it into a family assessment?

- No! Involve your county attorney so that you have all your t's crossed. Recognize that it is a difficult position, but you need to make sure all your ducks are in a row. Have to determine if it is more important to get this person on the list and have their name out there or to be guaranteed the ability to provide involuntary services. (But recall that abuse cannot be changed to a Family Assessment.)
- Have to consider if this is a person that would potentially be an adoptive or foster parent as well as a person who may want to work around children.

Discussion 9/29:

When you do the letter to the Individual, how much of the evidence (summary of what you found) do you need to put in there?

- As much as you think is necessary for the family to understand the case decision, but not so much that it identifies your reporter. There is a different standard for the courts and DSS, but we are going to have to start thinking about our decisions and consider if we have enough information for our case decision to stand in court.

On the case decision letter there is no place for them to sign that they got it.

- If counties feel that is necessary, they can build that in. But it is not required.

What part does the Director have in it?

- Once the individual files for judicial review the Director is to review the record to determine if DSS does still want to place that person on the list then the hearing goes forward. If he does not uphold the decision, the court is notified that the Director has rescinded the request to be on the RIL.

Can't you just have the Director review it before it is filed?

- Yes that is up to your county,. One county has the Director at the staffing for all cases where the result will be to put someone on the RIL. So when the court requests a review the Director has already done it.
- The only reason they may not want to do this is that the Director may not have time. Only a certain percentage of cases that they want to place on the list will actually appeal and the Director will only have to review these.
- Some counties already make staffing where being on the RIL is an option a 3 level review and have a program manager or someone there.
- RIL and licensing application
 - When you need to check the RIL for licensing application, at this time the Social Worker cannot check the RIL database because there is not one, therefore they will have to send the RIL request to Terri. You won't be able to send your licensing packet to Black Mountain until she does this so factor in some extra time.

October Meetings: 13th, 18th, 27th