

PRACTICE NOTES

For North Carolina's Child Welfare Workers

From the NC Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program

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This publication for child welfare professionals is produced by the North Carolina Division of Social Services and the Family and Children's Resource Program, part of the University of North Carolina School of Social Work.

In summarizing research, we try to give you new ideas for refining your practice. However, this publication is not intended to replace child welfare training, regular supervision, or peer consultation—only to enhance them.

Let us hear from you!

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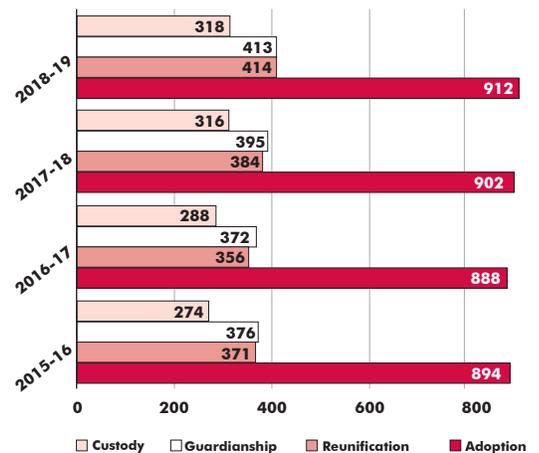
NC Is Working to Improve Permanency Outcomes

Foster care can be a lifeline for children and families, but when it goes on too long it can have negative effects. That's why federal law tells courts and child welfare agencies they must help youth achieve permanence within 12 months of entering foster care.

Yet as the figure at right shows, over the past four years, the time it takes NC children to exit foster care has grown. As the figure also shows, time to adoption in particular is an issue. In SFY 2018-19, children who exited to adoption spent far longer in foster care—a median of 912 days—than those who exited to reunification, guardianship, or custody.

North Carolina is determined to decrease length of stay and increase the rate of safe, permanent exits from foster care. No single strategy will achieve this, but as this issue of *Practice Notes* describes, our state is pursuing a number of proven methods to improve our performance. Despite their differences, a common theme of these approaches is the need

Exits from Foster Care in North Carolina: Median Days in Care by Exit Type



Source: NCDHHS Client Services Data Warehouse, Child Placement and Payment System, and NC FAST Child Services

for strong partnerships in which our judicial and child welfare systems hold each other accountable and work together to improve results for children and families. ♦

North Carolina Holds Permanency Leadership Summit

On Nov. 20, 2019, North Carolina held a summit in Raleigh on achieving timely permanence for children and youth in foster care. Titled "Partnership for Permanence: Working Together, Family Forever," the event drew more than 200 leaders and stakeholders from across the state. Attendees represented the courts, child welfare agencies, guardians ad litem, the general assembly, private agencies, and other stakeholders.

Highlights included remarks from Cheri Beasley, Chief Justice of the NC Supreme Court, and Dr. Mandy Cohen, Secretary of the NC Department of Health and Human Services, as well as workshops on community stakeholder engagement, including the youth voice, post-permanency services, safe and timely reunification, and NC's Early Childhood Action Plan.

We Can Do Better

Dr. Ralph Bayard of Casey Family Programs opened the event by celebrating the fact our state has seen a decrease in youth entering foster care. "Unfortunately," he noted, "we have also seen a decrease in exits from foster care."

"North Carolina's performance in terms of length of stay in foster care is 36th in the nation," Bayard said. "We can and must do better. For this to happen, the courts and child welfare must work together."

Balancing Competing Principles

Next, summit participants heard from social work scholar Dr. Jill Berrick, who *continued next page*

North Carolina is serious about improving permanency outcomes.

Summit

continued from previous page

argued that child welfare practitioners labor under an “impossible imperative” to satisfy many competing principles, including safety, permanency, keeping families together, family involvement, kinship connections, and others.

“People talk about this work as if it were simple, but simplicity is a recipe for disaster,” Berrick explained. “This work is complex. It requires constant moral choices. Successfully achieving one principle often means elevating it over another important principle.”

As a result, Berrick said, even when we succeed, it often doesn’t always feel that way. Even successes are vulnerable to criticism, since not all goals of the profession have been achieved.

Dr. Berrick’s presentation drew from her book *The Impossible Imperative: Navigating the Competing Principles of Child Protection* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2019).

