

A Parent *for* Every Child

FINAL PROGRAM REPORT

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New York State Office of Children and Family Services
Bureau of Research, Evaluation, and Performance Analytics

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Although names are not used in the body of this report, the five PFEC permanency specialists, the Project Director, and the Project Supervisor should be recognized for their dedication to the project goals and the youth and families served by this project. These individuals all worked creatively, empathically, and urgently to find forever families for children in very challenging circumstances.

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NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES (OCFS)

Brenda Rivera, LMSW, Director of Adoption Services / PFEC Project Supervisor
Brenda was so dedicated to this project that she delayed her retirement to oversee the continuity of services for youth served by PFEC and the conclusion of the PFEC study.

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Joanne Ruppel designed the study and helped facilitate the evaluation by Chapin Hall.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In late 2008, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) was awarded funding under the Adoption Opportunities: Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System to implement *A Parent for Every Child* (PFEC) program and to evaluate the program using a randomized control trial design.

When the PFEC project began, New York State (NYS) had already reduced the number of freed children waiting to be adopted to less than half of what it had been in 2000. Yet children with disabilities, who had cross-systems challenges and many barriers to permanency, seemed to have been minimally impacted by two decades of initiatives to increase adoptions and reduce time to permanency. As part of the grant proposal, OCFS planned a randomized study of innovative efforts and strategies to find permanent homes for freed children placed in mental health, developmental disabilities, or juvenile justice facilities, as well as for freed youth in congregate foster care who did not have a goal of adoption.

A Parent for Every Child's mission was to identify and remove the barriers keeping these children from being matched with a "*Forever Family*." Chief among these barriers was the frequent conflation of "placement" with "permanency." While related to each other, these are two distinct concepts; placement success means the child is residing in the best place to meet his or her needs, while permanency success means the child has a permanent relationship with at least one caring adult.

In October 2009, OCFS identified 351 children who met the target population criteria. Sixty-seven percent (234) did not have an adoption goal and were in congregate care facilities (institutions, group residences, group homes); 21 percent (73) were in mental health facilities; 12 percent (41) were in developmental disability facilities; and less than one percent (3) in juvenile justice facilities.

A little more than half the children were from New York City and about two-thirds were boys. Just under half were African-American. Most were older teens and the average age was 17.3 years. Time since being freed ranged from one to 242 months with an average of 84 months.

The PFEC project had three main goals:

- 1. Improve permanency outcomes for the youth participating in the PFEC program**
- 2. Contribute to the body of knowledge regarding effective strategies for recruiting, retaining and matching caregivers with youth with special needs**
- 3. Achieve long-term permanent reductions in the number of freed youth in mental health, developmental disability, and juvenile justice facilities, and similar reductions in the number of youth without adoption goals in residential treatment or other congregate care settings**

Project leaders set an upper age limit of 19.5 years so there would be time to work with the older youth before they had to leave foster care. From the 256 remaining PFEC-eligible children, 80 children were

randomly selected and assigned to treatment or control groups in the first year of service. In subsequent years, additional children were also randomly selected and assigned to either group.

OCFS contracted with three highly regarded, geographically dispersed service agencies with experience in serving older youth in foster care to provide the direct services with PFEC children and families.

Hillside Children’s Center, with offices and facilities throughout the western portion of the state, provided services in rural and suburban communities as well as in three of the largest cities in the state (Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse). **Parsons Child and Family Center** served the urban, suburban, and rural communities in and around the Capital District (Albany) in the eastern upstate part of the state. **You Gotta Believe!** provided services for children in NYC, as well as for children in counties just outside NYC, including suburban Long Island.

PFEC was overseen by the Director of Adoption Services at OCFS, while the Project Director worked at Hillside and was responsible for all PFEC program operations, including training and supervising the PFEC permanency specialists at the three partner agencies. Hillside and Parsons each hired one full-time permanency specialist. As half the children in the target population were from New York City, You Gotta Believe! hired one full-time and two-part time specialists on the PFEC project. Program Directors from Hillside and Parsons and the Agency Director from You Gotta Believe! were responsible for the PFEC contract deliverables and, in conjunction with the Project Director, for coordinating agency services available to the PFEC youth and parents.

All youth in both study samples continued their normal activities with their assigned workers from their local social services district, foster care agency, and residential facility. Youth in the intervention group were each assigned a PFEC permanency specialist to work on expediting permanency.

PFEC permanency specialists were trained to use the *Six Steps to Find a Family: A Practice Guide to Family Search and Engagement*. Throughout their daily work, the specialists demonstrated their commitment to the expansive and active youth-led definition of permanency that was originally coined at the 2002 National Convening on Youth Permanence.

Permanency is both a process and a result that includes involvement of the youth as a participant or leader in finding a permanent connection with at least one committed adult . . . A broad array of individualized permanency options exists; reunification and adoption are an important two among many that may be appropriate.

The PFEC permanency specialists considered the most appropriate and safe permanency option for each youth, given their unique circumstances and desires. While adoptions and legal guardianships provide many legal benefits and supports to youth, many of the youth and permanency resource families decided they would be better served by establishing one or more non-legally binding agreements between the youth and an adult(s). These agreements, known in the field as permanency pacts or commitment contracts, outline their lifetime commitments to one another. These relationships may or may not eventually lead to legal permanency.

PFEC specialists used diligent recruitment methods to establish a pool of eligible families from which caring adults were connected to youth in need of either relational or legal permanency. The

recruitment work involved the use of a variety of strategies, the choice of which was based on an individualized assessment of the youth. The strategies included: Family search and engagement efforts; Adoption Chronicles videos; internet and Heart Gallery photo listings; parent-specific targeted recruitment; adoption panels and adoption exchanges; youth panels; and outreach through weekly radio and cable TV “Adopting Teen and Tweens” shows.

PFEC specialists were well prepared to provide the individualized casework that is essential in helping youth develop sustainable and permanent relationships with caring adults. PFEC staff worked with youth to identify potential permanent resources; helped youth overcome resistance to adoption or permanency; facilitated the development of relationships between youth and permanent resources; provided adoption navigation services; provided specialized training and support services, and assisted prospective foster and adoptive parents with the certification process.

In addition to the individual level permanency work, the PFEC project aimed to make sustainable system-wide changes by increasing the awareness and competency of local district and voluntary agencies to achieve permanency for other children with special needs. The OCFS Director of Adoption Services, the PFEC Director, and the three partner agencies participated in numerous cross-systems meetings and conferences and provided or arranged for numerous trainings and workshops open to all.

The randomized control study found that PFEC youth were more likely to become or remain open to adoption than the control group youth. While youth in both groups participated equally in photo-listings, 29 percent of PFEC youth and none of the control group youth produced an Adoptions Chronicles video. A full family search and engagement strategy was employed for 29 youth; nearly half (45 percent) of these youth were matched to a family member located through this method; and one-quarter (seven) established legal or relational permanency with the identified family member. Even without a formal permanency pact, family search enabled many youth to establish connections and regular visitations with family members that had not been occurring before PFEC.

Over the course of the PFEC project, 122 families indicated interest in working with PFEC as potential permanent resources for youth with special needs. PFEC was successful in matching recruits to PFEC youth regardless of family recruitment method. However, it was more difficult to turn matches into formal permanent relationships. As PFEC youth could be matched to more than one potential family and vice versa, 125 matches, involving 51 youth and 112 families, were made.

Eighteen youth in the intervention group achieved permanency with a family by the end of the project. These outcomes included six adoptions, a legal guardianship, and eleven youth with signed permanency pacts or commitment contracts. In the control group, five youth achieved legal permanency during that same time period (three adoptions and two legal guardianships). No children in the control group finalized an alternative permanency arrangement.

Youth who were assigned to the PFEC intervention group were significantly more likely ($p < .01$) to achieve legal or relational permanency than youth in the control group, but the differences between the two groups on finalized legal permanency exclusively (adoption or legal guardianship) were not statistically significant. That is, youth enrolled in PFEC were not more likely to have an adoption or legal

guardianship finalized than youth in the control group. However, in addition to the six finalized PFEC adoptions and three control group adoptions, the only youth with pending adoptions are five PFEC youth. Given a little more time, it looks promising but remains to be seen whether PFEC will have a statistically significant impact on achieving finalized adoptions.

By bringing sustained attention to the permanency needs of this population, the PFEC project contributed to a 62 percent decrease in the number of children in the target population - from 351 children when the program began on October 1, 2009 to 133 children when the program ended on September 30, 2013. There were large decreases in all systems and for all demographics, with significant reductions in the average length of time in foster care (129 to 110 months) and time freed (84 to 69 months) between the 2009 target population and 2013 target population.

In conclusion, there are multiple key recommendations developed based on the grant findings. However two key recommendations stand out. The first is **permanency planning must begin upon admission to out-of-home care**. Local district case planners must continue permanency planning activities for children with special needs who are placed in mental health, developmental disability, or other congregate care facilities. Solution-focused permanency plans must demonstrate persistence and urgency toward permanency for every child. All youth permanency plans must include a detailed description of the post-permanency services that will be needed and how and by whom they will be provided. Secondly, **cross system communication and collaboration is essential** to successful outcomes for foster children being served by one or more systems of care. Involvement has to be more than acknowledgement that collaboration is necessary. It must be an active collaboration of staff from the various systems as part of the team that share common goals and are responsible for permanency efforts/outcomes on behalf of the overall well-being of children in care.



A Parent for Every Child

Every child deserves a family

We never outgrow our need for family. The love and encouragement parents provide gives us hope. The security of a forever family helps us realize our full potential and live productive, happy lives. Every young person deserves to have a family. Sadly, hundreds of young people may never know the stability, love, and support of a family. These youth range in age from 10 to 21 and have been living in a residential facility for some time. Many have been legally freed for adoption. All are in need of a family to call their own.



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Office of
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Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	i
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	ii
BACKGROUND.....	1
TARGET POPULATION	3
PROJECT GOALS	4
LOGIC MODEL	5
GRANTEE ORGANIZATION.....	6
Project Partners	6
Cross-System Partners	7
SERVICE MODEL	8
Legal and Relational Permanency.....	10
Permanency Strategies	10
Child-Centered Approach.....	11
Parent Recruitment and Support.....	13
Connecting or Reconnecting with Kin.....	15
PROJECT ACTIVITIES.....	16
OUTCOME EVALUATION STUDY DESIGN	21
Research Questions	21
Data Collection Methods	22
Child Characteristics.....	23
STUDY OUTCOMES and IMPACTS	24
Youth Receptivity.....	24
Changes in Youth Receptivity to Adoption/Permanency.....	24
Youth Participation in Recruitment Activities.....	24
Family Search and Engagement Outcomes for Youth	26
Parent Recruitment Strategy Outcomes.....	27
Assessing Recruitment Strategy Effectiveness in Achieving Matches	28
Youth Permanency Status at Project End	29
Impact of PFEC on Finalized Permanency Outcomes	30
Time to Matches and Finalized Permanency Outcomes.....	30
IMPLEMENTATION STUDY	31

Findings	31
Orientation.....	31
PFEC Staff Training	33
Barriers to Permanency	33
SYSTEM CHANGE IMPACTS	36
SUSTAINABILITY	37
Agency Sustainability	37
Local District Sustainability	38
Statewide Sustainability.....	39
Cost of Sustaining Key Program Elements	42
Changes required in Systems, Legislation, Policy, Procedures, Training and Funding Sources to Sustain Program Benefits	42
Dissemination Plan and Sustainability Plan Overlap.....	42
CONCLUSIONS.....	43
RECOMMENDATIONS	48
Recommendations to Administrators of Future, Similar Projects.....	48
Recommendations to Project Funders (Children’s Bureau)	48
Recommendations for Local Child Welfare Agencies	48
Recommendations for the State Child Welfare Oversight Agency.....	49
APPENDIX A: A PARENT FOR EVERY CHILD BROCHURE	50
APPENDIX B: Foster Club Permanency Pact Certificate.....	51
APPENDIX C: Chapin Hall’s Final Evaluation Report on PFEC.....	52

BACKGROUND

New York State has long been dedicated to identifying and rectifying the reasons some freed children remain in foster care for years, first systematically studying this problem in a 1990 study titled *100 Waiting Children*. As a direct follow-up to this study, in 1998, *New York State's Longest Waiting Children: A Study of New York State Children in Need of Adoptive Families* was published. This study found that the children waiting the longest for new families were significantly more likely to have substantial disabilities, and had spent an average of 11.8 years waiting for placement with an adoptive family. These children had been freed for approximately the same number of years, strongly suggesting that efforts to match and retain adoptive parents for these children was the problem and not legal delays in the termination of parental rights.

After the 2000 Children and Family Services Review (CFSR), the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) developed and implemented an extensive Program Improvement Plan (PIP).¹ To help improve adolescent services and permanency outcomes, in 2004, OCFS issued an Adolescent Services and Outcomes Practice Guidance Paper, developed by the PIP Adolescent Services and Outcomes Strategy Workgroup, which described a new framework for practice with adolescents in foster care. The guidance paper promoted enhanced training to support youth connections with at least one adult permanency resource person (in addition to providing life skills training), and was intended to improve permanency achievement, with the ultimate goal of self-sufficiency in adulthood. At the time, the new framework for practice was described as representing “a major shift in thinking.”

“... the new framework focuses on establishing permanent, nurturing adult connections for adolescents in foster care as well as providing these youth with life skills. Foster care youth should have a connection with at least one Adult Permanency Resource who is committed to providing guidance and assistance to the youth as the youth makes the transition from foster care to self-sufficiency. ... A concurrent planning approach for adolescents who are likely to remain in foster care through age 18, 19, or 20 involves working toward establishing or re-establishing positive connections with the youth's birth families, seeking adoptive families or guardianship arrangements, or identifying other ongoing supportive relationships with adults.”

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At the same time, OCFS embarked on significant improvements to adoption in partnership with former Chief Judge Judith Kaye and the Commissioner of the New York City Administration for Children's Services. The Adoption Now Workgroup, comprised of stakeholders from multi-systems of care, strove to resolve barriers to adoption in the family court and social service system in conjunction with the state PIP efforts. In 2000, New York received a federal Adoption Opportunities grant to analyze practices for

¹ The OCFS Performance Indicator Plan serves as a blueprint for ongoing quality improvement of the administration of child welfare services and practices. PIP is used as an opportunity to assess child welfare practices and programs in need of improvement, and continue building on state and local strengths and agency partnerships. See New York State Improvement Plan for the Child and Family Services Federal Review (April 14, 2003): <http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/reports/cfsr/pip.pdf>

children that were hard to place. Each initiative led to extensive changes in the adoption process and practices used at the state, regional and county level, but there was still more work to do. To continue this work, OCFS applied for and was awarded a federal Diligent Recruitment grant to implement and evaluate the “A Parent for Every Child” program (PFEC) in 2008.

When PFEC began in 2008, after two decades of initiatives to increase adoptions, the number of children in foster care waiting for adoption had been reduced to just under half of the New York State 2000 baseline (AFCARS: Foster Care File). The state’s percentage of children placed in adoptive homes within the federal 24-month standard more than doubled. The pool of resource families was well-balanced and placement stability was good as well. New York State consistently recruited stable foster families to meet the needs of children in care. Similar to the nation, New York State had a disproportionately high number of children of color and (or) ethnicity in care, but still continued to provide a diverse resource pool for them. Proportionality of children adopted by race or ethnicity was fairly proportional to the race and ethnicity of children in care.

The changes of the PIP and other initiatives were considerable, given the complexities of the state’s social services and court systems. The local social service districts (LDSS) range in size from New York City’s Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) which provides services to the five boroughs and a population of over eight million to rural Hamilton County with a population of just over 5,000 persons. In contrast to the New York City Family Court system with over 50 family court judges presiding in each of the boroughs, Hamilton County has one judge to cover county criminal, surrogate and family courts.

The previously described initiatives, along with data on foster youth in the care of other systems, showed that the most disabled children had cross-systems challenges and barriers to permanency that were minimally impacted by the permanency initiatives. In 2008, the Children’s Bureau agreed to fund New York’s plan to carry out a randomized study of innovative efforts and strategies to find permanent homes for freed children placed in mental health, developmental disability, or juvenile justice facilities, as well as freed youth in congregate foster care who did not have a goal of adoption.

For the youth with special needs in A Parent for Every Child’s (PFEC) target population needing someone to love them, nurture them, and advocate for them; serious medical, developmental, behavioral, and/or mental health complications, as well as cross-systems issues, had made the preferred permanency choice of adoption an elusive goal.

A Parent for Every Child’s mission was to identify and remove the barriers keeping these children from being matched with a “Forever Family.” Chief among these barriers was the frequent conflation of “placement” with “permanency.” While related to each other, these are two distinct concepts; placement success means the child is residing in the best place to meet his or her needs, while permanency success means the child has a permanent relationship with at least one caring adult.



TARGET POPULATION

A Parent for Every Child project set out to find and serve children who had the least likelihood of being adopted and who were in the most need of help to find a forever family before they aged out of care. This group was composed of children who were legally freed for adoption and who had serious physical, emotional, and developmental disabilities that required higher levels of care than provided by regular foster boarding homes.

OCFS wanted to improve the permanency outcomes of freed children who were in the physical care of the developmental disabilities, mental health, and juvenile justice systems, sometimes referred to as “cross-systems” children. In addition to the freed children residing in these other systems’ facilities, OCFS was very concerned about the level and quality of permanency work being done with freed youth in congregate care facilities who did not have a goal of adoption. Without adoption as a goal, and not living in a family setting with foster parents and siblings, were youth really being provided with opportunities to develop meaningful, long-lasting, family type relationships meant by “permanency”?

During the planning stage of PFEC in 2008, over 3,700 children were legally freed and waiting to be adopted; 1,500 of these children did not have an identified adoption resource. OCFS decided that the specific target population would be children residing in facilities licensed by the following state agencies:

- **Office of Mental Health (OMH);**
- **Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD);**
- **Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) (only children without adoption goal); or**
- **Operated by the OCFS Division of Juvenile Justice and Opportunities for Youth (DJJOY).**

In October 2009, OCFS identified 351 children who met the target population criteria specified above.

- **System Placement**
 - 67 percent (234) did not have an adoption goal and were residing in congregate care facilities (institutions, group residences, group homes)
 - 21 percent (73) were residing in mental health facilities
 - 12 percent (41) were residing in developmental disability facilities
 - 1 percent (three) were residing in juvenile justice facilities
- **Demographics**
 - 53 percent were from New York City, and 47 percent from all other counties in the state
 - 64 percent were male and 36 percent female
 - 48 percent were African-American, 25 percent White, 13 percent Hispanic
 - Most were older teens – the average age was 17.3 years; 34 percent were 15 to 17 years old, 29 percent were 18 to 19.5 years old, and 17 percent were older than 19.5
 - Just 8 percent were 12 to 14 years old and 3 percent were aged 9 to 11
- **Time since being freed ranged from 1 to 242 months with an average of 84 months**

Project leaders set an upper age limit of 19.5 years so there would be time to work with the older youth before they had to leave foster care. From the 256 remaining PFEC-eligible children, eighty children were randomly selected and assigned to treatment or control groups in the first year of service. In subsequent years, additional children were also randomly selected and assigned to either group.

PROJECT GOALS

The PFEC project had three main goals:

1. **Improve permanency outcomes for the youth participating in the PFEC program.**
2. **Contribute to the body of knowledge regarding effective strategies for recruiting, retaining and matching caregivers with youth with special needs.**
3. **Achieve long-term permanent reductions in the number of freed youth in mental health, developmental disability, and juvenile justice facilities, and similar reductions in the number of youth without adoption goals in residential treatment or other congregate care settings.**

Project staff worked directly toward the first two goals, while the third goal – to reduce the number of waiting children in the target population overall-was the ultimate goal of OCFS in planning this project.

Goal 1: PFEC staff worked directly with youth to achieve permanency with a committed adult. While adoption was the preferred permanency outcome, other permanent relationships, including permanency pacts, were pursued when appropriate. Objectives in support of the first goal were:

- To raise public awareness in New York State about the plight of these children and dispel misconceptions concerning the adoption of children with special needs;
- To recruit potential parents from specific target groups of people with the skills and inclination to parent youth with special needs, such as special education teachers and care workers, or people who had previously adopted or raised a child with special needs successfully ;
- To develop and provide specialized training and a development track for families who are open to adopting children with special needs but may lack experience in caring for them; and,
- To document specific support requirements for foster families and maximize connections with existing support programs to facilitate adoption for interested families and children.

Goal 2: PFEC was organized as a randomized control trial so its experiences could contribute to the body of knowledge regarding effective permanency strategies. An evaluation team from the Chapin Hall Center for Children was hired to conduct the random assignment process and to analyze the project's activities and outcomes. The evaluation team assessed program impact by comparing intermediate and permanency outcomes of PFEC children with the outcomes of a control group of similarly situated children not assigned a PFEC permanency specialist. (More information about the study is included in the Evaluation section of this report and in a separate Final Evaluation Report prepared by Chapin Hall).

Goal 3: Achieving overall reductions in the target population would occur if the work and recommendations of PFEC were adopted throughout the child welfare and other child-serving systems of care. This goal's objectives were geared to influence the placement and permanency decisions of caseworkers and supervisors across New York State. These objectives were:

- To systematically identify the practice, policy, and legal obstacles to permanency;
- To provide statewide practice guidance and training on successful strategies to expedite permanent connections for youth residing at the highest levels of congregate care; and,
- To examine concurrent planning processes in New York State about the targeted population with special needs and recommend changes to redefine best practices in this area.

