

Improving permanency planning for youth in extended foster care

John Paul Horn, MSW

May 13, 2014

Introduction

- Aged out of the foster care system in 2004
- Advocated at the State and Federal levels
- Completed my graduate assistantships at a federally funded child welfare resource center
- Work as a training consultant for child welfare related topics

Game plan

- 2 Objectives
 - Understand the outcomes related to permanency via personal stories and empirical research
 - Learn new strategies for engaging youth in talks about permanency

Understanding permanency

- What is permanency?
- What does a “permanent connection” look like?
- How long is “permanent”?

Your Turn

- Turn to your neighbor and tell them a story of someone who is/was important to you.
 - Where did you meet?
 - How long have you/did you know(n) each other?
 - How long did you know each other before you felt like you could trust this important person?
 - Did you meet them through a formal relationship or did you meet them in an informal situation?

My Turn

The story of Mrs. V

Your Turn (again)

- Think about this important person you shared with your neighbor.
 - Can you call them in the middle of the night with an emergency?
 - You just scored your dream job/vacation/won the lotto... Are they on your short list of people to call?
 - Your car broke down on a deserted highway... can you call them to come pick you up?
 - You're visiting home and need a ride from the airport...will they come get you?

“Permanent Connection”

A person in my life...

who I can call when life gets rough or is going great...

who can provide me with some type of support.

Case Studies

- JP
- Marie*
- Alan*

JP

- Placement history:
 - Entered foster care at the age of 8.
 - 6 foster homes, 7 group homes, 1 failed kinship care
 - All over California...
 - Children's Center and Juvenile Hall for long periods

JP

- What was the plan:

- Long term foster care; adoption not an option.

JP

- Identifying Key Players:

- Maternal Aunt
- 7th Grade Teacher and 7th Grade Librarian
- Former Foster Parent
- Best Friend's Parents

JP

- Outcomes:
 - At age 28, only 4 remain
 - Mrs. V, Mrs. B, Mom & Dad

Marie

- Placement history:
 - Entered foster care at the age of 6.
 - 6 Foster Homes
 - Mostly in our home county
 - Children's Center

Marie

- What was the plan:
 - Long term foster care; legal guardianship was possible.

Marie

- Identifying Key Players:
 - Maternal Aunt
 - Former Foster Parents #1
 - Former Foster Parents #6

Marie

- Outcomes:
 - At age 26, only 2 remain
 - Foster Parents #6

Alan

- Placement history:
 - Entered foster care at the age of 4.
 - 3 foster homes, 5 group homes
 - All over California...
 - Children's Center and Juvenile Hall for long periods

Alan

- What was the plan:
 - Long term foster care; adoption not an option.

Alan

- Identifying Key Players:
 - Maternal Aunt
 - Older Brother
 - Older Sister

Alan

- Outcomes:
 - At age 25, only 2 remain
 - JP and Marie

Summary

- JP
 - Entered care at 8
 - 4 permanent connections
- Marie
 - Entered care at 6
 - 2 permanent connections
- Alan
 - Entered care at 4
 - 2 permanent connections*

Themes from Case Studies

- #1: Permanency was not an option in case planning.
 - This practice has changed, but have attitudes or beliefs towards establishing permanency?
- #2: Frequent placement changes and types of placement have influence on the permanency planning process.
- #3: Permanency takes work. A lot of work. From everyone.

Engaging Youth in Permanency Planning

- Engaging youth as a resource/partner in planning for permanency
- Helping youth identify key players
- Providing support in developing relational skills
- Facilitating maintenance of the permanent connection

Object OR Recipient OR Resource/Partner?

- Youth as OBJECT
 - Adult knows what is best for youth. Youth should fall in line and go with the plan the adult has developed.
 - All young people, who are part of this group, need the same things. If they are a young person in this group, this is the course of action.
- **Adults hold all the power, youth have no voice.**

Object OR Recipient OR Resource/Partner?

- Youth as RECIPIENT
 - Adult knows what is best for youth, but asks what the youth may want in order to get some "buy in".
 - Believes that young people can benefit from offered programs.
 - Things will still go ahead, even without the buy in.
- **Adult has the power, but youth have a limited voice.**

Object OR Recipient OR Resource/Partner?

- Youth as RESOURCE/PARTNER
 - Adult respects that youth have valuable insights, skills, and problem solving ability that can help develop solutions.
 - Believes that young people can provide valuable contributions in planning for the future.
 - Recognizes that the youth contribution will be a part of the solution.
- **Adult and youth work as partners in planning.**

Adapted from Lofquist, W. (1989). The Technology of Prevention. Tucson, AZ: Associates for Youth Development

Identifying Key Players

- Placement genogram
- “People Who are Important to Me”
- Brainstorming with youth
 - Are there people who may want a seat at the table?

Relational Skills

- Trust
 - “I think the largest issue in relationships with those in foster care is trust because they have usually found adults do not have their best interests at heart.” Mrs. V.
- NRCPFC encourages:
 - Remaining genuine
 - Communicating early about changes
 - “Show me that I can trust you.”
 - Acknowledge that permanency might be a scary idea.

Relational Skills

- Availability and Consistency
 - “I think of Mrs. B and I bringing you books, meeting for lunch, ‘springing’ you from the group home at times, attending graduations, phone calls, and letting you know when we were going to see or talk to you when you needed it.” Mrs. V
- NRCPFC encourages:
 - Frequent, Constant, and Comfortable Communication
 - Show me that you respect me
 - Stay proactive about concerns I bring up.

Relational Skills

- Understanding that we all have something to contribute
 - “My beginning steps were to prove to you by **listening to your concerns**, finding you safe places at school, and being willing to fight for you if necessary.” – Mrs. V.
- NRCPFC encourages:
 - Stay open minded and listen to my opinions.
 - Let me take ownership of my future by letting me help create my case plan.
 - Engage me in solving problems.

Relational Skills

- Acceptance and Pride
 - “I think you have been able to feel my acceptance and pride in all the things you do...I tried to do small things to make your life as ‘normal’ as possible. “ – Mrs. V.
- Everyone makes mistakes
 - “You would get so worried when we needed to talk about something that you had done and would immediately think that we were going to end our relationship with you, even when we’d committed to being in your life.” – Mom

Facilitating Maintenance

- Barriers sometimes stand in the way of permanency
 - Worker turnover
 - Placement changes
 - Institutional policies
- Conflict is a normal part of the process
 - Mediation
 - Cooling off

Facilitating Maintenance

- Youth need a model for secure relationships
 - Trauma and attachment
- Know when it just isn't working
 - Nurturing vs. toxic relationships

Additional Resources

- National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections
 - www.nrcpfc.org
- National Resource Center for Youth Development
 - www.nrcyd.ou.edu
- Child Welfare Information Gateway
 - www.childwelfare.gov
- California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse
 - www.ceb4cw.org

Questions?

I am always happy to answer questions via e-mail:

johnphorn.iowa@gmail.com

Thank You!