Pennsylvania’s Roundtables

Summit attendees also learned about the judicially-led, collaboratively-driven approach Pennsylvania used to dramatically reduce the number of youth in foster care and double the use of kinship care.

According to Kim Clark, President Judge of the Family Division of Pennsylvania’s 5th Judicial District, and Angela Sager, Judicial Program Analyst with the Pennsylvania Courts, 12 years ago Pennsylvania faced many of the conditions and challenges North Carolina faces today, including a state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system, inconsistent practices at the court and agency levels, inconsistent service delivery and availability, and inconsistent outcomes for families and children.

One key to Pennsylvania’s success was the creation of a structure for communication, decision making, and relationship building called “Pennsylvania’s Children’s Round-

Court Partner Reflections on the Summit

An Interview with McKinley Wooten,
Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts

What were your big takeaways from the summit?

The biggest takeaway for me was that there exists tremendous energy around the State from stakeholders who are committed to timely permanence for our most vulnerable children. I was encouraged by the synergy in the morning World Café breakout session where stakeholders across disciplines worked on concrete solutions to issues affecting timely permanence.



McKinley
Wooten

What do you think about the system changes Pennsylvania made to improve permanency outcomes?

The Pennsylvania model provided a useful framework for us to consider in North Carolina. However, because of the size of our State, I think staffing resources would be needed to adequately adopt PA’s Children’s Roundtable model.

Anything else you would like to share about the summit?

In a State where local resources vary immensely, I was encouraged by an ongoing theme throughout the day that collaboration is the most cost-effective way to make needed system changes.

table.” These roundtables operate on three levels:

Local. A judge in each judicial district co-chairs a roundtable with the county child welfare administrator. Attended by a variety of stakeholders, these groups meet to share information and resolve challenges related to permanency and other issues affecting children.

Leadership. Every local children’s roundtable sends representatives to meet twice a year with peers from similar-sized counties. Leadership roundtables try to resolve concerns and issues raised by the local roundtables.

State. The state roundtable meets once a year to discuss and act on issues of concern raised by Pennsylvania’s eight leadership roundtables. The state roundtable’s more than a dozen workgroups have focused on many challenges, including improving father engagement, implementing court reviews of cases every three months, and increasing use of kinship placements.

For more on the Children’s Roundtables, click [here](#) or visit PA’s [Office of Children and Families in the Courts](#).

Promoting Permanency in NC

Summit attendees also heard from Lisa Cauley, Deputy Director of Child Welfare Services for the NC Division of Social Services. In her address on “[The Future of Foster Care in North Carolina](#),” Cauley described NC’s performance and gave an overview of the changes being made to our child welfare system by state and federal laws.

Permanency-related goals in NC’s 2020-2024 Child and Family Services Plan and its Early Childhood Action Plan, Cauley stated, demonstrate that North Carolina is serious about improving permanence outcomes for families and children.

Cauley believes the child welfare practice model our state will soon adopt will help bring about this improvement. She predicts, for example, that it would give staff the skills they need to talk with families about concurrent planning—plans that include active, simultaneous efforts toward reunification and an alternative form of permanency.

“We can’t wait until reunification is ruled out to begin exploring other avenues of permanence,” Cauley said. ♦

Families Love Wake County's New Family Visitation Center

Family time, or parent-child visits, are the most effective yet under-utilized tool we have in child welfare for moving families toward permanency (Nesmith, 2013). Whether a parent visits with their child consistently is the strongest indicator of whether reunification will occur (Leathers, et. al 2010; Ansay & Perkins, 2001).

By being purposeful in how we structure, plan, and implement family time, we create opportunities for parents to maintain their connection to their child, for children to build secure attachment, and for families to heal (Smariga, 2007).

The following factors have been proven to reduce the length of time a child spends in foster care:

- **Frequency of visits:** regular contact with the parent helps children cope with grief, manage the trauma of separation, decrease anxiety, and adjust to their placement.
- **Location of visits:** family time is significantly enhanced when it occurs in a comfortable, natural environment where the family has privacy and access to age appropriate activities.
- **Relationship between the social worker and the parent:** birth parents state they want a relationship with their social worker where they can tell their story, be honest about their feelings, and receive support without judgment. When this occurs, they are more likely to work with the social worker and the agency. They are also much more likely to work their plan by addressing the safety concerns that led to their child being in care.