LOGIC MODEL



GRANTEE ORGANIZATION

The New York State Office of Children and Family Services was awarded funding under the Adoption Opportunities: Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in the Foster Care System to implement the *A Parent for Every Child* program.

OCFS, a state government and the Title IV-E entity, was formed on January 8, 1998 through the merger of the former State Division for Youth with the family and children's programs administered by the former State Department of Social Services. OCFS was created to improve the integration of services for New York's children, youth, families and vulnerable populations, promoting their development and protecting them from violence, neglect, abuse and abandonment. The OCFS mission is "to serve New York's public by promoting the well-being and safety of our children, families and communities...achieve results by setting and enforcing policies, building partnerships, and funding and providing quality services." The agency's operating principles state that every service should be developmentally appropriate, family-centered, community-based, locally responsive and evidence and outcome-based.

New York, a state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system has oversight responsibilities for 58 local districts of social services and the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe. These local districts operate program services in the areas of foster care, adoption and adoption assistance, child protective services, preventive services for children and families, child care and referral programs, and protective programs for vulnerable adults. OCFS is also responsible for the administration and management of juvenile justice residential facilities, among other juvenile justice responsibilities.

Project Partners

As PFEC-eligible children were in facilities or treatment centers all across New York State, OCFS contracted with three highly regarded, geographically dispersed service agencies with experience in serving older youth in foster care to provide the direct services with PFEC children and families.

Hillside's Children's Center Parsons Child and Family Center You Gotta Believe!

Hillside Children's Center, with offices and facilities throughout the western portion of the state, provided services in rural and suburban communities as well as in three of the largest cities in the state (Buffalo, Rochester, and Syracuse). Hillside served as the lead agency with the Project Director and was responsible for supervising the program staff and the provision of services. **Parsons Child and Family Center** served the urban, suburban, and rural communities in and around the Capital District (Albany) in the eastern upstate part of the state. **You Gotta Believe!** provided services for children in NYC, as well as for children in counties just outside NYC, including suburban Long Island.

Each provider agency was authorized for home study and family certification in New York State and collaborated in planning for the program. The partner agencies were chosen because of their extensive experience in facilitating the adoption of children in foster care; and specifically for their experience

working with youth with special needs. Two of the three PFEC partner agencies are established foster care agencies that operate both foster boarding homes and residential congregate care campuses (Hillside and Parsons), while You Gotta Believe! has had success achieving good permanency outcomes for older youth in New York City and surrounding counties. The three partner agencies contributed the valuable resources of parent recruitment, foster and adoption certification/approval, and post-adoption support services. The resulting collaboration was well-suited to facilitate adoption and other permanency connections for freed children with cross-system special needs.

PFEC was overseen by the Director of Adoption Services at OCFS, while the Project Director worked at Hillside and was responsible for all PFEC program operations, including training and supervising the PFEC permanency specialists at the three partner agencies. Hillside and Parsons each hired one full-time permanency specialist. As half the children in the target population were from New York City, You Gotta Believe! hired one full-time and two-part time specialists on the PFEC project. Program Directors from Hillside and Parsons and the Executive Director of You Gotta Believe! were responsible for contract deliverables and for coordinating agency services with the Project Director. The directors participated in quarterly telephone conference calls with the Project Supervisor and Director to discuss program issues and issues that might impede permanency to the target population. Additionally, they participated in PFEC publicity, arranging for regional cross-system trainings and served as members of the PFEC Advisory Board.

The five permanency specialists worked to identify the barriers preventing each PFEC-enrolled youth from establishing permanency. They did this through intensive case record reviews and ongoing interaction with the youth and their caseworkers. Through their efforts on diligent recruitment of families and enhanced casework with youth, PFEC staff helped youth establish permanent relationships with committed adults. The project recommended keeping caseloads small because of the time-intensive recruitment activities provided to the youth. Initially, full-time PFEC specialists were each assigned ten youth, but caseload sizes for each worker varied over the course of the project. After subsequent cohorts of youth were selected for the study, each full-time worker maintained a caseload of about 22 PFEC youth and each part-time worker had a caseload of about 12 PFEC youth. (Caseload sizes were higher than expected and desired because cases did not close at the rate anticipated before new youth were added). Specialists had additional responsibilities, such as facilitating groups or providing training, but each permanency specialist only had PFEC-enrolled youth on their caseload.

Adoption specialists located in five OCFS regional offices were instrumental in either directly completing the data sheets on the PFEC control group and/or working with the local social services districts or agencies to make sure the information was completed and submitted to OCFS in time for entry into the database by the evaluation staff. Additionally, the adoption specialists worked with the PFEC permanency specialists to solve issues with access to facilities and youth.

Cross-System Partners

The state's Council on Children and Families coordinates the state's health, education, and human services systems as a means to provide more effective systems of care for children and families. The formal Council is composed of state agency commissioners and directors. As the Council spearheads

new and emerging initiatives that cross systems, it served as the oversight panel for PFEC. The OCFS commissioner or designee (usually the deputy commissioner for child welfare and community services) was updated on PFEC activities so they could contribute to discussions with Council members concerning the cross system issues that impact access to services for older youth in foster care.

In 2012, a section of the Council’s website entitled “*What is NYS Success?*” indicated the receipt of a “four year, four million dollar grant to support broad-scale operation, expansion, and integration of systems of care through the creation of sustainable infrastructure.” The New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) provided additional funding to “allow for the provision of and access to required services and supports that include the values, principles, and practices comprising the system of care approach to become the primary way in which children’s services are delivered in all counties throughout New York State.”

OMH and the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) were two key partners since the facilities these agencies operate or oversee were caring for a third of the children in the target population. Representatives from these state agencies were included in the PFEC Advisory Board. The Advisory Board also included staff from state, regional, local social services district, and private agencies, as well as former foster youth and adoptive parents. Engaging staff from other systems of care was essential to building and sustaining interagency collaboration for PFEC, not only for the care and safety of the youth but also to stress the importance a relationship with family and other committed adults has on the overall wellbeing of the youth.

As freed foster children are a tiny minority of the population served by the large mental health and developmental disabilities systems, permanency work had not been a priority for these staff.

PFEC aimed to change that.

SERVICE MODEL

All youth in the intervention and control groups continued their normal activities with their assigned workers from their local district, foster care agency, and residential facility. Youth in the intervention group were each assigned a PFEC permanency specialist to work on expediting permanency.

PFEC permanency specialists were trained to use the *Six Steps to Find a Family: A Practice Guide to Family Search and Engagement*. Throughout their daily work, the specialists demonstrated their commitment to the expansive and active youth-led definition of permanency that was originally coined at the 2002 National Convening on Youth Permanence.

“Permanency is both a process and a result that includes involvement of the youth as a participant or leader in finding a permanent connection with at least one committed adult . . . A broad array of individualized permanency options exists; reunification and adoption are an important two among many that may be appropriate.”

Six Steps to Find a Family: A Practice Guide to Family Search and Engagement. Developed by the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections (NRCRFC)

While some youth wanted to be legally adopted, if a youth preferred one or more commitment contracts with an adult, the specialists helped them achieve that goal instead. This approach does not deter the possibility of a future adoption if the youth and the adult agree even if the youth ages out of care. The literature shows an increasing number of former foster youth opting for adoption as adults.

A question addressed in the Discovery Stage of Six Steps to Find a Family is an issue that was relevant for many of the PFEC youth, especially those with severe developmental and medical disabilities.

“What if the youth has severe challenges and will never live at home?”

“Permanency is a relationship and family, not a place. Even if the youth will live in an adult care center after he turns eighteen or remain in a high level group home during the teen years, the youth needs a permanent family who will send cards, make phone calls, and spend time with him on holidays. Such a family will advocate for him wherever he is, assure his needs are met and monitor his progress -just what parents would do if their own child were in an adult care center.”

Six Steps to Find a Family: A Practice Guide to Family Search and Engagement. Developed by the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections (NRCRFC)

While this answer seems obvious to people in the child welfare field, for the developmental disabilities staff (and some child welfare staff) who had worked hard to position youth for transition to a community residence when the youth aged out of the developmental disabilities system for children, it was hard to reconcile why PFEC wanted to “upset the apple cart” and expend effort to find families for youth who were set to have lifetime placements in residential care anyway. A similar situation occurred with staff who had worked hard to plan for a suitable adult placement for an older youth with severe mental illness. For almost all youth in the target population, efforts to settle and stabilize youth, and attend to the day to day concerns of the youth while providing appropriate health, mental health, and education services left little time to attend to permanency work. Quoted in the PFEC Vignettes document, a clinical coordinator for a local social services district’s disabilities unit expressed a frequently perceived conflict of mission or values (below). It is important to note that it is a misconception to believe that focusing on independence and community involvement equates to not valuing families. It is also a misconception to think that child welfare’s permanency efforts means that helping youth in foster care develop into independent adults is not a priority. Both must be priorities.

“K’s situation underscores the divergent missions of the child welfare system and OPWDD. The child welfare system values family, values adoption, and the adult system values independence and community involvement and reaching your potential ...So it’s a challenge, because these systems aren’t meant to work together. They often have different purposes...”

PFEC Vignettes, 2013

Legal and Relational Permanency

In PFEC, the definition of appropriate permanency outcomes was expanded from the traditional legal outcomes of adoption and legal guardianship to also include relational permanency commitments. While legal permanency involves a permanent exit from foster care through adoption or guardianship (or reunification), relational permanency involves the establishment of lifelong connections between the youth and a caring adult, without a formal legal process. These relationships may eventually lead to legal permanence or they may not.

The permanency specialists who worked with PFEC youth considered the most appropriate and safe permanency option for each youth, given each youth's unique circumstances and desires. While adoptions and legal guardianships provide many legal benefits and supports to youth that they might not have otherwise, many of the youth and permanency resource families decided they would be better served by establishing one or more non-legally binding agreements between the youth and an adult(s). These agreements, known in the field as permanency pacts or commitment contracts, outline their lifetime commitments to one another.

“Permanency planning for foster youth needs to include a broad range of options as well as a concurrent planning approach. The new framework also recognizes the importance of providing youth with training and opportunities to practice life skills and educational opportunities. Youth involvement is essential to the practice framework.”

NYS Adolescent Services Outcomes Practice Guidance Paper, 2006

Permanency Strategies

PFEC posits that through diligent recruitment efforts a pool of eligible families will be established from which caring adults can be connected to youth in need of either relational or legal permanency. The recruitment work involved the use of a variety of strategies, the choice of which was based on an individualized assessment of the youth:

- Family search and engagement
- Adoption Chronicles videos
- Internet photo listings/Heart Gallery
- Parent specific/targeted recruitment
- General recruitment
- Adoption panels/adoption exchanges
- Media resources: weekly radio and cable TV “Adopting Teen and Tweens” shows
- Youth Panels

While recruiting a sufficient number of families is an important step in permanency work, individualized casework is critical to increasing the likelihood of developing sustainable relationships and forming permanent relationships with caring adults. The permanency specialists received training in the (National Resource Center for Adoption) Adoption Competency Curriculum, which included child and family assessment and preparation, to enhance their understanding and skills needed to expedite permanency.

The specialized casework provided by PFEC staff involved the following key components:

- Working with youth to identify potential permanent resources
- Helping youth overcome any resistance to adoption or permanency
- Facilitating the development of relationships between the youth and permanent resources
- Providing adoption navigation services
- Supporting permanent resources by providing specialized training and support services
- Assisting prospective foster and adoptive parents with the certification/approval process

Child-Centered Approach

PFEC specialists focused on ways to engage with youth in a way that provides youth with a sense of autonomy while still ensuring their care needs would be met as they were matched with families. On average, children in foster care will have a new caseworker, case manager, or case planner every few months and may feel little connection with their workers. A child in congregate care with a history of failed placements with numerous workers coming and going may believe that adoption or any placement within a family unit is not feasible. As a PFEC specialist at Hillside explained, the youth should take the lead at all stages of the family search and matching process. His approach proved successful with youth who initially did not believe they had a significant role in determining where they were placed and with whom they had to live.

Asked to describe what he did when assigned a new youth, the Hillside PFEC specialist provided the following description of his work. First, he contacted a prospective child's caseworker(s), care providers, and/or foster care providers, gained access and read the child's entire case file, and created lists of family members and others who had been involved in the child's life at some point. Upon clearance to meet with a prospective child by the local district, the PFEC specialist set up an initial meeting with the child. The initial meeting with a child was a critical stage where the PFEC specialist explained that he was not there to "tell the child what he or she had to do" but rather was there to work with the youth to facilitate what the youth wanted in regard to family finding. Promoting a greater sense of youth self-determination was critical in dispelling the assumption that here was yet another social worker to make decisions on behalf of the youth without actually having meaningful involvement in that child's life. The youth will ultimately decide if he or she is ready for adoption or another form of permanency, with who he or she will establish a family connection, and at the time he or she is ready to do so.

"It is vital to work together in defining the term in an operational way so that it may serve as the foundation of the work to ensue. ... The resulting definition needs to be one that the young person understands and one that is respectful of how the young person defines permanency and what is most importance to him or her."

Dianne Walters, former foster youth who is a national advocate for permanency, quoted in American Humane Association, vol. 26, 2011

The meetings between the PFEC specialist and the youth served as a starting point to understand the youth's personality, likes and dislikes, and what he or she was looking for in a new family. The child's photo would be taken and they might decide to create a Chronicle's video profile of the youth that

would be made available to prospective parents. The video and picture profiles were important in establishing who the child was, letting the youth talk about himself or herself, and what he or she wanted in a family.

The PFEC specialist carefully used his engagement skills to encourage the youth to be an active agent in the permanency process and to reveal himself or herself as a person with personality, needs, and desires in a way that overcomes stereotypes about kids in residential placement. This personalized approach allowed youth to play the central role in determining how and when he or she connects to potential families, and the pictures and videos helped build connections between children and prospective parents. The permanency journey this specialist took with child J illustrates how the skilled use of multiple permanency strategies helped overcome several disappointing matches and ultimately resulted in a happy adoption with a forever family.

Chronicles and Adoption Exchange Result in Adoption

J had had been removed at very young age and had ten placements and was 11 years old and in an OMH-licensed residential treatment facility (RTF) when he was assigned to a PFEC permanency specialist. “J had experienced trauma and had been diagnosed with ADHD, mood disorder, anxiety disorder. He was really a handful – very reactive, extremely angry...The RTF couldn’t get anywhere with him.” At assignment to PFEC, J had a visiting family that wanted to adopt him, but the family decided not to pursue the adoption. J was devastated, but the PFEC specialist convinced J to give it another try.

J did an Adoption Chronicle video interview, in which he talked about his love of sports and animals, as well as his proficiency in the Star Wars video game and his special talent in origami. He also created a photo listing for posting on “every electronic device we could find.” The specialist found another home for J and coordinated a lengthy transition from the RTF to the foster family. Sadly, after almost a year, that match failed and J went back into residential care.

J and his specialist started over and made his Adoption Chronicle video available for viewing again. The specialist took J’s photo listing to a regional exchange for professionals to present youth awaiting families. A home finder from a different city gave him a home study for a woman who really wanted to adopt. “I called her and asked her to look at J’s Chronicle. She called me back and said, ‘That’s my kid.’”

The specialist arranged a meeting and “they hit it off right away”. The county was extremely helpful with J’s case. Prior to PFEC they had concentrated on J’s mental health issues. “They are extremely interested in their kids and very open to trying innovative things.” PFEC gave them a way to help J achieve adoption, which was finalized in November 2012. As his specialist said, “if J had a mental health issue, it’s gone away. He’s living on a huge farm with lots of animals and he’s a happy kid.”

It is important to note, however, that the specialists also worked with youth who were unable to participate in permanency planning due to severe mental health or medical problems, or agency non-cooperation. For example, one older youth who is severely mentally and physically disabled was not competent to participate in any planning, but the local district and planning agency allowed the PFEC specialist to participate in treatment reviews and planning meetings, although there was no time for permanency work before he left foster care for adult residential care. In other cases, PFEC was prevented from reviewing children's records or meeting with them if a facility decided that they did not want PFEC to explore permanency work at all.

Parent Recruitment and Support

The service model also included recruitment and retention of prospective adoptive parents or other permanency resource parents. While PFEC was very much child-centered in helping youth embark on their permanency journeys, meeting prospective parents' needs by matching them with children right for their unique situation, and supporting them through training, casework, and by just being available was very important as well. Prospective families underwent foster/adoption training and certification/approval and were also offered additional training opportunities about parenting children with special needs. The specialists made themselves available to permanency resource and adoptive parents, at any and all hours in some dramatic cases. PFEC specialists serving children in upstate New York connected some prospective parents with their agencies' adoption navigators (experienced adoptive parents) to help families through the emotional and legal adoption process. All of the PFEC specialists serving New York City and surrounding counties were themselves foster or adoptive parents and could serve as adoption navigators for the families they were matching to PFEC children.

Potential adoptive parents completed MAPP/GPS (Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting/Group Preparation and Selection) training. MAPP training is a pre-certification training program which prepares potential adoptive and foster parents to open their homes to a child. The training class is designed to facilitate open communication between adoptive or foster parents, casework staff, and birth families. While it is not required by OCFS, it is the recommended preparation and selection program and is offered by foster care agencies throughout the state. Some of the objectives for prospective adoptive and foster parents include learning what to expect, what services are available, looking to one's own strengths and needs, learning about the stages of child development, helping children manage their behavior, understanding the roles and responsibilities of team work and helping foster/adoptive parents develop a good understanding of the child's biological family.

Permanency work and support to families did not end once youth went to live with their new families. In the case below, a move to another state illustrates that PFEC specialists not only arranged supportive services in New York, but continued to provide support by working with another state's agencies to arrange comparable services in the child's new home state.

A Complicated but Ultimately Successful Adoption

T has pervasive developmental and mental health problems and had spent the first ten years of his life in an OPWDD-licensed foster home and was in a residential treatment facility five hours from his long-term foster family when PFEC got involved. T's Chronicle's video, where he talked about his interest in weather, playing soccer, and his desire for a family, led to a match with a minister and ultimately an adoption. Along the way, there were detours and roadblocks, the most consequential of which was the pre-adoptive father's transfer to a new ministry in a different state just before the child was to have moved in with him. While the new family had been all set with Bridges to Health pre- and post-adoptive in-home services, the move to another state disrupted these plans and caused additional stress for the child and father. To qualify for needed services in the new state, the child had to be placed back in foster care in NYS so he could be transferred to the other state's foster care system, so he could qualify for Medicaid again, so he could get a health checkup required to register for school in his new state. The child even had to endure a weekend hospital stay while things were being sorted out. With the help of the OCFS Adoption Services Director, the other state was convinced that NY was not dumping this family on them and agreed PFEC was just trying to get the right services for him. In the affluent area the family moved to, no psychiatrists would accept Medicaid, so the PFEC specialist had to arrange for her agency (Parsons) to provide psychiatric supervision so the child could get his medications and be released into the adoptive father's care.

The finalization of his adoption in early 2013 was an emotional moment even for the family court judge. As the PFEC specialist related, "He couldn't believe we had found this family for T." At a follow-up visit at T's 18th birthday party, the specialist found T happily ensconced in a large group of his father's extended family who came from all over and T's new friends from school. Even T's biological sister was there. "T is in a great school that really meets his needs. He and [his Dad] have a wonderful relationship. To see the transformation from the kind of care he was getting in his residential setting and what his quality of care is now is amazing."

PFEC specialists often pursued two lines of family finding at the same time – searching for and restoring or building kin relationships that had been disrupted years ago by the parental rights termination, and exposing the child to unrelated resources who had an interest in adopting, mentoring, or otherwise helping raise a child with special needs. The permanency specialists were convinced that the more positive connections each youth created with caring adults outside the foster care system, the higher the likelihood that the youth would feel prepared to leave foster care nestled in a web of supportive relationships of kin and non-kin alike. This is another example of use of concurrent planning to expedite permanency, - working toward one permanency goal while simultaneously establishing and working towards the possible implementation of another goal. This effort is particularly pertinent to PFEC youth where time is of the essence, since many of the youth are at risk of aging out of care without a permanent adult connection. When a biological parent was actively seeking to have a termination reversed, PFEC did not pursue other permanency avenues while the court case was active.

Connecting or Reconnecting with Kin

Many youth wanted to reconnect to their original families and some hoped to live with them when they age out of foster care. Through family search and engagement techniques, PFEC specialists were able to find and prepare youth and kin for this possibility, even while still pursuing other permanency resources, including mentors as a step on the way to potential permanency. These themes are weaved throughout S's experience with PFEC.

Reconnecting with Mother

S was in residential care for ten years due to parental neglect and abuse. His mother was in prison and his father was deceased. While he was close to his sister and visited with his aunt and grandmother, no one in his biological family could provide him with a permanent home or the supports he needed. S wanted to be part of a family but hadn't lived in a home and didn't know how to interact with the other family members. The permanency team's goal was to help S figure out what he wanted and how to transition. At the same time, his biological mother began to reconnect with the youth. The specialist stated, "That was one of the most incredible experiences I had - seeing them reunited after so many years, after so much heartache and tragedy." The reconnection motivated his mother to turn her life around. In addition, a prison minister asked to be a mentor and source of support for S. While he is still in a group home, he has a better relationship with his mother and has the support of his mentor.

In some cases, family members located by PFEC specialists had not known the child existed or had lost track a long time ago. In one memorable case, a father knew his son existed but he had not been named on the child's birth certificate and thus had not been given the chance to parent. Through PFEC, he was finally able to become a parent to his child through legal guardianship.