(Cheng, 2010; White, Albers & Bitonti, 1996; JIF, 2018)

Applying What We Know

Wake County has put these best practice recommendations in action via Wake House, its family visitation center. Formerly a group home for boys, Wake House is a residential visitation

center for children and families—one of the first in our state.

Wake County changed their practices around family time in late 2018. Before then, visits were held in their human services office building. According to Paige Rosemond, Wake County's Child Welfare Director, "visits were in a 10x10 room, cramped, sterile. Parents had to walk past what could be their peers or other community members to be able to access the visitation. They couldn't take their children to the bathroom without someone with badge access" (Blanford, 2019). Wake County wanted to do something new—to get outside the box.

The Vision

With Wake House, Wake County created an environment that is comfortable and relaxing—where families can be themselves (Wake County Human Services, 2019).

Wake House is truly a house. This family visitation center has a living room, a fully stocked kitchen, multiple private rooms for families, and a large backyard with a basketball court. At Wake House, parents can cook dinner while their children do homework. Families are able to eat meals together around the dining room table. They can relax, watch TV, play video games, and read books together.

Parents say it "feels like home" and enjoy coming there. Children are now excited to come to their visits (Wake County Human Services, 2019).

What's more, parents are assigned a visitation coach who provides education, mentoring, and support to help them be more successful in their interactions with their children. Parenting classes are also held at Wake House (Blanford, 2019).

Improved Outcomes

Recently, Wake County has seen some very positive changes in permanency outcomes for children and youth in foster care. Since 2018, family reunification has increased by 71%, average time in care has decreased by 132



Wake House allows parents to interact with their children in ways they can't in an office building.

days, and the number of youth in care has decreased 65% (WakeGov, 2019). Because it makes use of so much of what we know about successful visits, it seems likely Wake House will help Wake County sustain or even improve its permanency outcomes.

To Learn More

To learn more about implementing similar practices around family time in your county, consider taking the two-day classroom course, *Visitation Matters*. Here, you will learn how to prepare parents, caregivers, and youth for family time; how to minimize the trauma to the family; and how to use visits to push families toward permanency. To register, North Carolina county child welfare staff should log in to ncswlearn.org.

To learn more about Wake House, consult the following:

- [Tour of Wake House](#)
- [ABC11 story about Wake House](#)
- ["Wake House: It Feels Just Like Home"](#)

District Collaboratives Seek to Boost Permanency Outcomes in NC

North Carolina believes poor collaboration between its legal and child welfare systems sometimes hampers its ability to achieve timely permanence for children in foster care (NCDSS, 2014). To address this barrier, the NC Division of Social Services (NC DSS) and the NC Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) are using a new approach called District Permanency Collaboratives.

A Focus on Outcomes

District Permanency Collaboratives exist to improve permanency outcomes in a specific judicial district. The central question for each Collaborative is: “*Is what we are doing getting the intended outcome...timely permanency for children?*”

Collaboratives meet on at least a quarterly basis to discuss local performance and identify ways to improve it. Collaborative participants include (but are not limited to) directors and attorneys from county child welfare agencies, judges (chief and/or juvenile court), district administrators and attorney advocates from the GAL program, parent attorneys, and clerks of court in the district (NC DHHS, 2019).

Piloted in 2018, District Permanency Collaboratives are now operating in all of North Carolina’s 41 judicial districts. (For a map of our state’s district court districts, click [here](#).)

Sharing and Understanding Data

Collaboratives are strongly encouraged to use continuous quality improvement (CQI). At its most basic, CQI means using information to understand and increase the effectiveness of our efforts.

To support this approach, every quarter North Carolina provides Collaboratives with something called the [Permanency Performance Profile](#). This profile combines administrative data from the court system (JWISE), child

welfare administrative data, and case review data from the Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI). Many of the measures on the profile align with the NC Early Childhood Action Plan’s goal of achieving permanent families for children in foster care.

For more information, see “Intro to Permanency Profiles” and “Permanency Profile Usage Guide” on [this page](#). For more on CQI, county child welfare staff can take the course [Using Data to Improve Practice & Performance](#).

After they meet, Collaboratives use a documentation tool to update NC DSS and AOC on their progress. This tool summarizes the group’s discussion, identifies ongoing challenges, and highlights successful practices in the district (NCDHHS, 2019). North Carolina is using these updates to guide efforts to support permanency across the state.