Father Reclaims Son

D's mother's parental rights had been terminated and his father had little involvement as he had not even been named on his birth certificate. The PFEC permanency specialist worked to establish D's father in his life. With the encouragement of his girlfriend and close family, D's father decided to pursue legal guardianship. The permanency team helped him navigate through permanency hearings and petition for paternity. D's unresolved feelings of abandonment and continued contact with his mother complicated his transition into his new family. His father, however, continued to work with him in therapy and stated, "He is my son and I am going to follow through with this." D's father comes to every appointment and has a better understanding of his history and behavior, especially since D "has never really been parented." After discharge to his father's care, they will continue their regular therapy sessions and transition into after-care services to help support their new family.

PFEC youth were not only failed by their birth parents, but some had earlier adoptions that also failed, leading to years of residential placements and no sense of family at all. With these experiences, it is understandable why these youth would feel that no one would want them. But through sensitive permanency work with the youth and extended kin, despair was turned into hope and love. In J's case, PFEC also improved the life chances of the next generation.

"No one would want me" – but her Aunt did!

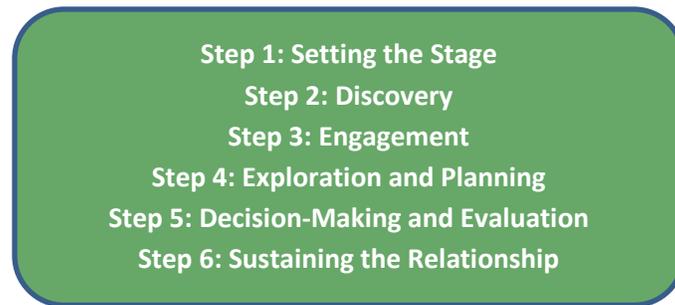
It took 18-year old J time to warm up to her PFEC permanency specialist, especially since both her birth and adoptive families had failed her. After J's birth parents parental rights were terminated, she was adopted, but that adoption failed and she entered a group home. J's situation was also complicated as she is a teen mother and the LDSS asked the specialist not to contact any of J's family. When asked her thoughts about finding a family, J said she did not have anyone who would want her. Reconnecting with her aunt, however, proved to be a viable option, especially since J's aunt was a former foster parent. The permanency specialist assisted J's aunt through the foster parent recertification process and J and her three-year old son went to live with the aunt. The specialist's support was highly important throughout the entire process for both J and her family. The aunt commented, "She's been a tremendous advocate." The PFEC specialist and her aunt noted many of J's behavioral issues disappeared when she reconnected with family. Her aunt stated, "I think we've come to understand that a lot of J's acting out was because she felt unloved. Everyone wants to feel like they belong someplace. Everyone wants to feel loved...she can depend on me. She has a parent now." While J chose not to pursue adoption, she is living with her aunt and is establishing healthy relationships with her extended family. J is achieving important milestones as a young adult - GED and cosmetology certification. She is currently holding down a part-time job and preparing for the state board tests. Establishing a healthy, stable support system provided J an opportunity to transition into a stable, well-rounded young adult.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

An extensive amount of diverse activities occurred over the five years of project. These activities may be categorized as child-focused, child-featured, parent-focused, cross-systems change activities, and public awareness, although some activities overlap more than one category.

Child-focused activities include activities geared to a specific child. Activities included notifying the local districts that a child was selected for the intervention, case mining for past relationships, coordinating with the child's workers to allow and facilitate the child's participation in permanency activities, helping children overcome fears or resistance to permanency, engaging a child in identifying potential permanency resources, facilitating child-specific recruitment activities such as video chronicles, facilitating meetings between child and potential resources, and providing post-permanency support.

PFEC specialists used the casework process strategies taught in the NRCPS's curriculum titled: *Six Steps to Find a Family: A Practice Guide to Family Search and Engagement*.



Child-featured activities are the public strategies, or activities and events featuring PFEC children:

- **Adoption Chronicles Videos:** These are professional, one-on-one videos in which the children discuss their likes, dislikes, what family means to them, and their hopes and future aspirations. The Chronicles videos emphasized a personal versus a clinical approach to empower children as active participants in the permanency process and help them connect with prospective families. The videos were posted on the PFEC website with links to the OCFS, Hillside and Adoption Chronicles websites. They were hosted through the provider agencies for prospective families and aired at local television and radio stations to raise awareness about the PFEC children and challenge negative stereotypes about children in care.
- **Agency Meet and Greets:** Partner agencies, such as You Gotta Believe! hosted meet and greet events for interested families to connect with children in a family-friendly environment. Events included bowling nights and agency picnics. Examples of other events in which PFEC youth participated were events sponsored by Children Awaiting Parents (CAP) and a Wendy's Wonderful Kids youth video premiere at the Little Theater in Rochester. The events were designed to create a positive, interactive environment where prospective resource parents could engage with children one-on-one.
- **New York City & Regional Heart Gallery Exhibits:** The purpose of exhibiting professional photographs of freed children is to enable prospective parents to learn about children available for adoption. The exhibits are displayed in a variety of venues throughout the year as well as during special Adoption Month activities.
- **Video Conferencing:** PFEC used video conferencing (when distance posed a barrier) to match and build connections between parents and children after finding similar successful outcomes out of state.
- **Family Finding Strategies:** Family Finding strategies used to connect youth with their families include an extensive search and discovery process to identify and engage family members, including Internet-based search tools to identify and locate family members. The premise of the Family Finding model promoted by Kevin Campbell is that with the passage of time, personal maturation and changes in family situations occur that allow for biological family connections to be made or reestablished for youth in care. The beliefs behind the Family Finding approach include:

- Every child has a family, and they can be found if we try.
- Loneliness can be devastating, even dangerous, and is experienced by most children in out- of-home care.
- A meaningful connection to family helps a child develop a sense of belonging.
- The single factor most closely associated with positive outcomes for children is meaningful, lifelong connections to family.

www.familyfinding.org

PFEC staff also worked with local district staff to assess biological family members' abilities to connect and care for the children. Family meetings were held to determine commitment towards the youth.

- **Photo-Listing:** As part of OCFS efforts to increase permanency for freed youth, letters were sent out to all local districts requesting their assistance in photo-listing all freed children without identified adoptive parents in the New York State Adoption Album as required by state statute and regulations. The local districts were asked to confirm that each eligible child was photo-listed and that eligible adoptive parents were registered in the Family Register Module of the Album. Compliance was assessed using the Album's match capabilities every three months until an adoptive placement was made.

Parent-focused activities include all activities to recruit, train, match, and retain potential permanency resources. While the family focused activities include any of the activities that are not child specific or aimed specifically at cross-system staff, there is overlap as cross-system meetings and training usually included foster and adoptive parents so they would hear and obtain first-hand information and receive needed training.

Public awareness activities included an extensive media campaign on radio, television, Internet, and in person at adoption recruitment events, and conferences. These activities included:

- Printed information advertising the needs of the youth for permanent resource families
- Focus groups and surveys related to recruitment, supports, training and licensing needs, availability of post placement and post adoption services.
- Resource guides posted on PFEC and NYSCCC websites.
- Certification/licensure training (MAPP/GPS)
- Supervision and support of placement
- Assisting parents with accessing needed resources
- Arranging for and financing travel costs for resource parent/adult to visit youth
- Trainings on information and skills needed to parent/mentor youth with special needs

Cross-systems change activities include all cross-systems collaboration and training activities geared towards improving the permanency knowledge of personnel whose work behavior and attitudes could affect the permanency chances of the children in the target population. This includes everyone from local district commissioners, directors of services, and caseworkers, to foster care agency staff,

congregate care facility staff, therapists, law guardians, parent support groups, and judges. In intention and effect, the entire project was a system change effort informed by work with specific children. System change activities are addressed further in a later section on sustainability.

- **Cross-Systems Meetings:** During these meetings, management and direct care staff from the Office of Mental Health, Juvenile Justice, the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, and local district child welfare and voluntary agencies collaborated on ways to meet the health and permanency needs of children in out-of-home care. Participants also discussed how permanency options, such as adoption, kin care, legal guardianship, and relational permanence are important aspects of children’s well-being. PFEC staff used these meetings to establish important contacts with managers and direct care staff to build a network of support in overcoming barriers in permanency planning for PFEC children.
- **Cross-Systems Workshops:** Parsons, Hillside and You Gotta Believe! each hosted regional cross-systems workshops and provided speakers that presented on the Family Finding Model, urgent needs of youth in care to develop life-long connections, and strategies to develop these relationships. The meetings were held alternately in all three regions of the PFEC study to allow more opportunities for management and care staff in all systems of care to participate. Some notable speakers included Kevin Campbell, co-developer of the Family Finding Model, Dr. Gary Mallon, the Executive Director for the National Resource Center for Permanency Planning, and Jeff Katz, the founder and Executive Director of “Listening to Parents” (in exploring challenges and support services for families navigating the adoption process).
- **Advisory Board Meetings:** Members were updated on recruitment and permanency activities to locate and connect resource families with PFEC children. They provided input on edits to Phase II of Versions A and B of the project’s plan submitted to the Children’s Bureau. Speakers presented on a variety of family recruitment and relationship-building activities such as the “Weekend Miracles Program” which connects youth with prospective adoptive parents. The meetings also provided members the opportunity to discuss children’s progress towards permanency and barriers the PFEC specialists encountered in working with their assigned children.
- **Training & Workshops:**
 - a. **Family Finding and Family Search and Engagement:** PFEC staff underwent training and supervision in the Family Finding Model and “Family Search and Engagement” (FSE). Training for the Family Finding Model involves 12 steps in which PFEC staff were given instructions about family finding strategies and underwent a review process and supervision of their field work with children and prospective families. FSE training emphasizes tools to discover and engage family and other natural supports, develop plans that are safe, realistic and sustainable, help families reclaim responsibility for their children, and provide support in developing and sustaining a permanent network of care for children.
 - b. **Adoption Competency:** In June 2013, the PFEC director presented on how to prepare youth and families for transition from residential care as part of an Adoption Competency Workshop. Child welfare professionals from local districts and voluntary agencies and

- adoptive parents participated in the workshop. Strategies on visitation, transition, youth preparation and integration into new communities were discussed at length.
- c. **Trauma:** All partner agencies hosted trauma workshops in their regions of the state. Staff, foster and adoptive parents, child welfare providers and other interested persons working with the PFEC target population or other foster care youth attended these training sessions. Parsons included a workshop “Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma” for resource parents to gain 16 credit hours toward their therapeutic certifications. Other workshops included the effects of trauma on youth development, and how adoptive (resource) parents can help children overcome traumatic events.
 - d. **Treatment Meetings:** All of the permanency specialists participated in treatment and planning meetings at facilities where the PFEC youth resided. They shared permanency-focused strategies and information to increase the facility staff’s knowledge of the importance of permanent connections for the youth in their care.
 - e. **PFEC Updates:** The New York State Adoption Services Director and the Director for PFEC did a presentation for the Statewide Multidisciplinary Child Welfare Collaboration Group on the progress to date of the project, preliminary findings, efforts to transition the work with the intervention group and sustainability efforts.

Seemingly Insurmountable Barriers to Permanency are Overcome

B was a sexually abused child, prosecuted for sexual misconduct, and placed on the sex offender registry until age 36. When he was randomly selected for PFEC, B was a likeable and insightful 17 year-old in residential placement with no permanency prospects.

B really wanted a new family. In his Adoption Chronicles video, B talked about his love of reading, swimming, snowboarding, and running, and about his grandmother who had sparked his love of cooking. More than 50 families inquired after viewing his video, but none stayed after they learned of his history.

While still hoping for a forever family, the county helped B enroll in community college and find and pay for an apartment (he was not allowed to live in a dorm). B shared his hope to be adopted in his public speaking class. “I just think it’s cool how I can take such a negative situation for me and turn it around and make it something positive for others and then, in return, it becomes positive for me,” B said. In a new Adoption Chronicle, B talked about playing guitar and his continued desire to have a forever family: “I’d love to have someone who accepts me for me and doesn’t judge me based on my situation or history.”

A family saw B’s Chronicle and fell in love with him. Because they have small children, they didn’t feel they could handle the legal complications of adoption, so they completed a permanency pact instead. “We feel like God didn’t make B to be unloved,” his “adoptive” mother says. “A lot of people have let him down in his life and, for whatever reason, he came into ours and we’re committed to being there to support B and be a part of his life.”

OUTCOME EVALUATION STUDY DESIGN

To learn whether the PFEC project was resulting in more youth achieving permanency than would have occurred through normal operations without any special intervention, a control group was needed for comparison. Since there were many more children in the target population than could be served by the PFEC program during the study period, a randomized control trial design was planned as a rigorous and ethical way to test the research questions. (Details of the study design, methodology, outcomes, and all tables and analyses are shown in the Evaluation Report prepared by Chapin Hall and attached to this report as an appendix.)

A stratified random design was used to select and assign children to the PFEC intervention group or to a control group. The OCFS Bureau of Evaluation and Research (BER) identified the current target population four times over two years. The target population was based on facility licensing agency (OMH or OPWDD), congregate care foster care facility type and permanency planning goal (OCFS), or in the care and custody of the OCFS Commissioner for juvenile justice reasons. Selected information about the children in the target population who were less than 19.5 years old was sent to the Chapin Hall evaluator. Before random selection and assignment occurred, the evaluator grouped the children by their facilities' geographical region to coordinate with the PFEC specialists' location (Western/Central Upstate, Capital District, and New York City areas) and custodial system (OMH, OPWDD, DJJOY, and LDSS).

The first cohort, selected in October 2009, consisted of 40 intervention and 39 control youth. Subsequent cohorts created in November 2010, and February and October of 2011 added 48 youth to the intervention group and 50 to the control group for a total sample of 88 receiving the PFEC intervention and 89 in the control group.

Research Questions

- 1. What impact, if any, did the PFEC program have on rates of permanency for the intervention group?**
- 2. What types of recruitment strategies, if any, were associated with positive permanency outcomes?**

In addition to these two overarching questions, the following questions were also considered as part of this evaluation:

- 1. What was the extent of each youth's participation in various recruitment activities?**
- 2. What was the reach of the general recruitment events and public awareness initiatives?**
- 3. What impact, if any, did various recruitment methods have on achieving matches and securing permanency for PFEC youth?**
- 4. Did the program have an impact on the certification of recruited families?**
- 5. Did the program have an impact on time to permanency for members of the intervention group?**

Data Collection Methods

The evaluation design did not call for any contact between the evaluators and youth or families. Most of the data used in the evaluation came from information entered into the PFEC database by the PFEC specialists. Chapin Hall developed a web-based database to track four categories of data related to the PFEC project which included information about:

1. All youth enrolled in the study (control and intervention).
2. All families recruited by PFEC staff as permanency resources. Information maintained on each PFEC-enrolled family included the way they were recruited, whether they were licensed foster parents, if they had adopted youth before, and what their current status was in the project (i.e., matched, unmatched, exited).
3. What happened after a PFEC youth and PFEC-recruited family became “matched” (both child and adult had interest in pursuing permanency with each other).
4. Recruitment events held throughout the course of the project. Each agency hosted a range of recruitment events and public awareness initiatives throughout the course of the project. These events were entered into the PFEC database along with the date of the event, the target geographic area, the number of families in attendance, and the number of families who enrolled with PFEC at the event. This information allowed researchers to assess the frequency and reach of various recruitment activities held over the course of the project.

A youth-family match occurred when a PFEC youth and a PFEC-recruited family both stated their interest in exploring a permanent relationship with one another. Over the course of the project, a youth could be matched to more than one family and vice versa. The recruitment method that led to each match and the outcome of the match (i.e., whether the match dissolved or resulted in one of the designated permanent outcomes), was housed in the database as well. As some youth already knew the family with whom they became matched prior to their enrollment in the PFEC initiative (e.g., extended kin, a former foster parent, a former social worker, etc.), the nature of this relationship was recorded as well.

Data collection about children assigned to the intervention group was ongoing. Permanency specialists were expected to use the PFEC database as a system of record for all project activities. Records were expected to be updated any time a project activity occurred or when a key milestone was reached for either a PFEC-recruited family, a youth enrolled in the study, or a matched family/youth unit.

Data collection for the youth enrolled in the control group was conducted at the time of initial enrollment and annually thereafter. Hard copy forms were sent by the evaluator to a team member at OCFS. The forms were then sent to the OCFS Regional Office Adoption Specialist who either completed the forms or passed the forms on to the appropriate local district caseworker for completion. Completed forms were returned to the evaluator and entered into the database.

Child Characteristics

The complete study sample consisted of 177 children over a two year period, with 88 children randomly assigned to the PFEC intervention group and 89 children randomly assigned to the control group.

- **Nearly half of the youth enrolled in PFEC and in the control group were in facilities licensed by OCFS, with a third in OMH licensed facilities and just under one-fifth in OPWDD facilities.**
- **Almost all children were living in some form of congregate care**, although a few children were living in OMH or OPWDD-licensed family settings.
- **Nearly all of the children were teenagers, and predominately older teenagers.**
 - The average age of children in PFEC was 16.8 and 16.6 for the control group.
 - About three-quarters of PFEC and control youth were between the ages of 15 and 19.5.
 - The children’s ages ranged from 10.9 to 19.5 years in PFEC and 7.2 to 19.5 for controls.
- **Most of the children had been in foster care for a good portion of their lives and had been freed for almost as long.**
 - The average time in foster care was 9.1 years and 9.8 years for PFEC and control groups respectively (range from just under one year to 19.3 years).
 - Children had been freed for an average of 5.9 years in both the PFEC and control groups (range from just a few months to 15.5 years).
 - Only 14 percent of the PFEC group and 21 percent of the control group had been freed for less than three years. One-third were free for three to five years, about one-third had been freed for six to ten years, and 15 percent had been freed for 11 or more years.
- **Seventy-five percent of the PFEC children and 61 percent of the control group were male.**
- **About half the children were African American** (55 percent of PFEC, 47 percent of controls).
- **Significant percentages of the children had mental, developmental, medical, or educational, disabilities rated as moderate or severe, and multiple disabilities were common.** The percentages for the PFEC group (reported below) were similar to the control group:
 - Mental disability: 45 percent severe, 31 percent moderate, 15 percent mild
 - Developmental disability: 20 percent severe, 26 percent moderate, 32 percent mild
 - Medical disability: 10 percent severe, 15 percent moderate, 32 percent mild
 - Educational disability: 33 percent severe, 34 percent moderate, 20 percent mild
- **Work toward adoption was not occurring for most children. Less than one-third of these freed children had a permanency goal of adoption at time of enrollment in the study.**
 - Twenty-nine percent of the PFEC group and 27 percent of the control group had a goal of adoption.
 - Twenty-five percent of the PFEC group and 23 percent of the control group had a goal of adult residential care.
 - Forty-five percent of the PFEC group and 49 percent of the control group had another planned living arrangement (APLA) as their goal.
 - One child in each group had a goal of discharge to relative/guardian.

See Tables 2 through 5 in the PFEC Final Evaluation Report for more details on the characteristics of children in the study.

STUDY OUTCOMES and IMPACTS

The evaluation tracked the various project activities of the PFEC specialists (such as the number of parent recruitment events held or number of children for whom family search and engagement was conducted); intermediate outcomes that resulted from these activities (such as number of parents recruited or children matched); and the number of children who achieved the longer-term project goal of adoption, guardianship, or commitment contract. When the level of PFEC recruitment activities and permanency outcomes are compared to level of activities and outcomes achieved by the control group, the difference between groups is a measure of the “impact” of the PFEC intervention.

Youth Receptivity

One hypothesis of the program was that the PFEC permanency specialists would influence youth in terms of increasing their receptivity to adoption or establishing a permanency relationship with a caring adult. The evaluation data suggests that the PFEC specialists were successful on this issue as more youth in the PFEC group became open to permanency with an adult and fewer become less receptive than youth in the control group.

As part of the enrollment process, permanency specialists (or the assigned caseworker for the control group) were asked to consider how receptive each youth was to the idea of being adopted or establishing a permanent relationship with a caring adult, and to rate their receptivity on a simple three-point scale: willing, refuses, or indifferent. Unable to determine was also an acceptable choice, especially in the beginning before the specialist had a chance to meet the youth. At the start of the study, 40 percent of both groups were willing to be adopted (35 PFEC vs. 36 control youth). The control group had more children refusing to be adopted (26 vs. 10) while more children in the intervention group were categorized as unable to determine (38 vs. 18) by the PFEC specialists.

Changes in Youth Receptivity to Adoption/Permanency

- Four of the ten PFEC-assigned youth who initially refused to be adopted changed their perspectives and were willing to be adopted by the end of the project. In comparison, none of the 26 youth from the control group who refused to be adopted at the time of their enrollment shifted their attitudes and ended the project willing to be adopted.
- The control group had a lot of movement in the other direction – 16 of 36 (44 percent) control youth whose initial assessments indicated openness to adoption were refusing to pursue adoption at the end of the project. In the intervention group, this rate was much lower; only four of the 35 PFEC youth (11 percent) who were willing to be adopted at project start moved into the refusal category.

Youth Participation in Recruitment Activities

PFEC permanency specialists were expected to actively engage the youth in the recruitment of families. The hypothesis was that PFEC youth’s increased participation in recruitment activities would lead to more families being recruited; these families would connect with the featured PFEC youth; and these relationships might develop into permanent arrangements.

- The most commonly utilized recruitment activity was Internet photo listings with 36 percent and 35 percent of PFEC and control children being photo-listed. It is not surprising the percentages were the same for both groups. Youth need to be open to adoption and have a goal of adoption in order to be photo-listed on national or state or city websites, such as NYS Adoption Album, the AdoptUSKids website, or the New York City or regional Heart Galleries, and less than 30 percent of study youth fit this criterion initially. Youth open to alternative permanency arrangements with an adult could be photo-listed on the project's website.
- Family Search and Engagement was recorded for 33 percent of PFEC youth and 30 percent of control group youth. Even though definitions were provided, there is some reason to believe that this term had different meanings for different people. For the PFEC specialists, the term meant they implemented all or most of the six steps enumerated in the Six Steps to Find a Family training, while it is unclear what caseworkers in the control group who had not taken this training meant by this term.
 - Case record mining is a preliminary step in family search efforts and PFEC specialists reported that they did this for 44 percent of assigned youth. Unfortunately, this step was not asked separately from the overall family search and engagement technique about the control group children, so it is unknown how often this would have occurred without an assigned permanency specialist.
 - Family Finding is a specific method taught by Kevin Campbell and only two of the PFEC specialists were trained in this technique. Family Finding was conducted with ten percent of PFEC youth and two percent of control group youth.
- Adoption Chronicles are videos which feature the youth talking about their likes, dislikes and interests, among other things. The videos are then posted on a website or made available to interested parties in DVD format. Adoption Chronicles videos were frequently used by permanency specialists on behalf of intervention youth, but rarely was this activity undertaken for youth in the control group (29 percent vs. two percent).
- Although not always involving the youth directly, targeted recruitment efforts are recruitment activities directed at individuals with experience with youth with special needs. For example, workers may reach out to former foster parents or physical therapists who have worked with youth with special needs. This type of recruitment work was more commonly done on behalf of youth in the intervention group when compared to the control group (31 percent vs. ten percent).
- Adoption Panels/Permanency Panels were reported more often for control group youth (26 percent) than for PFEC youth (18 percent).
- Adoption Exchanges was utilized equally for seven percent and six percent of PFEC and control groups respectively.
- Media resources were more likely to be used with PFEC youth (ten percent) than control youth (four percent).

The Glossary in the PFEC Final Evaluation Report includes definitions of these terms as well as other permanency-related terms.

Family Search and Engagement Outcomes for Youth

Family search and engagement activities were documented for 29 PFEC youth.

- Thirteen of the 29 youth (45 percent) became matched to a family member located through the family search method.
- Seven of the 29 youth (24 percent) established legal or relational permanency with the identified family member (two adoptions and five permanency pacts).

While not included in the final evaluation report, the individual reports prepared on each PFEC youth for the local districts show that many PFEC youth had reconnected with kin through the efforts of PFEC specialists, even if these connections did not result in a written permanency pact. At least seven youth not counted as achieving permanency in the outcome evaluation reconnected with their immediate and extended biological family. PFEC specialists arranged for parents and extended family to have more contact with the youth, including holiday or weekend visits and supervised visitation that had not been occurring. Here is one example:

Connected to Kin but No Permanency Pact

B worked closely with his PFEC specialist to identify two potential adoptive families who were not related to him, as well as to reconnect with his biological family. Ultimately, the child's goal was changed to family reunification, and the county continues to work closely with the child and his biological parents to achieve this new goal.

PFEC specialists often did not stop after one family resource connection was made, but continued to help create a network of caring relatives and other adults for the child.

Kin Connection and Relational Permanency

AF worked closely with her PFEC specialist to identify potential permanency resources. PFEC assisted in connecting her to her maternal aunt who later signed a permanency pact. Her aunt was thrilled to have her niece reconnect with cousins and extended family – there are over 50 maternal relatives residing nearby. The permanency specialist and aunt established weekend visits to introduce AF to her extended family and her aunt agreed to be present and supportive of her niece during her treatment reviews at her residential facility.

In addition to her aunt's permanency pact, the permanency specialist established a visiting resource with another aunt. Although AF still resides in a residential treatment facility, she is now a short drive away from her aunts who regularly visit on weekends.

The permanency specialist also located AF's father who was incarcerated in another state. PFEC assisted in establishing regular contact between father and daughter via phone calls, letters and emails. Her father was later released from prison and provided updated contact information to continue communication with his daughter.

Parent Recruitment Strategy Outcomes

To assess the effectiveness of the parent recruitment strategies, several questions were answered.

1. How many adults were recruited to the PFEC program through each recruitment method?
2. How many adult recruits through each method were matched to a PFEC youth?
3. How many recruited adults entered a permanent relationship with PFEC youth, by method?

1. How many adults were recruited as potential parents to the PFEC program through each method?

Over the course of the PFEC project, 122 families indicated interest in working with PFEC as potential permanent resources for youth with special needs.

- Adoption Chronicles brought 25 potential parents into the PFEC program
- Family Search brought 22 potential parents
- General Recruitment brought 17 potential parents
- Internet Photo Listing brought 16 potential parents
- Targeted Recruitment brought 15 potential parents
- Adoption Panels brought in four potential parents
- Three adults were recruited through unrecorded means
- Twenty adults were connected prior to start of PFEC

2. How many adult recruits through each method were matched to a PFEC youth?

PFEC was successful matching recruits to PFEC youth regardless of recruitment method.

- Adoption Chronicles matched 24 of 25 recruits
- Family Search matched all 22 recruits
- General Recruitment matched 12 of 17 recruits
- Internet Photo Listing matched 15 of 16 recruits
- Targeted Recruitment matched all 15 recruits
- Adoption Panels matched all four recruits
- Unrecorded means matched all three recruits

3. How many recruited adults entered a permanent relationship with PFEC youth, by method?

It was more difficult to turn matches into permanent relationships that met the study definition.

- Family search and engagement had the greatest success in turning recruitment into permanent matches with PFEC youth, as 36 percent or eight of 22 recruits became permanent resources.
- Of the 25 families recruited through Chronicles videos, three (12 percent) became permanent resources.
- Families recruited through Internet photo listings matched with youth frequently (94 percent), but none of the recruits established a permanent relationship with a PFEC youth.
- All 15 families found through targeted recruitment were matched with a child, but none resulted in a permanent relationship with a PFEC youth.

Assessing Recruitment Strategy Effectiveness in Achieving Matches

Since PFEC youth could be matched to more than one potential family and vice versa, the evaluation also reported on the results of matches. Throughout the PFEC project period, 125 matches, involving 51 youth and 112 families were made. For each match that occurred through a particular strategy, Table 16 of the Evaluation Report shows the number of matches that resulted in final legal permanency or alternative permanency, as well as the number of matches that remained active at the end of the program, and the number of matches that had dissolved.

- Of the 22 matches attributed to family search:
 - 41 percent resulted in legal or alternative permanency
 - 14 percent were still active
 - 45 percent dissolved
- Fifteen percent (five) of the 33 matches made via the Adoption Chronicles resulted in legal or alternative permanency arrangements. Although a low percentage, the number of Chronicles videos that resulted in finalized permanency is second only to family search, which resulted in nine permanent arrangements.
- Targeted recruitment had the highest percentage of active matches that had not yet resulted in legal or alternative permanency status (nine of 14 matches or 64 percent still active).
 - Targeted recruitment had the lowest level of match dissolution with 21 percent or three of 14 matches dissolved by the end of the project.
- Of the 19 matches that existed prior to PFEC becoming involved:
 - 16 percent (three) of the 19 pre-existing relationships resulted in legal or alternative permanency
 - Five matches (25 percent) were still active
 - Eleven matches (58 percent) dissolved during the study period

Youth Permanency Status at Project End

Eighteen youth in the intervention group achieved permanency with a family by the end of the project. These outcomes included six adoptions, a legal guardianship, and eleven youth with signed permanency pacts or commitment contracts. In the control group, five youth achieved legal permanency during that same time period (three adoptions and two legal guardianships). No children in the control group finalized an alternative permanency arrangement.

In addition to the six finalized adoptions, five PFEC youth had adoptions pending at the end of the project, while no youth in the control group had a pending adoption. Both groups had one legal guardianship pending, and there was one PFEC youth with a pending alternative permanency arrangement. Pending legal permanency was recorded if an intent to adopt contract was signed, an adoption placement agreement was signed, or if the youth was placed in the pre-adoptive home. Pending alternative permanency was recorded when both parties agreed to pursue this agreement and steps to facilitate the signing of that agreement had been taken. Local districts will continue to work with the families and youth to finalize these arrangements.

Youth Status at Project End	PFEC		Control	
Finalized Adoption	6	7%	3	3%
Finalized Legal Guardianship	1	1%	2	2%
Finalized Alternative Permanency	11	13%	0	0%
Youth in care: adoption pending	5	6%	0	0%
Youth in care: legal guardianship pending	1	1%	1	1%
Youth in care: alternative permanency pending	1	1%	0	0%
Youth in care: no permanency arrangement pending	38	43%	53	60%
Exit: Youth left the study with no permanency arrangement in place*	25	28%	30	34%
Total	88	100%	89	100%

* Youth in this group ended their involvement with PFEC – either through an exit from foster care or through refusal to participate in services offered by PFEC. As of the date of their exit from the study, no permanency arrangement, either legal or alternative, had been established. Some youth exited foster care by entering into adult residential care.

Impact of PFEC on Finalized Permanency Outcomes

Youth who were assigned to the PFEC intervention group were significantly more likely ($p < .01$) to achieve legal or relational permanency than youth in the control group. The differences between the two groups on finalized legal permanency exclusively (adoption or legal guardianship) were not statistically significant. That is, youth enrolled in PFEC were not more likely to have an adoption or legal guardianship finalized than youth in the control group.

However, in addition to the six finalized PFEC adoptions and three control group adoptions, the only youth with pending adoptions are five PFEC youth. Given a little more time, it looks promising but remains to be seen whether PFEC will have a statistically significant impact on achieving finalized adoptions.

As previously mentioned, youth were randomly assigned to one of four cohorts over a two year period. While there were at least 18 months available to work on permanency for each cohort, cohort assignment did have a significant effect on whether or not youth in the intervention group achieved permanency. Youth in the intervention group of Cohort 2 were 1.6 times less likely than youth in Cohort 1 to achieve permanency; youth in Cohort 3 were 1.8 times less likely than youth in Cohort 1 to achieve permanency; and youth in Cohort 4 were 3.3 times less likely than youth in Cohort 1 to achieve permanency.

Time to Matches and Finalized Permanency Outcomes

While it might seem like there was not enough time to achieve permanency in the later cohorts, most permanency arrangements were finalized within 18 months of enrollment in PFEC. Unfortunately, youth in each subsequent cohort were less likely to achieve permanency than youth in earlier cohorts. This outcome was most likely due to the addition of youth to the PFEC specialists' caseloads at a faster pace than existing cases could be closed due to permanency achievement or other attrition. While full-time PFEC specialists started with ten youth, after the fourth cohort was added, each full-time specialist had about 22 youth and each part-time specialist had about 12 youth on their caseloads.

Permanency arrangements were finalized for nine youth within the first year of their entrance into PFEC. The control group had five finalized permanency arrangements and four of them took more than a year from the start of PFEC in order to complete. The intervention group finalized six out of seven adoptions or legal guardianships in the first 18 months of the youth's enrollment in PFEC. The control group finalized three out of five in that same time period. (Of the 23 youth who finalized permanency, two started the project with the arrangement pending. One was in the intervention group and one was in the control group.) See Tables 21 and 22 in the PFEC Final Evaluation Report for more detailed information of length of time to permanency.

Likewise, most matches were made in a fairly timely manner. Fifty-seven percent of PFEC youth who entered the program without any connection to an adult became matched to a family in the first six months of entering the program, while twenty-three percent took more than a year to make a match. See Table 20 in the PFEC Final Evaluation Report for details on the length of time to make matches for each cohort.

IMPLEMENTATION STUDY

In addition to conducting the randomized control trial evaluation explained above, OCFS asked Chapin Hall to assess how well PFEC staff and leadership implemented the model and to identify any problems with the implementation or program model that would provide context to the outcome data from the formal impact evaluation study.

To do this, the Chapin Hall evaluators reviewed written documents provided by OCFS related to the planning or implementation of PFEC, including program progress reports to the federal Children's Bureau, work plans, written correspondence, presentation slides, and public awareness materials (e.g., advertisements and brochures). In addition, the evaluators conducted 19 structured interviews with individuals who were either directly or peripherally involved with the PFEC project. Interviews were conducted with ten members of the PFEC team (permanency specialists, supervisors, and senior leaders) and nine interviews were conducted with individuals external to the core PFEC team but who had involvement in the project in some way (e.g., county, agency, and OCFS staff).

Findings

All of the implementation study results, which include the assessments of the key decisions made during the first year, important implementation issues, and the evaluator's conclusions, are described in Section II of the PFEC Final Evaluation Report. Highlights are provided below.

Orientation

While the evaluators found that the PFEC program model had been implemented as designed, they found that the orientation plan was not effective in reaching the lower level caseworkers and supervisors. The orientation plan included introductory letters to the directors and commissioners of the various systems and local districts of social services, as well as personal meetings, and Advisory Board invitations. The absence of detailed information about PFEC goals and methods provided an opportunity for misconceptions to develop that made some workers reluctant to work with PFEC staff and slowed progress on permanency for some youth. The two most common problems that resulted from line staff's lack of orientation and training about the permanency and the PFEC project and study revolved around the issue of lifetime placements and selection of youth for PFEC.

Lifetime Placements: The most pervasive misconception was that the PFEC permanency specialists sought to place youth in family settings, even if the youth required residential placement. The position of PFEC was that youth in need of long-term residential care should remain in those placements. At the same time, the project would work to connect youth to caring adults who could make a lifetime commitment to the youth, be it through adoption, legal guardianship or a permanency pact.

... A number of interview respondents stressed the high value placed on lifetime residential placements, noting that the structure and support offered in these settings are ideal for youth facing the types of challenges common among PFEC youth. There was a sense that lifetime placements could be lost if PFEC staff were granted access to particular youth.

Selection of Youth for PFEC Intervention: In addition to concerns over the potential loss of lifetime placements, some stakeholders expressed concern that the project team did not consult with staff at their agency about which youth were to be selected for inclusion. In fact, the PFEC project was a controlled experiment, with participants randomly assigned to either the PFEC program or a control group by the evaluation team. The lack of understanding of this key element of the project design seemed to contribute to the resistance experienced by several PFEC specialists.

To promote more collaborative relationships with the caseworkers and supervisors with responsibility for PFEC-enrolled youth, permanency specialists and other PFEC team members spent considerable time talking one-on-one with casework staff. In some cases, these efforts bore fruit; caseworkers and supervisors described as initially reluctant to work with a PFEC permanency specialist came to welcome the permanency specialist's services. In other cases, resistance persisted for the duration of the project.

PFEC Final Evaluation Report, 2013, page 38

PFEC Staff Training

While the evaluator found that the PFEC specialists had received extensive and appropriate training for working with youth and families,

PFEC permanency specialists were not prepared for extensive communications with casework staff about the objectives and perspectives of the PFEC initiative and the role of the PFEC permanency specialist. Communications of this type turned out to be a major aspect of the permanency specialists' work. All of the permanency specialists agreed that the need for ongoing "public relations" work was both high and unexpected.

PFEC Final Evaluation Report, 2013, p.40

To the extent the project offered guidance to permanency specialists in this area it was done in one-on-one supervision with the Project Director. In fact, permanency specialists who were less inclined to invest the time in rapport and relationship building with casework staff often asked the Project Director to negotiate with the local district or agency staff on their behalf.

Permanency specialists who handled this part of the work themselves reported having more success at building relationships with agency staff – and gaining access to youth and their records – than those who declined to do this part of the work. Permanency specialists who intentionally approached agency/facility staff with respectful deference to their role and expertise on the youth's circumstances seemed to make quicker, deeper in-roads than the permanency specialists who did not explicitly focus on developing relationships with casework staff.

PFEC Final Evaluation Report, 2013, p.40

Barriers to Permanency

PFEC specialists recorded any difficulties to achieving permanency for each child in the project database. Through a review of their comments and later interviews of the staff, the evaluators identified four frequently occurring problems that were often difficult to overcome: geography, complex needs of PFEC youth, youth resistance to forming new relationships, and difficulty engaging caseworkers.

Geography: First, project and non-project staff agreed that youth are often placed in facilities that, although well-suited to address their complex needs, may be far away from their families and/or from the provider agency with primary case planning responsibility. Professionals from all four systems (OMH, OPWDD, OCFS, and DJJOY) noted the difficulty of working with families or potential resources not in close proximity to the facility in which the youth resides. In an effort to overcome these issues, the PFEC project used various forms of technology, such as video chats and video messages via Skype to connect youth with potential resources.

Complex Needs of PFEC Youth: A second barrier that consistently emerged was the complexity of the challenges associated with this population of youth. Among the PFEC youth were individuals with violent tendencies, youth with sexual aggression, youth who set fires, and youth with suicidal ideation and behaviors. Identifying a family for youth with these behavioral concerns was a real challenge and, according to permanency specialists, one that they could not always overcome. On a number of occasions, mental health professionals advised PFEC staff that a particular youth was too unstable to meet with the specialist or to explore permanency and requested PFEC efforts to cease until further notice.

Resistance to Forming New Relationships: A third barrier was the level of resistance among the youth themselves to exploring new relationships with adults. This was a barrier anticipated by project leaders; nonetheless, it posed significant challenges for the permanency specialists doing the work. Prolonged stays in foster care, often characterized by multiple placement and relationship disruptions, can engender mistrust and a desire to leave foster care independently, without the involvement of any adults or family. Permanency specialists were trained in helping youth reverse this stance and, as discussed in Section I, there were some successes. However, in some instances youth steadfastly refused to meet with them or to engage at all in discussions around permanency.

Difficulty Engaging Caseworkers: As discussed above, PFEC staff confronted resistance to their efforts from the primary caseworkers assigned to youth. This resistance appears to have been created through a combination of a lack of information about PFEC goals and methods by casework staff and a lack of anticipation and preparedness for the professional relationship building and communication skills required of the specialists for almost every assigned case. Regardless of the cause, the problem was pervasive, and in some cases, resulted in extreme delays characterized by months of unreturned phone calls, repeatedly meeting cancellations, and unanswered e-mail inquiries.

The evaluator’s conclusions, integrating the major themes with lessons learned, are reprinted below.

After five years, there remains a widespread and deep belief among PFEC leadership and staff that permanency is indeed possible for all youth in care. There is also a deeper appreciation and understanding of how difficult it is to achieve this goal. The PFEC project had a goal of achieving permanency for more than half of the PFEC-enrolled youth. Over the course of four years, 21 percent of enrolled youth achieved permanency. While short of the target, achieving permanency for nearly a quarter of randomly assigned youth is no small accomplishment, considering the special needs of the youth and the ongoing obstacles that confronted the project. . . [T]here were three challenges that had the greatest impact on the ability of permanency specialists to do their work.

First, misperceptions among county, foster care and residential staff about PFEC and its goals contributed to the difficulty permanency specialists experienced when starting work on each case. While the PFEC team made considerable effort to reach senior staff at the agencies and counties, the same level of effort was not directed to orient frontline staff. If given the opportunity to do something like this again, PFEC leaders said they would direct efforts at frontline staff in a more deliberate way.

Second, a key element to success in meeting project goals was relationship building, not only with youth, but also with – perhaps especially with – their casework staff. For some permanency specialists, the appeal of this job was the work they could potentially do with a particularly challenging group of foster *youth*. Although permanency specialists likely understood there would be some amount of collaboration required with youth’s assigned caseworkers, they would have benefited from greater preparation (and training) for the degree to which their efforts would be directed at professional staff rather than the youth themselves.

Third, the youth targeted for the PFEC project had very complex problems. In some cases youth were considered so unstable – or were simply AWOL for so long – as to preclude contact with a member of the PFEC team over the course of months, if not years. It is worth stressing that *those youth too fragile to take advantage of what PFEC had to offer are certainly no less deserving of support and permanency*. They may, though, require a different kind of intervention, a different version of PFEC, one that is better able to respond to youth’s unique – and oft-times extreme – circumstances.

SYSTEM CHANGE IMPACTS

Using the statewide administrative foster care database, the research staff at OCFS identified which children met the target population criteria four times during the project so that the Chapin Hall evaluators could randomly select youth for the intervention and control groups. As a way to ascertain whether the program had any systemic effects on this population, OCFS researchers used the same method to identify how many children still met the program criteria at the conclusion of the project.

- The number of children in the target population decreased by 62 percent from 351 to 133 children during the four years of PFEC operation (October 1, 2009 to September 30, 2013).
- There were large decreases in all systems and for all demographics.
- There were significant reductions in the average length of time in foster care (129 to 110 months) between the 2009 target population and 2013 target population.
- There were significant reductions in the average length of time since being freed (84 to 69 months) between the 2009 target population and 2013 target population.

Target Population Location and Demographics in Pre-PFEC (2009) and Post-PFEC (2013)

Licensing Agency of Facility	Target Population 10/1/2009		Target Population 9/30/2013	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
DJJOY	3	.9%	1	.8%
OPWDD	41	11.7%	13	9.8%
OMH	73	20.8%	39	29.3%
OCFS	234	66.6%	80	60.2%
Race/Ethnicity				
White	87	24.8%	35	26.3%
Black	167	47.6%	52	39.1%
Hispanic	46	13.1%	21	15.8%
Other	51	14.5%	25	18.8%
Average Age				
	17.3		17.0	
<9	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
>=9 and <12	11	3.1%	2	1.5%
>=12 and <15	27	7.7%	14	10.5%
>=15 and <18	118	33.6%	61	45.9%
>=18 and <19.5	101	28.8%	30	22.6%
>=19.5	94	26.8%	26	19.5%
Total	351	100%	133	100%

Target Population Time in Foster Care and Time Freed in Pre-PFEC (2009) and Post-PFEC (2013)

	Target Population 10/1/2009		Target Population 9/30/2013	
	Time in FC	Time freed	Time in FC	Time freed
Min. number of months	5	1	9	2
Max. number of months	251	242	246	203
Mean number of months*	129	84	110	69
Median number of months	131	76	106	64

*Differences in means are statistically significant at .01 level (P<.001).