To learn more and find resources for District Permanency Collaboratives, follow [this link](#). ♦

District Permanency Collaboratives: Spotlight on District 21

To gain insight into how Collaboratives work, *Practice Notes* spoke with representatives from Judicial District 21 (Forsyth County).

How did your district get started and what are your priority areas?

Mr. Thacker: We began by identifying several priority areas with our judicial partners. These include (1) enhancing the network of resources in the community to make it easier to serve children and parents, (2) using court time more efficiently and providing more court time, and (3) increasing the number of GAL and parent attorneys.

We also decided to meet monthly. We felt meeting more often was needed to tackle the needs of our child welfare cases.

What advice do you have for other Collaboratives?

Mr. Thacker: Communication is key. Dialogue isn’t always easy—tough conversations need to happen. But we are all invested in positive outcomes for children and families. Nurturing relationships with each partner enables us to have the cohesion needed to work together effectively.

It’s also important to advocate for resources in your community. This takes relationships with stakeholders and providers. Having parent attorneys and the chief judge engaged in this process speaks volumes.

Why do you think the Collaborative is going so well in your district?

Judge Menefee: What helped us start was having a meal together and getting to know each other as people. We recognized it was important to move away from being rigid and stuck in our roles and to really listen to one another. We started being willing to try new things, hear feedback from one another, and create an environment where we could be efficient, thoughtful, and never lose sight of the families we all serve.

We strive to understand each other. We are curious and thankful for what each other do. If we don’t understand or don’t agree, we have hard but important conversations to find a way to understand different perspectives.

We also ask questions about what we can do better in our various roles. This engenders respect and keeps the conversation going. We all share the same belief: it’s about the families, not the titles.



*John Thacker,
Family & Children’s
Division Director,
Forsyth Co. DSS*



*Lisa Menefee,
Chief District
Court Judge,
21st Judicial District*

Success Coach Service Supports Permanency in Catawba and Beyond

A family's need for support seldom disappears the day reunification or adoption occurs. Recognizing this, Catawba County Department of Social Services (DSS) has partnered with others to develop an intervention that is sustaining permanence in its community and beyond.

A Collaborative Effort

Success Coach Service is a program that matches families with coaches who use support, education, and coordination of services to strengthen permanent placements and enhance child well-being.

Funding from The Duke Endowment enabled Catawba DSS to launch Success Coach Service in 2006. Since then, the program has evolved thanks in part to contributions from partners and funders such as the National Implementation Research Network, Child Trends, NC PASS, Casey Family Programs, and the Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship.

Families Served

Post-Adoption. Through a 3-year grant from the NC Division of Social Services, Catawba DSS provides Success Coach Service and other forms of post-adoption services to all types of adoptive families (international, private, or through foster care) in the eight counties of Region 3: Ashe, Alleghany, Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Watauga, and Wilkes. Families self-refer or are referred for this free service.

Reunification. Funding from The Duke Endowment and Casey Family Programs make Success Coach Service available to families in Catawba County who have achieved reunification. According to Catawba DSS, this voluntary program served 17 families in 2018, all of whom remained reunified during service delivery.

CPS In-Home and Permanency Planning. The program is also being piloted with Catawba County families served by CPS In-Home and Perma-

nency Planning services. Families are notified by the agency about this free, voluntary service. These pilots are funded by The Duke Endowment.

How It Works

During the first few weeks of engagement with families, Success Coaches and family members complete several evidence-based assessments to identify strengths and needs:

- [NC Family Assessment Scale for Reunification](#)
- [DECA \(Devereux Early Childhood Assessment\)](#)
- [DESSA \(Devereux Student Strengths Assessment\)](#)
- [Casey Life Skills](#)

In addition, staff gather detailed information about the child's journey to adoption (if applicable), specifically noting trauma histories and risk and protective factors, and they assess the family's understanding of trauma's impact on development and behavior. Assessments are repeated during services and at closure to gauge the family's progress and inform interventions.

With information from the initial assessment, Success Coaches and families develop a service plan to reduce risk factors and increase the family's resiliency by building protective factors. Although services are individualized, coaches' holistic approach typically involves:

- Connecting families to community resources

"It's completely different when it's your own granddaughter. My friends, my family, my church—nobody I knew had gone through what I was going through. But my Success Coach understood."

— Post-Adoptive Parent

- Helping parents assess their child's needs
- Providing education and training
- Offering opportunities to connect with other families
- Offering support for special school needs
- Helping families manage crises
- Providing referrals to individual, family, and group counseling, and
- Teaching parenting strategies that really work.