SUSTAINABILITY

It was always intended that direct services provided by the grant-supported PFEC staff would end when the federal grant ended. The idea behind the project was to use the experiences learned from working with the most challenging cross-system cases to get an in-depth knowledge of why permanency work was not occurring with this particular population, figure out what was needed to change this situation, and start implementing policy and practice changes system-wide. The goal is to make everyone involved in these children's care, no matter which system hired them, become attuned to the urgent need for permanency work for all freed foster children, including the target population of this project. When the caseworkers and others with responsibility for these youth are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and time to conduct family finding, outside permanency specialists, like the PFEC staff, will not be necessary going forward. PFEC made a good start at raising awareness about the plight of these children and the practicalities of working with these youth toward real permanent relationships that will last into adulthood. Many arrangements were made to help sustain this effort into the future.

Agency Sustainability

Selection of the three service provider agencies at the onset of this project was determined based on their years of experience and expertise in serving youth similar to those in the target population. Hillside, Parsons, and You Gotta Believe! increased their knowledge about working collaboratively across systems of care as part of their involvement with this project. These agencies will continue their work and focus on recruitment for families for older foster youth in their care long after the project is completed. Additionally, they will continue their commitment to informing and training others of the benefits of permanency for all freed children no matter how intensive the child's level of need.

The PFEC permanency specialist positions were filled by each partner agency with staff judged to have the commitment and experience necessary to be permanency advocates for the youth selected for PFEC. Staff members at each agency were trained in Family Search and Engagement techniques and will continue to use them after the project ends. Hillside Family of Agencies invested in the development of a Family Finding curriculum and committed to training internal staff and local district staff, as well as staff from voluntary agencies serving youth from OPWDD, OMH and OCFS. Parsons has incorporated several of the project strategies in their efforts to find resource parents for older foster care youth. Adoption Chronicles and other forms of video will continue to be used by Hillside and You Gotta Believe! with equipment and staff training acquired through the grant. Partnerships with Children Awaiting Parents and The Heart Gallery will be sustained.

Family Finding Training: During the period of this project, Hillside became qualified to provide Family Finding training. By the end of the project, OCFS had provided funding for staff from over twenty local districts to attend this training. New York City, the state's largest district, is working on having this training provided for their workers. OCFS expects to continue to encourage districts to have their staff receive this training.

Trauma-Informed Training: All three partner agencies hosted trauma workshops in their regions of the state. Staff, foster and adoptive parents, child welfare providers and other interested persons working with the PFEC target population or other foster care youth attended these

training sessions. Parsons training institute offered a workshop “Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma” for resource parents which enabled them to gain 16 credit hours towards therapeutic certification. Other workshops included the effects of trauma on youth development, and how to effectively parent youth who have experienced significant trauma in their lives. The Parson’s training institute will continue to provide training on trauma- informed care across the state.

Local District Sustainability

Local social services districts are the authorized agencies with custody and responsibility for care, planning and recruitment for the target population served by the project. At the start of the project, letters were sent to all local social services commissioners and directors of services informing them of the project’s goals and enlisting their help in both updating the data on the target population, and working with project staff if a child in their county was selected for the project. There has been ongoing collaboration between PFEC program staff and local district case managers for the youth in the intervention group. For the youth selected for the control group, OCFS regional adoption specialists worked with local district staff to complete the information sheets sent out quarterly needed for the evaluation.

As part of the transition activities at the conclusion of the project, letters were sent to local social services commissioners and directors of services informing them of the activities closing out the project. A report on each child in the intervention group that explained the progress to permanency and any barriers encountered was prepared and sent to the local districts. For those youth in the intervention group who did not achieve permanency, PFEC staff worked with the local districts to update them on the current status of the permanency work being done for the child, how that work can be sustained, and the end date for their work on the cases. The permanency specialists made sure the youth on their caseloads understood that the program would end and that their local district or agency will continue to work with them in finding a permanent family.

As part of the sustainability efforts of the PFEC project, and in keeping with statewide efforts stressing the importance of securing permanency for older youth in foster care, the local districts were provided with a packet of educational and informational items. These items were aimed at improving staff efforts at preparing youth to successfully live with a family or transition from foster care to live independently connected to a committed, supportive adult. The packet includes:

1. The book *Getting Solid: A Youth’s Guide to Permanence* provides information on the importance of establishing permanent connections for foster youth and preparing them to “participate in positive, caring, life-long relationships.”
2. A fantastic binder *FY13 – Involved, Informed, Independent* helps a youth to identify and organized all the important forms, papers, contacts, medical and work related information a youth needs to function as an independent adult.
3. *It’s T Time: Transition Planning Toolkit* is for caseworkers and facility staff to help them to assist foster youth in preparing for a successful transition into adulthood. PFEC ask the districts’ assistance in reminding staff of New York State’s policy in compliance with federal law regarding

Transition Plan Requirements for youth in foster care. We expressed the critical nature of the request given the number of older youth who sign out or age out of foster care each year. This was the reality for a number of the PFEC youth. They were reminded that the OCFS website provides a number of policy releases and guides on educational, employment, vocational, and Health Care Integration services needed to assist youth to successfully transition from foster care.

In 2010, OCFS provided two statewide teleconferences to inform and guide local districts as they developed multi-year recruitment plans. The PFEC Supervisor participated in both teleconferences and provided information on the PFEC project to emphasize the importance of recruitment strategies focused on finding families for older youth, as well as strategies to recruit African American and Hispanic families, and also touched on the problems of disproportionality and disparity for children of color in the foster care system. OCFS also has direct involvement with local districts as they prepare their updated recruitment plans for the Title IV-B and Title IV-E comprehensive state plans. OCFS regional staff will work with local districts to include recruitment planning that specifically addresses the needs of youth in the target population.

Statewide Sustainability

OCFS, as the Title IV-E state child welfare agency, includes in its mission statement “promoting safety, permanency and well-being of our children.” Its CFSR Program Improvement Plan included the expanded recruitment of foster and adoptive parents with a focus on targeted recruitment of families for older youth, and there are a number of initiatives and programs aimed at improved outcomes in this area. However, it is usually the youth in foster boarding homes or youth who can advocate for themselves that benefit the most from these programs. OCFS PFEC staff were involved in internal conversations with OCFS executive and professional staff responsible for programs and services that impact services to older foster youth. The goal of these conversations was to raise the prominence of the permanency needs of the PFEC target population in their program discussions and service delivery strategies. These programs include:

- Youth in Progress (YIP), an adolescent advocacy group for youth in foster care. The PFEC supervisor worked with the OCFS Bureau of Training on a YIP pamphlet in the “Need to Know Series entitled - Adoption Rights for Foster Care Youth who are 14 Years and Older;”
- National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) program, which requires each state to develop a data collection method to assess independent living services delivery to youth in foster care and track the life outcomes of all 17-year-old foster youth for several years;
- Bridges to Health (B2H), a Medicaid home and community-based services waiver which helps to better integrate cross-system Medicaid services to help maintain children with severe emotional, developmental, or health disabilities in foster boarding or adoptive homes;
- New York State Cross-System Committee on the use of Psychotropic Medications for children in foster care, which is a collaboration among OCFS, the Department of Health (DOH) and OMH to work on solutions to improve the oversight, monitoring and appropriate use of psychotropic medication for children, including foster children;

- Legal staff reviewed numerous legal and policy documents to determine what, if any changes need to be made to state statute, regulations, or practices. The document review included Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with DOH, OMH and OPWDD, Title IV-E eligibility for foster youth residing in other systems, OCFS regulations that govern permanency and other foster care services to youth in other systems of care, interstate compact issues for PFEC youth who move to another state, and PFEC youth eligibility for federal adoption assistance if they lose IV-E eligibility;
- The state’s response to the Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) and Interethnic Placement Provisions (IEP) includes a comprehensive state/county plan for the diligent recruitment of foster and adoptive parents representative of the youth in care; and
- KinGAP is a subsidized guardianship program that can be especially helpful to youth in the PFEC target population as it allows youth to leave foster care to the care of a relative legal guardian and receive a subsidy similar to adoption assistance.

The PFEC permanency specialist positions provide the day-to-day child specific recruitment work but those positions were specific to the project and will end. However, the state plans to look at the staff qualifications and skill sets of the PFEC permanency specialists to identify the skills necessary to successfully build relationships with youth, foster and adoptive parents, and cross system partners.

The state also considered how to best share PFEC success stories statewide and nationally. To capture the real story of the project, a journalist was hired to interview youth, parents, permanency specialists, OCFS staff and others who collaborated on the project, and write their vignettes about their permanency journeys. These vignettes, combined with the final evaluation report and program report, will leave the legacy of knowledge to inform the field.

OCFS checked that permanency hearings were occurring for these youth, and the PFEC director found that the youth were often not in attendance. The project supervisor and director addressed this concern with the Court Improvement Committee at OCFS, with the intention that they will raise this issue with the community of children’s attorneys, who are responsible for making sure the children are included in permanency hearings when appropriate.

Regional cross-system meetings, PFEC presentations at statewide conferences such as the New York Public Welfare Association (NYPWA) annual meeting of local district commissioners and directors of services, and the New York State Citizens Coalition for Children (NYSCCC) annual conference throughout the lifetime of the project, have been used to inform and update professionals and parents. Regional trainings to inform parents and providers on the consequences of childhood trauma and treating children who have experienced trauma were held in October 2012.

- You Gotta Believe! brought in Jayne Schooler, a renowned author and trainer, to deliver “Building Trauma Competent Healing.” The training was attended by staff, foster and adoptive parents, and child welfare providers from the NYC metro area.
- Hillside Children’s Center provided three trainings across western and central New York. “The Effects of Trauma on the Development of Youth in the Child Welfare System” was developed

and presented by Dr. Jody Todd Manly, Clinical Director of the Mt. Hope Family Center, University of Rochester. Dr. Manly is an expert in evidence-based trauma treatments. Her presentations were delivered in Rochester, Buffalo, and Syracuse to staff, foster and adoptive parents, and local county and voluntary agency child welfare providers.

- Parsons Child and Family Center provided “Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma: A Workshop for Families and Caregivers” for staff from Albany, Columbia, Schenectady, Ulster and Washington counties, as well as child welfare staff from voluntary agencies and adoptive and foster families in these counties. This training was in three day modules and was presented six times in one month. It was also an opportunity for resource parents to accumulate 16 hours of training credit toward their therapeutic certifications.

Adoption Competency training for therapists and caseworkers statewide is being provided by OCFS adoption specialists in each region. Training prospective parents so they are prepared for parenting is also a priority and all three partner agencies, along with local social service districts and contract agencies, continue to provide training to foster and adoptive parents.

The evaluation component concluded upon completion of the final evaluation report. The evaluation report will be used to guide discussions about potential training topics and strategies for change statewide.

We are also interested in improving the quality of child specific data in our data systems. Once a foster child entered another system of care such as OMH or OPWDD, workers sometimes failed to update location, facility, or permanency planning goal data and it is difficult to obtain information from the other systems on these children. OCFS is working with local social services districts to improve the timely entry of child specific data. PFEC staff recommended to the cross-systems committee of state commissioners the need to address cross-system linkage of data, a need for data elements in common, and a protocol on sharing and protecting confidential client information.

Other than the overarching focus on permanency cross systems, PFEC funding supported some valuable tools that will continue to serve youth and families in the future.

- Portable studios designed for taping Adoption Chronicle videos of the youth will continue to be used by both Hillside and You Gotta Believe!.
- The laptops used by the PFEC specialists will continue to serve the agencies that wish to connect youth with family members via Skype.
- The PFEC grant allowed us to develop Service Guides of Foster Care, Adoption, Family Support, and Therapeutic Services available by region. It is now accessible on New York State’s Citizens’ Coalition for Children’s website <http://nysccc.org/map/> where people can click on a county on a map of the state to see descriptions and contact information for services available in their area.

Cost of Sustaining Key Program Elements

Federal and state funding exists to serve this population of youth. Title IV-E and Title IV-B funds are available for the child specific recruitment of permanent resources for youth in care. There are also additional incentive dollars for increasing adoptions of older youth in foster care.

Changes required in Systems, Legislation, Policy, Procedures, Training and Funding Sources to Sustain Program Benefits

Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) between OCFS, OMH, and OPWDD were reviewed with the OCFS legal advisor. Further review and any revisions, if needed, will occur at the commissioner level as the MOUs cover collaborations across systems on numerous projects and not just responsibilities in the area of permanency efforts specific to this population of youth. OCFS continually collaborates on many initiatives with the various systems of care and establishes new agreements depending on the goals of the program/project.

The project supervisor consulted with OCFS legal counsel to clarify who has financial responsibility for freed children residing in other systems of care. The attorney explained that even though the freed children are in the legal custody and guardianship of the LDSS commissioners, the other systems' facilities are not IV-E eligible facilities. Foster care payments were not being made for these children as they were eligible for care in OMH or OPWDD facilities based on the eligibility requirements of these other systems. While the majority of children are Title IV-E eligible (when not in non-IV-E eligible facilities) and thereby Medicaid eligible, locating providers who accept Medicaid to provide services needed to strengthen and maintain the new family relationships can be a challenge.

Dissemination Plan and Sustainability Plan Overlap

Statewide dissemination of PFEC goals, progress, and successes has been ongoing throughout the project. Sustainability will grow as the dissemination of that evidence-based information is shared and the benefits are clearly witnessed by finding permanency for these children.

CONCLUSIONS

As expected, PFEC found that freed youth residing in residential care due to their developmental, emotional, or behavioral needs are the most vulnerable and challenging group of youth in foster care to work with to implement expedited and lasting permanency changes. These youth were in care and freed for many, many years, suffered multiple traumas, had little or no family contact for years, and had special needs, some very severe. The children assigned to the PFEC intervention were predominately older male teenagers with an average age of 16.8. To add to the challenge, many of the youth were being cared for in other systems of care, such as mental health and developmental disabilities, whose primary concern is not permanency, but treatment.

The project was successful in soliciting help from the local social services districts to keep the administrative data on the youth in the target population current. As a result, there is a better understanding of the demographics on these youth; who they are, where they are, how long have they been there, and if permanency work is being done on their behalf. OCFS research staff identified the target population four times over a two year period plus a final identification of the children who met the target population criteria at the end of the project. Between 2009 and 2013, efforts to keep the spotlight on the needs of these youth led to a decrease of 62 percent in the size of the target population, with large decreases in all systems and for all child demographic categories.

The independent evaluator from Chapin Hall Center for Children used a stratified randomized control trial design to test the effectiveness of the PFEC intervention and developed a web-based project database to record project activities and outcomes. The PFEC permanency specialists were responsible for reporting about youth in the intervention group. Data on the control group was recorded by OCFS Regional Adoption Specialists or local social services district caseworkers on forms provided to the evaluators.

One of the deficits of this project was the lack of access to current case data by the permanency specialists for the youth on their caseloads. As voluntary agency workers, the permanency specialists were not authorized to access statewide child welfare and foster care administrative data systems because they have strict privacy controls. The specialists had to depend on case planners or case managers to get current information about the youth, sometimes resulting in significant delays that could have been avoided with system access. Another deficit was that the evaluation design did not incorporate regular updates and feedback on progress meeting intermediate project goals. More frequent feedback would have focused PFEC staff's attention to areas needing improvement.

Discussing permanency can evoke feelings that are often polar opposites for youth: excitement at the thought of an adult or family who wants and will care for the youth, and doubt and/or despair as he or she recalls previous disappointments with disrupted or dissolved placements and adoptions. Working to change a youth's negative receptivity to adoption or alternative permanent arrangement was an important task for the permanency specialists. Even more challenging for them were those youth who were unable to articulate their desire for permanency due to their special needs but who were no less entitled to have a family or a committed adult in their life.

High levels of responses to PFEC recruitment efforts confirm that willing adults and families do exist who can become viable permanency resources for youth with special needs. However, it is important to acknowledge that, given the unique circumstances of the youth served by the project, it could be an intense and complicated process to achieve permanency, and to do so in a timely manner. It required focused casework, relationship-building, therapy sessions, and the provision of support services to parents and youth. These efforts were critical to counteract and deal with the multiple traumas experienced by the youth, their special needs, their lack of recent experience living in family environments, and their struggles as teens to assert their independence as emerging young adults who naturally want to be free of rules and restrictions.

The passage of time loomed over the work of the PFEC specialists. Staff was cognizant of the national AFCARS statistics on the number of youth similar to those in the target population signing out, or aging out of care without a family or committed adult. PFEC specialists needed to balance the concern with time with the need to make good stable placements and avoid later disruptions or adoption dissolutions and further trauma to the youth.

A significant number of parents responded to the various recruitment efforts: 122 individuals/families indicated their interest to be a potential parent to a PFEC youth. Of the various recruitment methods used and tracked (Adoption Chronicles videos, family search, internet photo listing, adoption panels, and targeted recruitment), family search and engagement had the greatest success: 36 percent of adults recruited through family search became permanent resources to PFEC youth. The individual or families that persisted and had a child placed with them were usually parents who had previous experience with youth with needs similar to those of the target population. In a few cases, disruptive or violent behavior on a visit or during a placement with a potential parent made potential parents realize they were unable to effectively manage the youth's behavior and this did lead to some disruptions. In other cases, some parents, when faced with the reality of medical and other costs associated with the care of the youth, decided not to proceed with adoption due to potential family liability and costs.

The provision of on-going support and services was a major consideration for most parents since the majority of the youth will need services and support for a considerable time, and some will need it their entire lives. The availability of post-placement and post-adoption services was a concern in all areas of the state. The PFEC specialists worked with parents themselves as well as referring parents to foster parent support groups and to "Parent to Parent" groups formed specifically for parents of children with disabilities, and other cross system parent groups for youth with special needs. They also helped enroll eligible youth in the Bridges to Health Medicaid waiver program which provides in-home services during and after foster care until age 21.

The following summarizes specific activities aimed at meeting the two major goals of the project.

Goal One:

Improve permanency outcomes for the youth participating in the PFEC program.

As stated in the original proposal, the project had a goal of achieving permanency for at least 50 children from the target population. At project end, 25 youth in the intervention group had either a finalized or pending permanency outcome, so only 50 percent of the goal was reached. However, in comparison, only six youth (seven percent) from the control group achieved either a finalized or pending permanency outcome during the same time period.

In 2007, Chapin Hall analyzed data from the Multistate Foster Care Data Archive and found that the adoption rate for children in congregate care was .4 percent. In comparison, seven percent of youth served by PFEC were adopted and an additional six percent had adoptions pending when the study closed. The level of permanency achieved can be attributed to multiple factors. At the permanency specialist level, PFEC had the advantage of specialized permanency case loads, specialists skilled in working with older youth with special needs, experience in working with youth from congregate care settings, and experience in navigating other systems of care.

The specialists were instrumental in educating professionals providing clinical care for the youth on the importance of permanency. Their respective agencies trained staff and strongly support permanency work on behalf of older teens and youth. The Project Director was skilled and experienced in this work. The commissioners of the local departments of social services, responsible for decisions regarding the youth best interest determinations in placement decisions, were critical and valuable partners in the permanency process.

At the state level, the OCFS Project Supervisor intervened when asked and as necessary to resolve case-specific cross-system issues. Collaboration and commitment at all levels were necessary to successful outcomes. Navigation across and up and down systems is not a simple process and required frequent and open lines of communication. This is a continual challenge to New York's state-supervised and locally administered child welfare system. During the PFEC project, which started in late 2008, extreme fiscal constraints for state and local governments increased the challenges. Further adding to the complexity was the increasing use of contracted case management and case planning responsibilities to private voluntary agencies. Working with these entities posed a new challenge to some of the permanency specialists.

Even with the high level of commitment, other challenges arose in specific cases. While reconnecting with a parent seemed to be a viable option for some youth, local departments of social services objected in some cases because of the reasons the child came into care in the first place. Reassessing the appropriateness of connecting with the parent was always carefully explored in a collaborative manner. In some cases, distance and travel for visits with potential resources was an issue. As some PFEC youth resided more than three hours away from a relative or significant other, PFEC specialists arranged for Skype (internet video chat) as an alternative to face-to-face meetings. In one particularly difficult case, the residential placement facility was reluctant to allow the PFEC specialist access to the

youth, causing a long delay and requiring intervention from OCFS and local district administrators, as well as Family Court.

The PFEC project was affected by staff turnover during the last year of the project after two full-time permanency specialists left the grant-funded project. Unfortunately, the agencies were not able to hire and train two new staff in the short time remaining. As a result, the Project Director assumed responsibility for the cases assigned to the PFEC specialist who retired from Hillside, and he worked with the Director of Foster Care and Adoption at Parsons on cases that had been assigned to a specialist who resigned for a new position. The loss of the two permanency specialists resulted in some data entry gaps for some cases, but the records were eventually completed in time for evaluation analysis.

“It always seems impossible until it’s done.”

Nelson Mandela

Despite these challenges, the permanency specialists, driven by a strong conviction that every child is adoptable, persevered with fortitude and determination on some very complicated cases. Even when it was clear that a youth’s clinical needs were so severe that it was likely the child would never reside in a home setting, the specialists continued recruitment efforts on behalf of these youth because they understood that a permanent connection to a supportive adult is a critical ingredient to overall well-being. Time was not always on their side. Some youth were fast approaching age 21 and the end of foster care, yet this did not dissuade the permanency specialists from pursuing project goals. Ever mindful that placement decisions must meet the unique emotional and therapeutic needs of each individual child, the specialists participated in numerous treatment and case planning meetings. These meetings helped inform their work to match youth with adults prepared and ready to face the future together.

How do we develop and sustain such a work force for the future? A starting point is statewide training for staff on child specific recruitment techniques, adoption competency, trauma training, and transition planning. Plans for Adoption Competency, Family Finding, and Family Search and Engagement trainings are ongoing at this time. Most importantly, permanency work using these specialized tools needs to start early with each child and continue after setbacks or disappointments. The tools developed or refined by project staff lead to the next goal of the project.

Goal Two:

Contribute to the body of knowledge regarding effective strategies for recruiting, retaining and matching caregivers with special needs youth.

Prospective foster and adoptive parents were recruited through a variety of means: general and targeted parent recruitment, child specific recruitment, and family search. Adoption Chronicles and Family Search and Engagement were the most successful recruitment methods for turning recruitment into permanent matches. The permanency specialists received training in the Family Finding Model and

were fortunate to attend workshops led by developer Kevin Campbell. The lead agency, Hillside Children's Center, contracted and collaborated with Mr. Campbell to develop a Family Finding curriculum that is now provided statewide and nationally through the Hillside Institute for Family Connections. With the availability of this curriculum, there was no need for the project to duplicate those efforts. OCFS has recommended this curriculum to local social services districts and voluntary agencies.

In the last month of the project, Family Finding training was provided to county and agency staff in central New York using PFEC funding. The training was provided in both one-day or two-day formats. The two-day training included: an overview of the model's six steps; ways this model is different from traditional approaches; tools to discover and engage families and others; how to develop plans that are safe, realistic, and sustainable; how to help families reclaim responsibility for their children; and how to help youth develop a lifetime support network. The one-day training provided an overview of the Family Finding model, information on the tools used to engage families, and the Family Finding services and staff the Institute can provide to local districts and agencies. The Family Finding training familiarizes caseworkers with responsibility for securing permanency with effective tools to find and engage families to become permanent resources for youth with special needs.

The willingness of permanency specialists to be available to resource parents whenever necessary provided great comfort and support for families. Training for resource and adoptive families assists families with learning what to expect, to develop the skills necessary to care for youth with special needs, and to understand ways to help children manage their behavior. Trauma training for parents and staff working with the target population is vital. All the partner agencies through project funding hosted regional trauma training workshops open to local district or voluntary agency staff and resource parents.

Another significant product produced through PFEC funds was the creation of regional resource guides to support placements pre and post finalization. The guides provide service descriptions and contact information by county so families can easily locate services available in their area, and are available on the New York State Citizens Coalition for Children (NYSCCC) website.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations to Administrators of Future, Similar Projects

- **Cross systems teams:** Cross system communication and collaboration is essential to successful outcomes for projects that involve foster children being served by more than one system of care. Involvement has to be more than acknowledgement that the project is needed. Project staff should include staff from the various systems as part of the team that share common goals and are responsible for permanency efforts/outcomes on behalf of the target population and the resource families.
- **Sharing data across systems on the target population:** The various data collected on a youth by each system should be shared so that the workers involved with the youth will have current and accurate information to better understand the needs of the child and make informed decisions about meeting their needs.
- **Interagency training:** Providing inter-agency training on the importance of permanency and strategies to expedite permanency for older youth in foster care prior to the start of the project and concurrent with the implementation of the project will contribute to the success of the project.
- **Increasing post-adoption/wrap-around services:** Many of the youth served by this project have special needs. Achieving permanency does not mean that these youth cease to have special needs or do not continue to need services. Post placement and post adoption services are critical to sustaining stability and permanence for these youth.

Recommendations to Project Funders (Children's Bureau)

- Encourage future grantees using a randomized design to consider how they can best utilize evaluation information during the course of the project to inform decisions. Help grantees devise a strategy for doing interim analysis so they can evaluate progress towards benchmarks (for example, the number of youth participating in Family Search and Engagement or the number of youth featured in Chronicles videos). Integrating a continuous quality improvement approach to the work and outcome evaluation would help the project team make useful mid-course adjustment in order to meet program goals.
- Remove financial barriers to the adoption or permanence for children with special needs. A child who is adopted or goes into permanent guardianship with a relative should be eligible for all benefits to which he or she would have been entitled had he or she remained in foster care.

Recommendations for Local Child Welfare Agencies

- Permanency planning must begin upon admission to out-of-home care. Local district case planners must continue permanency planning activities for children with special needs who are placed in residential care in OMH and OPWDD facilities.
- Local districts should develop procedures for initial diligent search and case-mining for parents, relatives, and siblings of each child. Involvement of parents, relatives, siblings or guardians in the out-of-home care/treatment and permanency planning of children from the point of entry

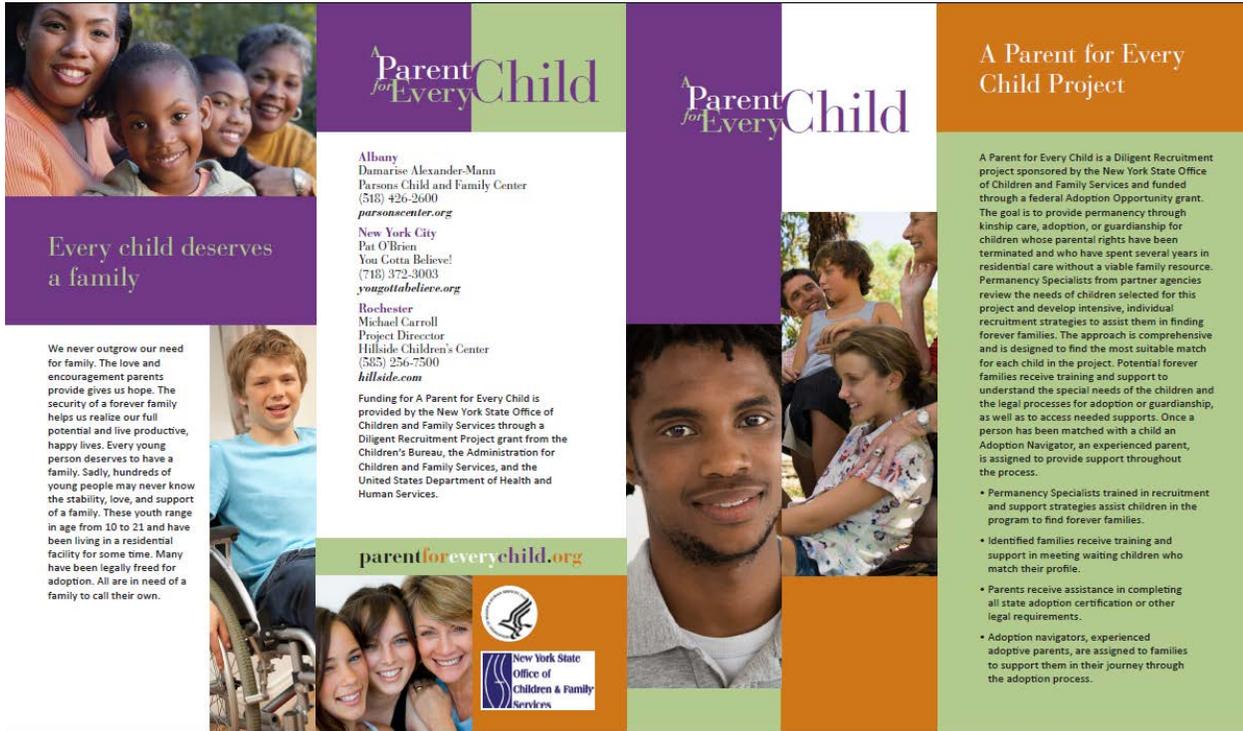
into care through discharge must be maintained. Permanency-focused supervision is a necessary support for staff in this process.

- Require that the diligent search information, both paternal and maternal, be easily accessible in an electronic case record or as a face sheet in the front of hard copy case files with dates when kin and others were last contacted.

Recommendations for the State Child Welfare Oversight Agency

- Permanency efforts and outcomes should be reviewed as part of the Permanency Roundtable model including working with local districts on the development of permanency action plans for each child. Youth permanency plans must include a detailed description of the post-permanency services that will be needed and how and by whom they will be provided.
- Create regional resource guides with information about health, mental health, disability, and education services that are permanency-oriented and trauma-informed. Children and youth in the target population, as well as their families, should have access to this guide and to providers with expertise in these areas. Maintain and update the guides on the web because printed guides quickly go out-of-date.
- Require agencies with responsibility for recruitment and retention of families to develop, implement, and demonstrate culturally-competent practices related to the recruitment and support of all families, including families of color, transracial or multi-ethnic families, large families, single parent families, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) involved families.

APPENDIX A: A PARENT FOR EVERY CHILD BROCHURE



A Parent for Every Child

Albany
Damarise Alexander-Mann
Parsons Child and Family Center
(518) 426-2600
parsonscenter.org

New York City
Pat O'Brien
You Gotta Believe!
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Rochester
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parentforeverychild.org

New York State
Office of
Children & Family
Services

A Parent for Every Child Project

A Parent for Every Child is a Diligent Recruitment project sponsored by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services and funded through a federal Adoption Opportunity grant. The goal is to provide permanency through kinship care, adoption, or guardianship for children whose parental rights have been terminated and who have spent several years in residential care without a viable family resource. Permanency Specialists from partner agencies review the needs of children selected for this project and develop intensive, individual recruitment strategies to assist them in finding forever families. The approach is comprehensive and is designed to find the most suitable match for each child in the project. Potential forever families receive training and support to understand the special needs of the children and the legal processes for adoption or guardianship, as well as to access needed supports. Once a person has been matched with a child an Adoption Navigator, an experienced parent, is assigned to provide support throughout the process.

- Permanency Specialists trained in recruitment and support strategies assist children in the program to find forever families.
- Identified families receive training and support in meeting waiting children who match their profile.
- Parents receive assistance in completing all state adoption certification or other legal requirements.
- Adoption navigators, experienced adoptive parents, are assigned to families to support them in their journey through the adoption process.

Every child deserves a family

We never outgrow our need for family. The love and encouragement parents provide gives us hope. The security of a forever family helps us realize our full potential and live productive, happy lives. Every young person deserves to have a family. Sadly, hundreds of young people may never know the stability, love, and support of a family. These youth range in age from 10 to 21 and have been living in a residential facility for some time. Many have been legally freed for adoption. All are in need of a family to call their own.



Who is eligible?

If you genuinely care about children and want to open your home to an older child, chances are you qualify. Whether you're single, married, divorced, or living with a domestic partner, you're eligible. You don't have to own your own home. Whether you're an experienced or a first-time parent, you can become a guardian, kinship caregiver, or adoptive parent. Even empty nesters and grandparents are eligible.

In making a decision to become a permanent resource, it is important for you to consider the following key beliefs found in a number of initiatives for successful youth permanency:

- Older children continue to need permanent families to support, love, and guide them.
- No child should age out of foster care without a family or adult resource.
- Youth permanency is possible—older children are adoptable.
- Youth and their permanent families must receive support before, during, and after placement.
- Youth must understand permanency planning and share in the selection of a family or adult resource.
- Relatives are an important source of permanency for older children.
- Resource parents must be willing to make a long-term commitment to the youth.

Explore the possibilities

If you've been thinking about expanding your family, contact the Permanency Specialist or one of the three PFEC partner agencies nearest you to learn more about Waiting Youth in your area. One phone call could open the door of hope to a young person and a rewarding lifelong relationship for you. Or visit our Web site at parentforeverychild.org.

Become a permanent resource for a waiting child

The most important reasons to develop a permanent connection with a waiting child are a genuine love of children and the desire to open your home permanently to a child. Some forever families have already experienced the sleepless nights and dependency of infancy and early childhood with their biological children and prefer to be a resource to an older child. Some appreciate the fact that older children's personalities and interests are well documented, allowing for better matching with their new family. Others find it easier to develop a bond with a child where they can immediately begin to share family activities, hobbies, and conversation.

A waiting child can be challenging. These youth have experienced trauma and many have been neglected or abused. They may have developed emotional and behavioral challenges as they struggle to cope with their early life experiences and an uncertain future. However, in a consistent, loving family setting, with the needed supports, these youth can overcome their challenges and realize their full potential.

You don't have to be perfect to be a perfect parent.

—AdoptUsKids

APPENDIX B: Foster Club Permanency Pact Certificate

Foster Club's Permanency Pact tool is designed to encourage life-long, kin-like connections between a young person and a supportive adult. A free PDF of the full publication may be downloaded from <http://www.fosterclub.com/files/PermPact.pdf>.

PERMANENCY PACT

In an effort to substantiate and sustain
an on-going connection between a youth and a supportive adult,

SUPPORTIVE ADULT

pledges to provide specific support to, and has been accepted as a
provider of such support by,

YOUTH

confirmed this _____ day of _____, _____

DAY MONTH YEAR

as witnessed by _____

FACILITATOR

- A Home For The Holidays
- A Place To Do Laundry
- Emergency Place To Stay
- Food/Occasional Meals
- Care Packages At College
- Employment Opportunity
- Job Search Assistance
- Career Counseling
- Housing Hunt
- Recreational Activities
- Mentor
- Educational Assistance
- Relationship/Marriage/Parenting
- Transportation
- Assistance With Medical Appts
- Storage
- Motivation
- Someone To Talk To/Discuss Problems
- A Phone To Use
- A Computer To Use
- Clothing
- Spiritual Support
- Legal Troubles
- Cultural Experience
- Apartment Move-in
- Cooking Lessons/Assistance
- Regular Check-in
- Bills & Money Management Assistance
- Drug And Alcohol Addiction Help
- Mental Health Support
- Co-Signer
- Help Reading Forms, Complex Docs
- Mechanical/Building Projects
- Housekeeping
- Home Decorating
- Voting
- Volunteerism
- Finding Community Resources
- Safety And Personal Security
- Babysitting
- Emergency Cash
- Social Circle/Community Activities
- Advocacy
- Reference
- Adoption
- _____
- _____



*FosterClub's Permanency Pact documents a
life-long, kin-like commitment to a relationship
between a youth and a supportive adult.*

the national network for young people in foster care | www.fosterclub.org

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APPENDIX C: Chapin Hall's Final Evaluation Report on PFEC

ChapinHall at the University of Chicago
Policy research that benefits children, families, and their communities

A Parent for Every Child Project

The Final Evaluation

Chapin Hall at University of Chicago
November 2013

Fred Wulczyn
Sara Feldman
Kerry Price

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

Among child welfare professionals - researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers alike – there is agreement on the negative consequences for youth who age out of foster care without an attachment to a caring adult. In New York State there is a particularly challenging sub-population of youth in foster care at highest risk for this scenario: special-needs youth who reside in a congregate care setting and who have been freed for adoption. The Parent for Every Child (PFEC) project targeted permanency efforts at this sub-population of youth and set out to do two things: 1) improve their permanency outcomes and 2) identify effective recruitment strategies for matching caring adults with these youth.

For this project the traditional definition of permanency was expanded to include both legal and relational permanency. Legal permanency involves a permanent exit from foster care, typically through adoption or guardianship. Relational permanency involves the establishment of a lifelong connection to a caring adult, without legal certification. These relationships may eventually lead to legal permanence or they may not. The permanency specialists who worked with PFEC youth were encouraged to consider the most appropriate permanency option for each youth, given their unique circumstances. Adoptions or legal guardianships are often the most appropriate permanency arrangements for youth. Other youth, though, may be better served by establishing what is known in the field as a permanency pact or a commitment contract: non-legally binding agreements between the youth and the adult, which outline their lifetime commitment to one another.

The theory of change underlying PFEC has two main components, one related to recruitment and the other related to the provision of specialized casework. First, PFEC posits that through diligent recruitment efforts, a pool of eligible families will be established from which caring adults can be connected to youth in need of either relational or legal permanency. While recruiting a sufficient number of families is an important step in efforts to help youth establish connections with caring adults, individualized casework is also necessary in order to facilitate the development of sustainable relationships. This is the second component of the PFEC logic model: providing specialized casework to youth and potential permanency resources in order to improve the likelihood of youth forming a permanent relationship with a caring adult.

This report has two parts. The first part of the report describes the PFEC project and examines the extent to which PFEC had its intended effects on permanency outcomes for youth. The second part of this report provides findings from our qualitative, retrospective study of the implementation of the PFEC project. The focus there is on how the PFEC program staff and leadership implemented the program model to achieve program goals.

Key Outcome Findings

This study examined two types of outcomes. The first type includes intermediate outcomes, such as success at recruiting families and matching these families with PFEC youth. The second type evaluates the effectiveness (impact) of the PFEC program in achieving legal or alternative permanency arrangements for youth compared to a control group who did not receive PFEC services.

Recruitment

PFEC specialists were expected to utilize diligent recruitment efforts to create a pool of eligible families interested in establishing relationships with youth in need of either relational or legal permanency. Recruitment work involved the use of a variety of strategies, including family search and engagement, Adoption Chronicles, Internet photo listings and adoption panels.

A total of one hundred and twenty-two families made at least an initial indication of their interest in working with PFEC as a potential permanent resource for a child in care. Most recruited families came forward through either the Adoption Chronicles videos or through the use of family search and engagement techniques.

Overall, youth in the intervention group participated in recruitment activities more frequently than youth in the control group. For example, 29 percent of youth in the intervention group created an Adoption Chronicles video for purposes of recruiting families; two percent of youth in the control group participated in this activity. Similarly, 22 percent of youth in the intervention had family search activities done on their behalf whereas 16 percent of youth in the control group participated in this activity. Other strategies, such as Internet photo listings, were used similarly by both the control and intervention groups as a recruitment strategy.

Matching Families and Youth

Some strategies resulted in many matches between PFEC youth and families but did not lead to permanency. For example, families recruited through Internet photo listings matched with youth frequently but none of them established a permanent relationship with a PFEC youth. Families recruited through family search and engagement activities became permanent resources for PFEC youth at a higher rate than families recruited through Chronicles videos, Internet photo listings or targeted recruitment.

Permanency Outcomes

There was a statistically significant relationship between group assignment (PFEC or control) and the likelihood of a youth achieving any type of permanency. Youth assigned to a PFEC permanency specialist were more likely to achieve permanency (inclusive of relational permanence) compared to youth who received casework as usual. Eighteen youth in the intervention group achieved some form of permanency with a family (eleven through a permanency pact and seven through adoption or legal guardianship). Only five youth in the control group achieved some form of permanency with a family (all five were legal permanency arrangements).

Youth in Cohort 1 were more likely to achieve permanency than youth in the three other cohorts. It does not appear that this was a result of exposure time to the intervention alone. Most family/youth matches were made in the first year of enrollment in PFEC. Permanency arrangements (for PFEC-enrolled youth) were typically finalized within 18 months of youth's enrollment in the project.

Key Process Study Findings

New York State has a multi-layered system of care, which required PFEC permanency specialists to coordinate with multiple workers and supervisors in order to gain access to a PFEC-enrolled youth and their case record. This turned out to be a much bigger challenge than was initially expected.

PFEC leaders designed an orientation plan intended to spread information about the project and build relationships with staff in the field. The orientation plan included introductory letters, face-to-face meetings in various settings and a cross-systems advisory board. The orientation plan was implemented with fidelity; however, it did not influence the behavior of other service system staff in the expected ways.

Findings indicate that agency and county staff were often distrustful of PFEC staff and skeptical of the goals of the project. This situation, coupled with low awareness of the project among frontline workers in the field, opened up the opportunity for caseworkers to develop misconceptions about PFEC that often left them reluctant to collaborate with the PFEC permanency specialists.

As a result of these misconceptions, PFEC permanency specialists had to focus considerable time and effort on communicating with casework staff about the objectives and perspectives of the PFEC initiative, the role of the PFEC permanency specialist and their intentions when entering into new work with a youth. This aspect of the work was a challenge for the workers. Skill building around effective communication, messaging, and relationship-building with other professionals involved in the children's care was not an explicit element of the PFEC training model. Guidance provided to permanency specialists in this area was done in one-on-one supervision with the Project Director.

Summary

The PFEC program tested the hypothesis that when diligent recruitment efforts are undertaken and enhanced casework is done on behalf of the most challenging cases, resources can be located and permanency arrangements can be achieved. The findings here seem to support that hypothesis. More permanent arrangements (inclusive of permanency pacts and commitment contracts) were put in place for the intervention group than for the control group. Youth in both groups achieved legal permanency at similar rates.

The project team confronted some significant challenges in carrying out their work. Misperceptions among key stakeholders about PFEC and its goals contributed to the difficulty permanency specialists experienced when starting work on each case. The extent to which PFEC staff would need to build relationships with other casework staff was somewhat unexpected and required a considerable dedication of staff time and energy. Further, the youth targeted for the PFEC project had very severe and complex problems. Still, the PFEC project was able to demonstrate promising results that can be utilized by others in the field considering similar types of work.