At first, coaching visits occur every other week. Depending on circumstances, these visits may decrease to once a month after the first 60 days. Families can stay with the program for up to 2 years. Many stay in touch with their coach to share accomplishments after they conclude the program. Even after families graduate, booster sessions are available if new challenges arise.

To Learn More

For more information, please visit the Success Coach Service [website](#) or [Facebook page](#) or contact Catawba DSS's Debra Katz (828-695-6908; dkatz@catawbacountync.gov). ♦

Post-Adoption Success Coach Service Results

Debra Katz, Post Care Supervisor at Catawba County DSS, shared the following to illustrate the Success Coach Service's impact on adoptive families in Region 3.

2017-18

- 27 families/59 children served
- 100% reported increased trauma knowledge and protective factors and overall satisfaction with services
- 10/11 (91%) families reported children remained in their homes 12 months post-services

2018-19

- 27 families/53 children served
- 100% reported increased trauma knowledge and protective factors and overall satisfaction with services
- 14/15 (93%) families reported children remained in their homes 12 months post-services

Free Services Help Counties Achieve Permanence for Youth in Care

Through North Carolina's Permanency Innovation Initiative, the Children's Home Society of NC (CHS) offers an array of free services to help county child welfare agencies achieve permanence for children and youth in foster care. This article describes two of the most important.

1. Child-Focused Recruitment

Like listing with [NC Kids](#), child-focused recruitment complements county efforts to achieve permanence. Although it does not replace ongoing county responsibilities, child-focused recruitment can be a tremendous help because it is highly effective. When served with [Wendy's Wonderful Kids](#), the model CHS uses, youth are 1.7 times more likely to be adopted. Here's how this free service works.

Eligibility. All children in foster care who are age 9-20 and legally free or legal risk are eligible. Legally free or legal risk children in foster care under age 9 also qualify if they have an eligible older sibling. Children of any age are eligible if they are medically fragile or have a significant diagnosed mental health disorder.

Referral. The process begins when a county child welfare worker (the "referring worker") sends a referral form to CHS. Click [here](#) to access this form.

Initial Meeting. If the referral meets established criteria, the referring worker and recruiter meet to discuss case specifics and develop a plan for an effective partnership.

Recruitment. The recruiter helps the referring worker achieve adoption or guardianship (the preferred permanency outcomes) by reviewing information and searching potential permanency resources. These could be extended family that share legal, genetic, or social connections, or an adoptive family that is a match based on the child's needs. The recruiter also partners with the referring worker and the child to prepare for permanency through assessments and planning.

Parent Education. Individuals and families identified as potential

permanency resources are eligible for parent education services. This involves creating a family education plan that integrates information about trauma, child development, and child-specific needs to support the child's ongoing development, attachment, and transition to a new family. Since 2014, CHS has provided education services to 165 NC families. Click [here](#) for a brief video in which families discuss the benefits of this service.

Results. Child-focused recruiters typically identify a permanency resource within 150 days, although this can vary greatly. Between January 2014 and June 2019, CHS served 946 youth from 88 NC counties. Of these, 370 exited care to permanency.

Whenever your agency lists a child with NC Kids, consider making a referral to CHS for free child-focused recruitment. The purpose of registering children with NC Kids—which is required by policy—

is for child-specific recruitment, a key permanency strategy.

2. Free Training

CHS also offers free permanency training and consultation services through the Permanency Innovation Initiative. Agencies choose from a list of training topics that can be customized to fit their specific interests, staff size, and availability. Topics include building resilient teams, engaging fathers, supporting sibling relationships, and trauma-informed practice. These services are available to all North Carolina county child welfare agencies, GAL programs, and court systems. Private agencies can participate in partnership with a county DSS.

CHS has provided permanency-related training to 11,047 professionals since 2014. To learn more, contact CHS's Revonda Yarbrough (Ryarbrough@chsnc.org; 828/270-2482).

Funding

The Permanency Innovation Initiative is funded by the state of North Carolina and the Dave Thomas Foundation. ♦

Child-Focused Recruitment: Brittany's Story

Brittany, who entered foster care at age 4 due to neglect, was referred for child-focused recruitment in 2018. Brittany's recruiter spent time with her each month to get to know her and establish a strong, positive bond.