Table of Contents

Executive Summary.....	i
Introduction	1
Part I: The PFEC Outcomes Study	3
Target population	3
Theory of Change.....	4
The Evaluation	5
Study Population.....	9
PFEC Outputs: Recruitment, Engagement, and Casework Activities.....	14
Recruitment Efforts.....	14
Engagement and Casework.....	19
Outcomes.....	23
Intermediate Outcomes.....	23
Final Outcomes	26
Discussion.....	32
Part II: PFEC Implementation Study.....	34
Introduction	34
The First Year: Planning and Key Decisions.....	35
Major Themes	36
Stakeholder Orientation	36
Staff Preparation and Skills.....	39
Barriers to Permanency	42
Conclusion.....	43
References	44
Appendices.....	46
Appendix 1: Intervention Group Variable List	46
Appendix 2: Control Group Variable List	48
Appendix 3: PFEC Family Variable List	50
Appendix 4: Family Study Status Definitions	51
Appendix 5: OCFS Severity Levels and Definitions of Special Needs	52
Appendix 6: Glossary of PFEC Database Terms	54

INTRODUCTION

In 2008, New York State's Office for Children and Family Services (OCFS) received funding from the Children's Bureau to implement a project called A Parent for Every Child (PFEC). The PFEC project was designed to accomplish two primary goals: (1) to improve permanency outcomes for the youth participating in the project and (2) to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding effective strategies for recruiting, retaining and matching caregivers with youth with special needs.

Permanency is a concept that can be viewed expansively. There is legal permanence, where a family acquires legal rights from the state and the youth exits from the foster care system. This takes place with parental reunification, adoption or legal guardianship. One can also think about permanence relationally; that is, the establishment of a lifelong connection to a caring adult, without legal certification. These relationships may eventually lead to legal permanence or not.

In designing this initiative, OCFS chose to expand on the traditional notion of permanency to include both legal and relational permanency as goals for this project. There is support for PFEC's focus on relational permanence in the literature. Research has demonstrated that a supportive relationship with a caring adult has a positive influence on both the short and long-term well-being of youth (Beam, Chen and Greenberger, 2002; Samuels, 2008). Other research has found that connections to committed adults can help reduce the risk of poor outcomes for youth who age out of care (Courtney, Pilavin, Grogan-Kaylor, & Nesmith, 1998). The National Youth Permanency Convening of 2002 put forth the following definition, which is consistent with the perspective of PFEC leaders: "Permanency is both a process and a result that includes involvement of the youth as a participant or leader in finding a permanent connection with at least one committed adult. A broad array of individualized permanency options exists; reunification and adoption are an important two among many that may be appropriate."

Consistent with this expansive view of permanency emerging in the field today, PFEC staff responsible for providing direct services to youth enrolled in the program, referred to as permanency specialists, were encouraged to consider whether alternative arrangements, such as a permanency pact or a commitment contract, would be appropriate for the youth served through this project. Permanency pacts and commitment contracts are agreements that an adult and child can enter into as a way of certifying their lifelong commitment to each other. While these agreements are non-legally binding, they represent an emotional and moral commitment that the youth and the family make with one another. The signed pact represents the finalizing of a life-long commitment between the youth and the supportive adult. The Foster Club, Inc., a national network for young people in foster care, is one organization that encourages the use of permanency pacts and distributes literature and a sample pact for use by professionals.²

The target population for the PFEC initiative was children who were legally freed for adoption and who had serious physical, emotional, and developmental disabilities requiring higher levels of care than regular foster care. Children were eligible for inclusion in the PFEC study if they were residing in facilities licensed by:

1. The NYS Office of Mental Health,
2. The NYS Office for Persons with Developmental Disabilities,
3. The NYS Division of Juvenile Justice and Opportunities for Youth, or
4. The NYS Office of Children and Family services and had a permanency planning goal other than adoption

² See http://www.fosterclub.com/_transition/article/permanency-pact for materials from Foster Club, Inc. including a sample Permanency Pact.

This population of youth was chosen for several important reasons. When looking closely at youth aging out of care, data indicate that many of them are coming from congregate care facilities. Nationally, about fifteen percent of all youth in foster care reside in congregate care settings (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). In New York City, about one-third of youth ages 11 or older are living in congregate care settings (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, 2012). Youth living in congregate care settings are found to have the highest lengths of stay and the lowest rates of adoption among all youth in care in New York State (NYS OCFS, 2008).

Since most youth are adopted by their foster families it stands to reason that youth who reside in a congregate care setting are at a compelling disadvantage when it comes to achieving permanency. In planning for youth in congregate care settings, research has shown that reunification and adoption are used far less often than independent living as the permanency goal for these youth (Avery, 2000). In NYC, one study found there is minimal permanency work taking place with families on behalf of youth in congregate care settings (Freundlich, 2005). In fact, children like those served through PFEC tend to have particularly poor permanency outcomes, such as longer stays in care and lower adoption rates when compared to other youth in care in New York State (NYS OCFS, 2008).

It is well established that youth leaving care without a permanent resource often experience an array of additional negative life outcomes, such as unemployment, homelessness, lower education levels and higher levels of criminal justice involvement (Courtney, 2009; McMillen, 1999; Osgood, 2010). Youth with special needs will likely encounter even more pronounced struggles as they transition to adulthood (Cox, 2003; Heflinger, 2000).

An additional impetus for the PFEC project was the need to establish a pool of qualified families willing to provide a permanent home for foster youth with special needs. Throughout the foster care system there is a disparity between the number of youth eligible for adoption and the number of qualified adoptive resources.³ Scholars have found a connection between the recruitment of a sufficient number of qualified foster families and the extent to which stable placements are identified for hard-to-place youth (Sellick and Howell, 2003 as cited in Colton, 2008). Further, most child welfare professionals agree that an apparent disparity in recruitment efforts, where attention to recruiting permanent resources is more pronounced for youth in family settings than for youth in congregate care, is part of the reason why a notable percentage of foster youth are aging out of care without a permanent resource (Rodger, 2006). In fact, the available research suggests there is an untapped pool of families who would be willing to care for older, youth with special needs. However, relatively little is known about the most successful strategies for boosting the recruitment and retention of these potential foster parents (DTFA, 2007; Helm, 2006).

Chapin Hall was asked to conduct the evaluation of the PFEC project. The interest, broadly speaking, was in understanding the connection between enhanced recruitment efforts and casework services and outcomes for youth. The overarching research questions guiding this work were:

1. What impact, if any, will the PFEC program have on rates of permanency for the intervention group?
2. What types of recruitment strategies, if any, are associated with positive permanency outcomes?

³ Throughout this document the term 'special needs' is used to encompass a host of complex scenarios. For purposes of this report, this term refers to youth with serious behavioral issues or a disability, such as mental retardation, visual or hearing impairments, physical disabilities, emotional disturbances, and other diagnosed conditions that require special care.

Structure of the Report

This report presents findings from a two-pronged evaluation of the PFEC project. First, findings related to the outcomes of PFEC are presented. This first part of the report is divided into five sections. Section I provides an overview of PFEC: what PFEC set out to accomplish, the theory of change underlying the model, and additional information about the PFEC target population. Section II provides an overview of the evaluation design, including information about the sampling strategy used to assign eligible youth to either the intervention or control group. This section also lays out the central research questions for the evaluation of PFEC and the sources of data used in the analysis.

Section III describes the population of youth selected for inclusion in the study. This section lays out the characteristics of the sample, by group assignment (intervention or control), to provide a side-by-side comparison of the two groups of youth included in the study. Section IV provides descriptive information about the casework activities undertaken on behalf of the two groups of youth (PFEC-assigned youth and youth in the control group). The work that the permanency specialists did on behalf of the youth assigned to the PFEC group is compared to the work done by the workers associated with the youth assigned to the control group. Section V provides information on the extent to which outcomes shifted in the expected ways for the youth in the intervention group. This section of the report concludes with a discussion of the most salient findings. Last, there is a discussion of the overarching themes that emerged from this work, the limitations of this study, and summary thoughts are provided, particularly as it relates to future work in this area.

Part II of this report presents the findings from the process study. The process study results are organized into three sections. First, there is an examination of the planning for PFEC and key decisions made during the first year of the project. Second, the major themes identified through an analysis of materials and informational interviews are outlined. Last, there is a discussion of how major themes in the report relate to lessons learned over the course of the five years of this project.

PART I: THE PFEC OUTCOMES STUDY

Target population

PFEC was designed to secure permanent families for youth who are legally freed for adoption and who have a variety of special needs, including physical, emotional and developmental disabilities - youth who tend to have the highest lengths of stay and lowest rates of adoption among youth in care in New York State (NYS OCFS, 2008). Specifically, the target population for this project included freed children in one of the following four groups:

1. Children who were in the physical care of a program licensed or operated by the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH);
2. Children who resided in facilities licensed or operated by the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD);
3. Children in the physical care of a program licensed or operated by the Division of Juvenile Justice and Opportunities for Youth (DJJOY);
4. Children who resided in congregate care settings, institutions, group homes or group residences and had a permanency planning goal other than adoption.

In October of 2009, a total of 351 youth were identified as meeting the target population criteria. To have time to work with the older youth, an upper age limit of 19.5 years was set which reduced the target population to 256 children. The target population was updated for each cohort addition. Youth who had already been selected into PFEC or who no longer met the eligibility criteria were removed. Those youth who had become eligible since the last selection were added to the list. The target population list was utilized for each round of sampling, described more fully in Section II.

Theory of Change

The theory of change underlying PFEC has two main components: one related to recruitment and the other related to the provision of specialized casework. First, PFEC posits that through diligent recruitment efforts a pool of eligible families will be established from which caring adults can be connected to youth in need of either relational or legal permanency. The recruitment work involved the use of a variety of strategies, the choice of which was based on an individualized assessment of the youth:⁴

1. Family search and engagement
2. Adoption Chronicles videos
3. Internet photo listings
4. Parent specific/targeted recruitment
5. General recruitment
6. Adoption panels/adoption exchanges
7. Media resources

While recruiting a sufficient number of families is an important step in efforts to help youth establish permanent relationships with caring adults, individualized casework is also necessary in order to facilitate the development of sustainable relationships. This is the second component of the PFEC logic model: providing specialized casework to youth and potential resources in order to improve the likelihood of youth forming a permanent relationship with a caring adult. The specialized casework provided by PFEC staff involved the following key components:

1. Working with youth to identify potential permanent resources
2. Helping youth overcome any resistance to adoption or permanency
3. Facilitating the development of relationships between the youth and identified permanent resources
4. Providing adoption navigation services
5. Supporting the permanent resource by providing specialized training
6. Assisting identified permanent resources with the licensing process

⁴ Each of these strategies is described more fully in the section titled PFEC Outputs: Recruitment, Engagement, and Casework Activities and in Appendix 6.

The Evaluation

This section provides an overview of the evaluation design for the PFEC project, including the questions guiding the evaluation, how youth were sampled and assigned to the intervention or control group, and how information about youth in the sample and PFEC families was collected and maintained. Details about the different types of data utilized for this report are also provided.

Evaluation Design

Chapin Hall's evaluation of PFEC involved the use of a stratified randomized design. Randomized designs are the gold standard, as they allow evaluators to reasonably attribute changes in outcomes to program effects (whether a subject did or did not receive the intervention). Subjects' random assignment to either the control or intervention group minimizes what is referred to as allocation bias, leaving both the control and intervention groups "equal," with the one exception being the receipt – or not – of the intervention. In this evaluation, the random assignment of eligible subjects occurred just after subjects were grouped in two ways: by geography (Capital District, Western District, and New York City) and custodial system (OMH, OPWDD, DJJOY, and LDSS).⁵

Since all of the youth in the target population were in foster care, they each had an assigned caseworker. All youth in the sample would continue to receive services from their primary caseworker. Members of the intervention group would receive additional services provided by a PFEC assigned permanency specialist; youth in the control group would receive services from their assigned caseworker only.

Given the expanded view of permanency used by the project, the evaluation set out to answer two main research questions:

1. What impact, if any, did the PFEC program have on rates of permanency for the intervention group?
2. What types of recruitment strategies, if any, were associated with positive permanency outcomes?

In addition to these two overarching questions, the following questions were also considered as part of this evaluation:

1. What was the extent of each youth's participation in various recruitment activities?
2. What was the reach of the general recruitment events and public awareness initiatives?
3. What impact, if any, did various recruitment methods have on achieving matches and securing permanency for PFEC youth?
4. Did the program have an impact on the certification of recruited families?
5. Did the program have an impact on time to permanency for members of the intervention group?

⁵ In addition to the four classifications noted above, age was also a factor in the criteria for selection. Youth older than 19 and one half years old were not included in the target population given that they would age out of the system shortly after assignment to a group.

Study Sample

Table 1 displays the count of youth included in the study, by cohort. The first entry cohort, sampled in November of 2009, included 39 control youth and 40 intervention youth. The second entry cohort, sampled in November of 2010, included 12 control youth and 13 intervention youth. The third and fourth cohorts were added in February and October of 2011 and include a total of 38 control youth and 35 intervention youth. The final sample had 177 youth: 89 in the control group and 88 in the intervention group.

Table 1. Sample Sizes, by Cohort Assignment

	Intervention	Control	Total
Cohort 1 November 2009	40	39	79
Cohort 2 November 2010	13	12	25
Cohort 3 April 2011	14	12	26
Cohort 4 October 2011	21	26	47
Total	88	89	177

Sources of Data

Chapin Hall relied on two main sources of data for the PFEC evaluation: the state administrative foster care database, which contains placement data for youth in foster care, and the PFEC database, designed and created by Chapin Hall specifically for use by the PFEC project team. Each of these data sources are detailed below.

Statewide Foster Care Database

The Bureau of Evaluation and Research at OCFS identified youth in the target population through their administrative foster care data record. Once an individual was randomly selected for inclusion in the study by Chapin Hall, eighteen variables from their administrative data record were retained and transferred into the PFEC project database. The youth's demographics, county with responsibility, and information about the physical location of the youth (i.e., facility name, facility address) were utilized by permanency specialists to locate the youth assigned to the PFEC intervention group.

The PFEC Database

Chapin Hall developed a web-based database to track four categories of data related to the PFEC project. First, the database tracked information on all youth enrolled in the study (control and intervention). Second, the database housed information on all families recruited by PFEC staff as permanency resources. Third, the database maintained information around what transpired once an intervention-group youth and PFEC-recruited family became "matched."⁶ Last, permanency specialists entered information into the database pertaining to agency-sponsored recruitment events held throughout the course of the project. In the following sections, a more thorough description of these four categories of data is provided. Data collection began at the time of

⁶ A family and child are matched when both parties are interested in establishing permanency.

assignment of Cohort 1 in November of 2009. All youth were followed through April 15, 2013 (or until they exited the foster care system).

Child Level Data

Once the PFEC permanency specialist made contact with an assigned youth or reviewed the case record, specialists were asked to fully enroll the youth in the database. This involved verifying the pre-loaded data fields and entering additional information, some of which would serve as a baseline for later comparison (i.e., type and level of disability, permanency goal, receptiveness to adoption). A similar verification and enrollment process took place for the youth assigned to the control group.

Data collection for the intervention group was ongoing. Permanency specialists were expected to use the PFEC database as a system of record for all project activities. Records were expected to be updated any time a project activity occurred or when a key milestone was reached for either a PFEC-recruited family, a youth enrolled in the study, or a matched family/youth unit. The research team conducted regular quality control checks. As well, technical assistance related to the use of the PFEC database was offered by the evaluators throughout the course of the project.⁷

Data collection for the youth enrolled in the control group was conducted at the time of initial enrollment and annually thereafter. Hard copy forms were sent by the evaluator to a team member at OCFS. The forms were then sent to the OCFS Regional Office Adoption Specialist who either completed the forms or passed the forms on to the appropriate local district caseworker for completion. Completed forms were returned to the evaluator and entered into the database. The Cohort 1 control group (n = 39) completed a total of three follow-ups. The first and second follow-ups were completed with a 100 percent response rate. The third follow up, in December 2012, had one unreturned form out of 22 distributed. Cohort 2 (n=12) completed two follow-ups. All forms were completed and returned for the first time point and one out of 11 follow-up forms was incomplete for second follow up. Cohort 3 (n = 12) completed two follow-ups with a completion rate of 100 percent for both time points. Cohort 4 (n=25) completed one follow up and all 25 forms were completed and returned.^{8, 9}

PFEC Family and Match Data

The PFEC permanency specialists were responsible for entering information on all families recruited as potential permanent resources. Information maintained on each PFEC-enrolled family included the way they were recruited, whether they were licensed foster parents, if they had adopted youth before, and what their current status was in the project (i.e., matched, unmatched, exited).¹⁰

A youth-family match was considered to have occurred when a PFEC youth and a PFEC-recruited family both stated their interest in exploring a permanent relationship with one another. Over the course of the project, a youth could be matched to more than one family and vice versa.

⁷ The full list of variables maintained in the PFEC database for intervention youth is available in Appendix 1.

⁸ If a control group form was returned stating that the youth's case was closed, continued closure was verified by the OCFS Bureau of Evaluation and Research via the child welfare and foster care administrative databases at the next data collection time point. If the case remained closed, no follow up form was sent out. If the case had re-opened, a follow up form was sent for completion.

⁹ The full list of variables maintained for control group youth is available in Appendix 2.

¹⁰ Appendices 3 and 4 provide a full listing of variables maintained on each PFEC enrolled family as well as the definitions utilized for each study status.

Information related to the recruitment method that led to each match and the outcome of the match (i.e., whether the match dissolved or resulted in one of the designated permanent outcomes), was housed in the database as well.¹¹ Some youth may have already known the family with whom they became matched prior to their enrollment in the PFEC initiative (i.e., extended kin, a former foster parent, a former social worker, etc.). Information pertaining to the nature of this prior relationship was entered as well.

Program-Level Data

The five permanency specialists were employed at one of three provider agencies: Hillside Family of Agencies (Hillside), You Gotta Believe! (YGB), and Parsons Child and Family Center (Parsons). Three permanency specialists were employed with PFEC full-time and two worked part-time for the project. Each agency hosted a range of recruitment events and public awareness initiatives throughout the course of the project. These events were entered into the PFEC database along with the date of the event, the target geographic area, the number of families in attendance, and the number of families who enrolled with PFEC at the event. This information allowed researchers to assess the frequency and reach of various recruitment activities held over the course of the project.

¹¹ A match 'dissolves' when the youth and identified family are no longer interested in pursuing a permanent arrangement with one another. A full listing of PFEC related definitions is provided in Appendix 6.

Study Population

In this section, the youth selected for inclusion in the study are described. Table 2 provides demographic information about all youth enrolled in the study, by group (control and intervention). Looking at the two groups' information side-by-side, the two groups are aligned fairly well in regard to age. When youth are compared by ethnicity, more Hispanic youth are in the control group and a greater proportion of African American youth are in the intervention group. Also, a noticeably higher proportion of males are in the intervention group (75 percent) as compared to the control group (61 percent).¹²

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Youth at Enrollment in PFEC

	Count		Percent	
	Intervention	Control	Intervention	Control
Age				
Under 9 years	0	1	0%	1%
9 – 12 years	4	5	5%	6%
12 – 15 years	15	9	17%	10%
15 – 18 years	39	44	44%	49%
18 – 19.5	30	30	34%	34%
Total	88	89	100%	100%
Race				
African American	48	42	55%	47%
White	23	20	26%	22%
Hispanic	13	22	15%	25%
Other	4	5	4%	5%
Total	88	89	100%	100%
Gender				
Male	66	54	75%	61%
Female	22	35	25%	39%
Total	88	89	100%	100%

¹² The patterns described are consistent with the target population overall. Among the universe of eligible children, there were more male youth and more than half were African American.

Table 3 shows that the youth in the sample were, on average, 16 years old. Youth in both the control and intervention groups had been freed for adoption for nearly 6 years; the two groups were similar in the length of time they had been in foster care (9 – 10 years).

Table 3: Average Age, Time in Care and Time Freed (In Years)

	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Intervention Group				
Age at enrollment	16.8	2.0	10.9	19.5
Time in foster care	9.1	4.4	.72	18.7
Time freed for adoption	5.9	3.5	.20	14.8
Control Group				
Age at enrollment	16.6	2.5	7.2	19.5
Time in foster care	9.8	4.5	1.5	19.3
Time freed for adoption	5.9	3.5	.53	15.5

Table 4 provides additional characteristics of the youth at the time of enrollment including the custodial system and years in foster care. Almost half of the youth enrolled in PFEC and in the control group were in facilities licensed by OCFS, with about a third in OMH licensed facilities and just under one-fifth in OPWDD licensed facilities. The majority of children were living in some form of congregate care.¹³ Most youth in both the intervention and control groups were freed for less than ten years (84% and 82% respectively). About one fifth of the youth had been in care for 15 years or more.

¹³ Both OMH and OPWDD license family settings to serve as an alternative to group living arrangements; less than 10% of children in the study were in family-like settings at enrollment into the study.

Table 4: Youth Information at Enrollment in PFEC

	Count		Percent	
	Intervention	Control	Intervention	Control
Licensing System with physical care ¹⁴				
OCFS	37	42	42%	47%
OMH	32	30	37%	34%
OPWDD	16	14	18%	16%
DJJOY	3	3	3%	3%
Total	88	89	100%	100%
Years freed for adoption				
0 – 2 years	12	11	14%	12%
3 – 5 years	28	30	33%	34%
6 – 10 years	34	32	38%	36%
11 – 14 years	12	14	13%	16%
15 – 17 years	2	2	2%	2%
Total	88	89	100%	100%
Years in care				
0 – 3 years	7	3	8%	3%
4 – 6 years	17	21	19%	24%
7 – 9 years	27	18	31%	20%
10 – 14 years	22	28	25%	31%
15 – 17 years	9	13	10%	15%
More than 17 years	6	6	7%	7%
Total	88	89	100%	100%
Title IV-E Eligibility				
Not Eligible	50	44	57%	49%
Eligible	38	45	43%	51%
Total	88	89	100%	100%
Permanency Planning Goal				
Adoption	26	24	29%	27%
Adult Residential Care	22	20	25%	23%
Independent Living / APLA	39	44	45%	49%
Discharge to Relative / Guardian	1	1	1%	1%
Total	88	89	100%	100%

¹⁴ Nineteen youth experienced a change in system type over the course of the project. Movement between systems is detailed in Figure 1.