Brittany had already experienced adoption disruption and told her recruiter she was afraid of being adopted again. She did not want to be rejected by another family. Asked how she felt about reconnecting with her biological family, Brittany said she was hopeful, but knew nothing about them. She said she would love to see her mother again.

The recruiter thoroughly researched the DSS case file and found Brittany's maternal and paternal biological family in Florida. The recruiter received a call from Brittany's birth mother, who said she had been looking for her daughter for over 10 years. She was amazed the recruiter had found her. The recruiter continued to look for family and found one paternal family member. Sadly, Brittany's father had died shortly after Brittany entered foster care; her paternal relatives did not even know she existed.

When the recruiter set up a call with the maternal side of the family, Brittany cried and hid her face. She was nervous, happy, and in disbelief all at once. She heard her mother's voice for the first time in over a decade. The recruiter supported Brittany during the call and processed it with her afterwards. Brittany was a bundle of nerves, but happy and grateful the recruiter understood her desire to connect with her mother. During this call Brittany was surprised to learn she is of Mexican descent: she always thought she had Puerto Rican and African American heritage.

In December 2019, Brittany will go to Florida to see both sides of her family. Her recruiter will go with her to facilitate the meeting and support her every step of the way.

NC Improves Post Adoption Support Services (PASS)

North Carolina recently modified its post adoption support services program to make it more effective than ever.

PASS Overview

The NC Division of Social Services (NC DSS) contracts with community-based agencies to provide post adoption support services (PASS). Each provider serves one or more of 11 PASS regions. These agencies provide evidenced-based, trauma-informed services to any North Carolina adoptive family, regardless of whether they adopted through the child welfare system. Services offered by PASS providers include case management, clinical services, crisis intervention, respite, and parenting education and support. More than 1,700 NC families and individuals received PASS in 2018-19 (NCDHHS, 2019).

The Latest Improvements

Important recent changes to PASS include the following:

1. Respite. All PASS providers are now required to offer respite services. This change was made to give adoptive families short-term relief and prevent placement disruptions. Respite services can either be planned activities or crisis out-of-home placement resources and can vary by agency and available resources.

2. Outreach. Although PASS has always been available to *all* adoptive families, PASS providers must now make extra effort to inform families

who have adopted outside foster care about the services available to them.

3. Illegal custody transfers. In 2016, North Carolina made it illegal for anyone to participate in or facilitate unlawful transfer of custody of a child (S.L. 2016-115). PASS providers must now provide targeted outreach and education to families at risk of illegal custody transfer and to families involved in an illegal custody transfer.

4. Data collection. NC DSS has stepped up efforts to measure the effectiveness of PASS. In 2017-18, NC DSS updated the way performance measures are tracked when agencies provide services to more than one region so that outputs, outcomes, and quality measures are reported by region, even when a PASS agency serves multiple regions.

In addition, all PASS agencies now use the same outcome measures. This will enable NC DSS to compare performance among regions and providers, and to better evaluate patterns in service provision and PASS participation across the state.

NC DSS is also partnering with [Child Trends](#) to understand how those adopted from foster care in our state fare as young adults. The results of this study will guide future enhancements to our PASS program.

Future Changes

Counties should be the largest source of family referrals to PASS agencies.



High-quality post adoption services ensure ongoing stability, permanency, and well-being for adoptive families (CWIG, 2018).

Unfortunately, they are not. PASS providers are struggling to engage county child welfare agencies.

To address this, in the future North Carolina policy will require county child welfare agencies to refer all families completing an adoption to their PASS provider. PASS is and should be much more than a crisis resource. Agencies and families can depend on PASS services as an ongoing supportive resource to strengthen families and preserve permanency outcomes.

Conclusion

The number of adoptive families in North Carolina continues to grow. Between 2013 and 2017, more than 6,700 children and youth were adopted from foster care in our state (USDHHS, 2019). By continually evolving the PASS program, we seek to support, strengthen, and preserve all adoptive families in NC. ♦

More about Support for Adoptive Families in North Carolina

For Adoptive Families. To request post adoption support, adoptive parents should contact the department of social services in their county or the county from which their child was adopted. Specific county information can be found [here](#) or by calling 877/625-4371. Families can also self-refer to the PASS provider in their county. Click [here](#) for information about PASS agencies and the counties they serve.

All adoptees—including those involved in foreign, domestic, foster care, relative, stepparent and adult adoptions—are eligible to receive post adoption services.

Other NC Resources. Many children available for adoption through the North Carolina child welfare system are eligible for monthly payments, medical benefits, and other services. Monthly adoption assistance payments are based on the age of the child and the child's specific special needs. More information is available on the NC DSS Adoption [website](#). Child welfare workers can also refer to [Appendix 3.6 Child Welfare Funding – Adoption Assistance](#) in the *NC Child Welfare Policy Manual*.

NC Kids. Through [NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network](#), NC DSS provides foster care and

adoption support services, services for the recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive families, and technical assistance to county child welfare agencies and private child-placing agencies. See *Children's Services Practice Notes* [vol. 19, no. 2](#) for more on NC Kids.



Outcomes Depend on Our Efforts to Recruit and Retain Resource Families

When we have enough skilled, high-quality foster and adoptive parents and kin caregivers, it is easier to place children in their communities and school districts. More siblings can stay together. Careful matching with caregivers is easier. Children awaiting adoption don't have to wait as long for forever families.

Bottom line? Permanence outcomes depend a great deal on the diligent recruitment and retention (DRR) of resource families. Understanding this, the federal government developed a wealth of DRR resources through the [National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment](#). North Carolina, too, has focused on DRR, supporting agencies

through [webinars](#), issues of [Practice Notes](#) and [Fostering Perspectives](#), the guide [Treat Them Like Gold](#), and a document entitled, "[Key Drivers for Improving Diligent Recruitment and Retention Outcomes](#)."

Below you will find information about a new DRR resource agencies and practitioners should know about. Although the national campaign CHAMPS (Children Need Amazing Parents) explicitly focuses on foster parents, the policies and winning approaches outlined in this roadmap are applicable to DRR of adoptive and kinship families as well. Visit <http://fosteringchamps.org/> to learn more about CHAMPS. ♦

A Roadmap to Achieving Success in Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention

Reprinted from <http://fosteringchamps.org/about>

Past approaches to recruitment often have focused too narrowly on recruiting "enough" families and have overlooked the underlying problems that cause many families to give up or walk away from foster parenting. We can do better. Solutions exist.



| POLICY | WINNING APPROACHES |
|--|--|
| <p>1. Implement data-driven recruitment and retention practices</p> | <p>Winning policy approaches include maintaining a foster parent census to closely track the availability of foster families to meet the needs of children and teens in their community; making the first placement the best placement by using targeted recruitment and pre-match strategies; and gathering and using feedback from foster families to continually improve practice by conducting surveys, focus groups, and exit interviews with foster families to understand their experiences, what they need to succeed, and their reasons for quitting.</p> |
| <p>2. Provide foster parents with timely access to trusted, dedicated staff and to peer support</p> | <p>Winning policy approaches include investing in crisis mobile response services to help stabilize placements when high needs or emergencies occur; hiring experienced foster parents to serve as dedicated peer support workers to train and coach foster families in caring for children with greater needs; and supporting kinship navigator services to support relative caregivers.</p> |
| <p>3. Engage foster parents in decision-making</p> | <p>Winning policy approaches include establishing foster parent advisory boards; improving notification of foster parents about court proceedings; and training caseworkers on information sharing with foster parents about the child's health and education needs.</p> |
| <p>4. Support relationships between birth and foster families</p> | <p>Winning policy approaches include recruitment plans that target prospective foster families who have an interest in coaching and mentoring birth families; shared parenting policies that include comfort calls and icebreakers; and caseworker training on family engagement practices such as team decision making.</p> |
| <p>5. Prioritize placements with family members</p> | <p>Winning policy approaches include kinship firewalls that put in place a special approval process needed for non-kin placements; removing licensing barriers for kin who can provide a safe and stable placement; and requiring family-finding at first contact.</p> |
| <p>6. Ensure timely access to physical and mental health services</p> | <p>Winning policy approaches include ensuring children have access to medical homes and trauma-informed care; providing state-of-the-art training to help foster parents and workers understand and manage children's physical and behavioral health needs; authorizing foster parents to consent to routine medical care; and facilitating sharing of health information through electronic information exchange.</p> |

KinGAP, Guardianship, and the Path to Permanency

When reunification and adoption are not possible, guardianship is an important path to permanency for youth in foster care. Guardianship is most often used when relatives or “family-like” individuals wish to provide a permanent home for the child and maintain the child’s relationships with extended family without termination of parental rights (CWIG, 2019).

Of the children and youth in the U.S. who exited foster care to permanency in 2016, 9.5% (n=23,659) did so through guardianship (USDHHS, 2019).

KinGAP

To support guardianship, North Carolina offers the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP). This program offers financial assistance and Medicaid for youth who are placed with licensed kin or foster parents who are committed to being a permanent home for the youth.

Unfortunately, KinGAP is underutilized. Although numbers have increased slightly, fewer than 30 of the 1,008 North Carolina youth who left foster care through guardianship in SFY 2018-19 received KinGAP benefits (NCDHHS, 2019).

To achieve permanency when reunification and adoption are not possible, North Carolina strongly encourages

child welfare staff and their agencies to:

- Encourage kin to become licensed foster parents. Begin discussing licensure when the child is first placed with kin. To qualify for KinGAP, the youth must be placed in a licensed home for at least 6 months. On average, only 10% of relative caregivers become licensed in NC (NCDHHS, 2019).
- Identify barriers to relative licensure in your county and implement strategies to address them.
- Make use of these resources:
 - [KinGAP](#) (fact sheet for child welfare professionals)
 - [Kinship Foster Care and Guardianship Assistance](#) (for resource parents)
 - [Comparison Chart](#) (outlines differences between unlicensed and licensed kinship foster care, legal custody, legal guardianship, and adoption)
 - [1-Hour online course](#) about KinGAP.

How can we use KinGAP more?

To Learn More

Click [here](#) to access the NC Child Welfare manual to learn more about guardianship and KinGAP program requirements. ♦

NC Seeks to Serve More with Foster Care 18-21 Program

North Carolina wants to bring the benefits of its Foster Care 18-21 program to more young adults. This voluntary program gives youth in foster care the option to continue receiving services, including monthly foster care maintenance payments, until they reach age 21.

As Figure 1 shows, participation in Foster Care 18-21 has grown steadily. In its first six months, it served 407 young adults. Enrollment climbed to 968 in its first full year and increased further in 2018-19 (NCDHHS, 2019).

FIG. 1

Enrollment in NC’s Foster Care 18 to 21 Program

| FISCAL YEAR | YOUNG ADULTS SERVED |
|-------------|---------------------|
| 2016-17* | 407 |
| 2017-18 | 968 |
| 2018-19** | 1,029 |

*The program began January 1, 2017
**Data is for July 1, 2018 to March 31, 2019

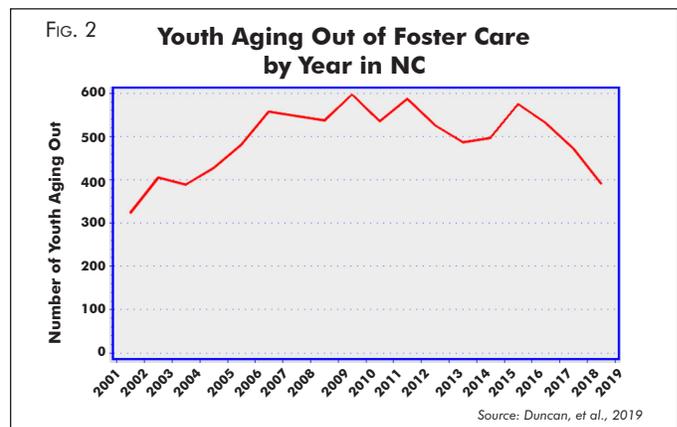
Improved Outcomes

Since the Foster Care 18-21 program began, the number of 18-year-olds exiting foster care in North Carolina without achieving permanence has fallen dramatically. As Figure 2 shows, the number of youth “aging out” began rising more than a decade ago. In 2015-16, the year before the Foster Care 18-21 program debuted, 575 youth aged out. Last year, that number dropped to 391 (Duncan, et al., 2019).

We Can Do Better

We celebrate this change, but we can do even better. Research shows that youth who voluntarily enter extended foster care after they turn 18 are much more likely than their peers who exit foster care to have a positive housing, employment, and education status (Netzel & Tardanico, 2014). Every single young person in foster care should get the support they need to succeed as an adult.

Increasing the use of the Foster Care 18-21 program can help us achieve this goal. If you or your agency has questions about how to grow the number of youth it serves with this program, contact the NC Division of Social Services’ Erin Conner (Erin.Conner@dhhs.nc.gov). ♦



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