One concern of PFEC leaders was that the frequency of movement between systems for this particular population of youth would make locating and working with the youth a challenge. Figure 1 (below) shows the extent to which children moved out of the system they were in at the start of PFEC. All youth began the project in one of four system categories: OMH (living in a facility licensed by OMH); OPWDD (living in a facility licensed by OPWDD); DJJOY (living in a facility licensed by DJJOY); or OCFS (living in a congregate care setting that is licensed by OCFS AND has a permanency planning goal other than adoption). Nineteen percent of the youth who were residing in an OMH licensed facility at the time of enrollment moved into another system over the course of the project. The frequency of movements from the other systems was less prevalent.

Figure 1: System Movement from Project Start to Project End

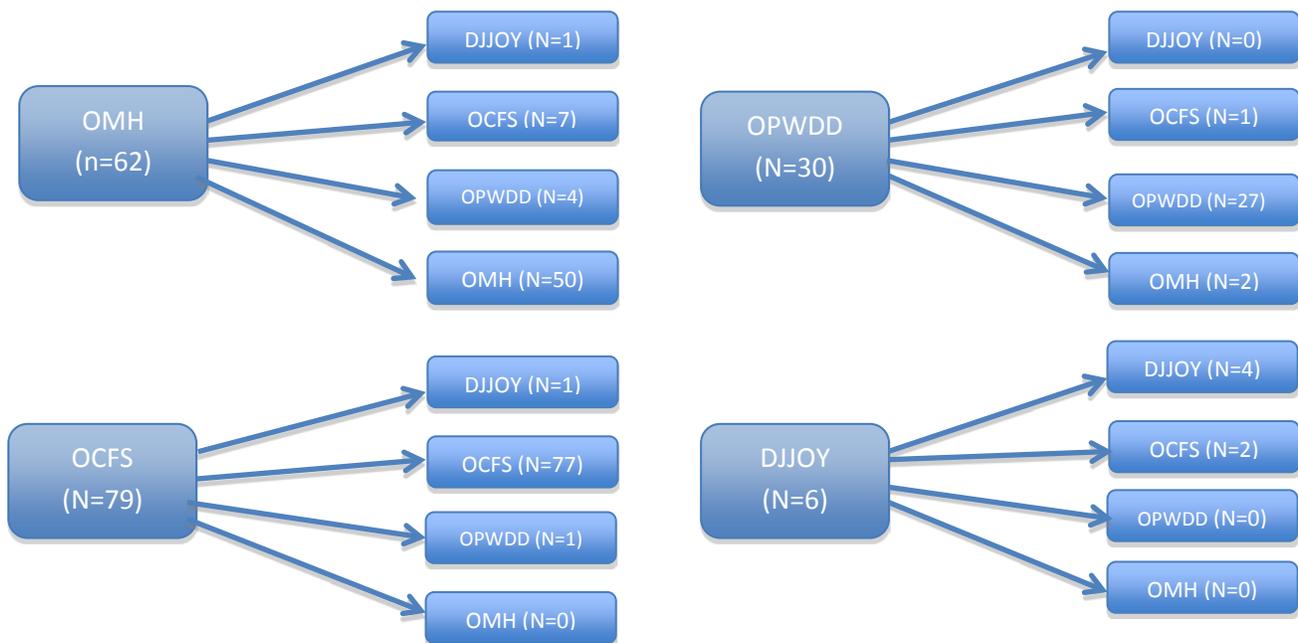


Table 5 displays categorical variables used to summarize the children’s level of disability in four functional domains: medical, educational, mental, and developmental. As a way to establish inter-rater reliability, staff members were provided with the same definitions OCFS provides to caseworkers for use in the Adoption albums (see Appendix 5). Table 5 shows that the youth in the PFEC project were likely to present with a variety of disabilities in more than one functional area. Overall, both groups presented with similar levels and types of disability. Mental disabilities were more prevalent than other types. Seventy six percent of the intervention group and 81% of the control group reported either moderate or severe disabilities of this type. Medical disabilities were less frequent but still rather prevalent with 25% of the intervention group and 30% of the control group reporting moderate or severe medical disabilities.

Table 5: Disability Level for all Youth

	Count		Percent	
	Intervention	Control	Intervention	Control
Level of Medical Disability				
None	27	30	31%	34%
Mild	28	28	32%	31%
Moderate	13	17	15%	19%
Severe	9	10	10%	11%
Unable to Determine	11	4	12%	5%
Total	88	89	100%	100%
Level of Educational Disability				
None	4	13	5%	15%
Mild	18	20	20%	22%
Moderate	30	27	34%	30%
Severe	29	24	33%	27%
Unable to Determine	7	5	8%	6%
Total	88	89	100%	100%
Level of Mental Disability				
None	0	2	0%	2%
Mild	13	13	15%	15%
Moderate	27	34	31%	38%
Severe	40	38	45%	43%
Unable to Determine	8	2	9%	2%
Total	88	89	100%	100%
Level of Developmental Disability				
None	12	18	14%	20%
Mild	28	23	32%	26%
Moderate	23	22	26%	25%
Severe	18	21	20%	23%
Unable to Determine	7	5	8%	6%
Total	88	89	100%	100%

PFEC Outputs: Recruitment, Engagement, and Casework Activities

As outlined earlier, the PFEC intervention included the recruitment of families as well as casework with PFEC youth and the recruited families. This section looks at the extent to which these activities were conducted on behalf of families and youth in the intervention and control groups.

Recruitment Efforts

Permanency specialists had a fair amount of latitude in the way they approached the work of recruiting foster families for the PFEC youth assigned to their caseloads. One recruitment approach stood out from the others in terms of its emphasis as a strategy for use by permanency specialists, a technique referred to as family search and engagement. Family search and engagement is a model that focuses on identifying and locating kin and non-kin adults who could potentially serve as resources for youth in care.

Each permanency specialist was trained in a particular model called *The Six Steps to Find a Family: A Practice Guide to Family Search and Engagement*. In addition to that training, the Project Director and two permanency specialists received certification in *Family Finding*, another model for locating family members on behalf of youth in care.¹⁵ The logic model indicated that family search and engagement would be undertaken on behalf of all youth in the intervention group. In addition to this method, the permanency specialists organized general recruitment events, such as bowling nights and agency picnics. As well, there were targeted efforts such as the creation of videos featuring the youth and posting of profiles of youth on adoption-focused websites.

Over the course of the PFEC project 122 families made at least an initial indication of their interest in working with PFEC as a potential permanent resource for a youth in care. Table 6 (below) shows the recruitment strategy that brought these families to the attention of the PFEC staff. As some families were already connected to a PFEC youth prior to start of the project, these families were not technically recruited, but they were enrolled as PFEC families and had their progress tracked. They are included on this table as well.

¹⁵ The distinction between Family Finding and Family Search and Engagement and explanations of each are provided in Part II of this report in the section on Training Requirements.

PFEC families were most frequently recruited through either the Adoption Chronicles videos (20 percent) or through the use of family search and engagement techniques (18 percent). Twenty families (16 percent) were connected to a PFEC youth prior to the initiation of the project. Internet photo listings, general recruitment events and targeted recruitment methods yielded 13 percent, 14 percent and 12 percent of recruited families, respectively.¹⁶

Table 6: Family Level Enrollment Method

	Count	Percent
Adoption Chronicles	25	20%
Family Search and Engagement	22	18%
Connected to youth prior to PFEC	20	16%
General Recruitment (i.e., community events, gallery exhibits)	17	14%
Internet Photo Listing	16	13%
Targeted / Parent Specific Recruitment (i.e., Meet and Greet)	15	12%
Unknown	3	3%
Youth Panel	2	2%
Adoption Exchange	2	2%
Total	122	100%

¹⁶ The total number of families who had exposure to PFEC via these recruitment methods was not collected. That information would be needed in order to fully determine the efficacy of a given method at recruiting families for this population of youth.

In addition to tracking information around how each family was enrolled in PFEC, the three participating agencies maintained information about the public awareness and parent specific events they held throughout the course of the project. These types of events, along with the number of attendees and the number who ultimately signed up with PFEC, are displayed in Tables 7 and 8.

There were a total of 125 PFEC related event types held over the course of the project. Overall, there were more parent-specific events (n=78), such as Meet and Greet, than there were public awareness type events (n=47) such as conference presentations.

Table 7: Program Event Target Area and Type, by Agency¹⁷

	Hillside (Western District)	Parsons (Capital District)	You Gotta Believe! (New York City)
Type of Events Held			
Parent-Specific Recruitment Event	15	25	38
Public Awareness Event	12	23	12
Total	27	48	50

As Table 8 shows, the combined reach of these events was quite expansive, with over 25,000 people attending the different events.¹⁸ The rate of families signing up as PFEC families at the events was low; only 46 families officially registered at one of these events to become a PFEC permanency resource.

Table 8: Agency Recruitment Events, by Type

	Parent-Specific Recruitment Events	Public Awareness Events
Total Number in Attendance	7,415	18,642
Number of Families Enrolled at event as PFEC Families	41	5

As Table 8 indicates, in addition to the recruitment work undertaken by the PFEC permanency specialists, efforts were made to increase public awareness about the needs of PFEC target youth through a general media campaign. The campaign included broadcasting radio advertisements, Internet based ads, and the launching of “A Parent for Every Child” website. The purpose of these efforts was twofold: to dispel misconceptions about the adoption of youth with special needs and to increase the pool of eligible families for this particular population of youth. The reach of these media campaigns was tracked by the PFEC Project Director and reported to the evaluator at the end of the project period. According to the Project Director, there was a radio advertisement that aired over eight hundred times, with a projected reach of 750,000 listeners. The Internet-based

¹⁷ For the most part, agencies held recruitment events in their geographic area. Twenty events were held for which the target area was not indicated (18 YGB; 1 Hillside and 1 Parsons).

¹⁸ This figure includes all individuals in attendance at event regardless of whether they are a potential adoptive resource or not. Conferences, walks and similar events may have included professional staff, current foster and adoptive parents as well as foster youth themselves.

advertisements were viewed over five thousand times; the PFEC website was visited over sixteen thousand times (this figure includes repeat visitors).

One expectation of PFEC was that permanency specialists assigned to PFEC youth would actively engage the youth themselves in the recruitment of families. The hypothesis was that as a result of PFEC youth's increased participation in recruitment activities, additional families would be recruited. These families would connect with the featured PFEC youth and these relationships may develop into permanent arrangements. Table 9 shows the participation of each youth in recruitment activities, by group assignment.

The most commonly utilized recruitment activity of this sort was Internet photo listings; in NYS, most children with a goal of adoption are required to be photo-listed. This category includes posting information about a specific youth on agency websites as well as state or city-sponsored resources such as NYC's Heart Gallery or the Adopt US Kids website. Both the intervention and control groups used Internet photo listings as a recruitment approach for more than a third of the youth in the study sample; most of these existing venues are not available to youth who do not have a goal of adoption.

Targeted recruitment efforts are activities that are directed at individuals with experience with youth with special needs. For example, workers may reach out to former foster parents or physical therapists who worked with youth with special needs in the past. This type of recruitment work was more commonly done on behalf of youth in the intervention group when compared to the control group (31% vs. 10%).

Adoption Chronicles are videos which feature the youth talking about their likes, dislikes and interests, among other things. The videos are then posted on a website or made available to interested parties in DVD format. Adoption Chronicles videos were frequently used by permanency specialists on behalf of intervention youth, but rarely was this activity undertaken for youth in the control group (29% vs. 2%).

Table 9: Participation in Recruitment Activities, by Group Assignment ¹⁹

	Count		Percent	
	Intervention	Control	Intervention	Control
Internet Photo Listing	32	31	36%	35%
Family Search and Engagement	29	27	33%	30%
Record Mining ²⁰	39	-----	44%	-----
Targeted Recruitment	28	9	31%	10%
Adoption Chronicles	26	2	29%	2%
General Recruitment	25	14	28%	16%
Adoption Panels / Permanency Panels	16	23	18%	26%
Media Resources	9	4	10%	4%
Adoption Exchange	6	5	7%	6%
Family Finding	9	2	10%	2%

¹⁹ This table details whether or not a child participated in the recruitment activity at least once; repeat participation is not counted.

²⁰ Reviewing the case record for family members and/or other potential resources was a preliminary step in family search efforts. The extent to which this work was done on behalf of youth in the control group was not asked, and as such, is unknown.

Table 10 details the extent of family search activities undertaken on behalf of PFEC youth and the preliminary outcomes of those efforts. Family search and engagement activities were documented for 29 youth in the intervention group. Thirteen of these youth became matched to a family member located through these efforts; seven went on to establish either legal or relational permanency with that identified family member (two adoptions and five permanency pacts).

Table 10: Family Search and Engagement (FSE) Activities

	Count	Percent
Of all intervention youth (n=88), how many had FSE efforts done on their behalf?	29	33%
Of all intervention youth for whom FSE efforts were undertaken (n=29), how many became matched to someone via those efforts?	13	45%
Of the youth who became matched via FSE (n=13), what were the permanency outcomes for those youth? ²¹		
Legal permanency (youth exited care with permanency achieved)	2	15%
Alternative permanent arrangement (signed permanency pact or commitment contract)	5	38%
No permanency arrangement in place; youth still in care	4	32%
Youth exited care with no permanency achieved	2	15%
Total	13	100%

Engagement and Casework

Once families are recruited, there was additional work that took place in order to facilitate the development of a relationship between the PFEC-participating youth and the recruited family. Permanency specialists interacted with youth and families as they explored the possibility of permanency. The following section details this aspect of the intervention: 1) the ongoing casework with youth and 2) the engagement and casework with families.

Child-Level Casework

As part of the enrollment of all youth in the database, permanency specialists (or the assigned caseworker for the control group) were asked to consider how receptive each youth was to the idea of being adopted or establishing a permanent relationship with a caring adult.²² The youth's attitudes were tracked over time to see if there were any changes; one hypothesis of the study was that the PFEC permanency specialists would influence youth in terms of their receptivity to adoption or permanency.

Table 11 displays information related to the receptiveness of all youth in the sample from the time of their enrollment in the study until the end of the project period. PFEC permanency specialists gauged youth's receptivity directly, based on their interactions with the youth. Workers were asked to rate the receptivity of each youth on a simple three-point scale: willing, refuses, or

²¹ These data are censored. This means that youth may go on to achieve permanency at some point in the future as a result of particular efforts and one will not know that information. This table displays outcomes as of the end of data collection, April 15, 2013, and since outcomes beyond that point are unknown, the data are considered to be censored.

²² The question asked was 'What is this child's receptiveness to adoption or permanency?'

indifferent. The control group was followed up annually on this metric; receptivity data for PFEC-assigned youth was updated on an ongoing basis.

At the start of the study, both groups had an almost equal number of youth willing to be adopted (36 control vs. 35 intervention youth). The control group had more children refusing to be adopted (26 vs. 10); more children in the intervention group were categorized as unable to determine (38 vs. 18).

Four of the 10 PFEC-assigned youth who initially refused to be adopted changed their perspectives and were willing to be adopted by the end of the project. In comparison, none of the 26 youth from the control group who refused to be adopted at the time of their enrollment shifted their attitudes and ended the project willing to be adopted. The control group had a lot of movement in the other direction – 16 of 36 (44%) control youth whose initial assessments indicated openness to adoption were refusing adopted at the end of the project. . In the intervention group, this rate was much lower; only four of the 35 PFEC youth (11%) who were willing to be adopted at project start moved into the refusal category.

Table 11: Receptivity at Project End, by Group and Starting Receptivity

		Attitudes at Project End				
Willing at Start						
		Total Willing at Start	Willing at End	Refuses at End	Indifferent at End	UAD at End
Intervention		35	29	4	2	0
Control		36	14	16	2	4
Refuses at Start						
		Total Refusing at Start	Willing at End	Refuses at End	Indifferent at End	UAD at End
Intervention		10	4	6	0	0
Control		26	0	25	0	1
Indifferent at Start						
		Total Indifferent at Start	Willing at End	Refuses at End	Indifferent at End	UAD at End
Intervention		5	0	1	4	0
Control		9	1	6	1	1
Unable to Determine at Start						
		Total UAD at Start	Willing at End	Refuses at End	Indifferent at End	UAD at End
Intervention		38	10	6	4	18
Control		18	1	6	0	11

Family-Level Casework

In addition to direct casework with the PFEC youth, permanency specialists provided services to the families recruited through PFEC activities. The permanency specialists assisted families who wanted to become certified foster parents with the licensing process. If a family became matched to a PFEC-assigned youth, the PFEC permanency specialist offered or referred families to trainings around the specialized needs of the youth. For those families not currently interested in pursuing a

permanent relationship with any PFEC youth, the permanency specialists continued working to make a connection for them with other youth known to the agency or with PFEC youth entering in later cohorts. If a family was not interested in serving as a resource at all, they would exit from PFEC and work with them would discontinue.

An analysis of the general characteristics of all PFEC recruited families shows that 60 percent of recruited families were already licensed foster or adoptive parents when recruited to PFEC; 25 percent of all recruited families had adopted youth before.

Table 12 shows the degree to which PFEC-recruited families advanced through the foster home licensing process. Overall, this table shows that most families had completed some number of the required steps in the foster home certification process at the time of their enrollment in PFEC. There were 90 families with a completed home study at the time of their enrollment. By the end of the project, six families out of the 32 who were not already licensed became fully licensed foster carers.²³

Table 12: Activities Associated with Licensing Foster Parents

	Count	Percent
Background Check Complete		
Prior to PFEC	74	60%
While in PFEC	7	6%
Not Completed by Project End	41	34%
Total	122	100%
SCR Check Complete		
Prior to PFEC	74	60%
While in PFEC	5	4%
Not Completed by Project End	43	36%
Total	122	100%
MAPP Training Complete		
Prior to PFEC	73	60%
While in PFEC	12	10%
Not Completed by Project End	37	30%
Total	122	100%
Approved Home Study		
Prior to PFEC	90	74%
While in PFEC	6	5%
Not Completed by Project End	26	21%
Total	122	100%

²³ A family is considered fully licensed when a home study has been completed.

After being recruited, only 18 of 122 families opted not to move forward with a PFEC-enrolled youth and instead chose to end their involvement with PFEC. The permanency specialists recorded the families' reasons for exiting the project; where possible, the specialists tracked what happened after the families ended their involvement with PFEC. Table 13 shows that most of the families who ended their involvement with PFEC did so for financial reasons or because they felt unable to manage the unique needs of the PFEC youth. None of the families who opted out of the PFEC program went on to establish a permanent relationship with another youth in foster care prior to the end of the PFEC initiative (April 2013). Of those who exited, only two families indicated that they would consider becoming an adoptive parent for a child in the future.

Table 13: Families Leaving PFEC with no Permanent Connection

	Count	Percent
Reason for departure		
Reason not given	5	27%
Unable to manage needs of child	4	22%
Financial	4	22%
Not Interested	3	17%
Ineligible	1	6%
Moved	1	6%
Total	18	100%
Post-PFEC		
Family connected with or established permanency with another child	0	0%
Family would consider becoming an adoptive parent for another child in the future	2	11%

In addition to the specialized casework provided by permanency specialists to youth and families, there were additional support options, such as adoption mentors or adoption navigators, which specialists were encouraged to utilize. An adoption mentor is an experienced adoptive parent who is assigned to the youth and family when they are working through the steps to legal adoption. Their role is to support and guide youth and families as they move through the adoption process. The PFEC database indicates that five intervention youth were assigned adoption mentors. Adoption navigation services were available to help potential adoptive parents work through the system and overcome potential barriers.²⁴ Seventeen families (14%) received adoption navigation services during their time in PFEC.

²⁴ The original model called for independent navigators to be hired who were experienced adoptive parents. After project start, a decision was made to have the permanency specialists, some of whom are indeed experienced adoptive parents themselves, to serve in this capacity for those families in need of this service.

Outcomes

This section examines two types of outcomes. First, the outputs that are associated with the process of establishing a permanent relationship between youth and a caring adult are examined. These intermediate outcomes include the recruitment of families and the matching of families with youth. Second, the final outcome of improving permanency rates for youth, both in terms of permanent exits (adoption or legal guardianship) as well as the broader definition of permanency, which includes the establishment of sustainable relationships with caring adults (permanency pacts, commitment contracts) without necessarily leading to an exit from care, are examined. The program's impact on the time to permanency is also considered.

Intermediate Outcomes

One key goal of PFEC was to recruit a pool of eligible families to serve as permanent resources for youth in the intervention group. Questions answered here include how many families were recruited to PFEC and what happened with those families, particularly with respect to whether they "matched" with a PFEC youth and whether those matches lead to either legal or relational permanency.

Recruiting Families

Researchers have begun to consider the question of whether some recruitment efforts are more or less effective than others. In considering effectiveness, there is the question of how many families a strategy brings forth and, no less importantly, the question of whether or not the individuals recruited through those means go on to establish a permanent relationship with a child in care.

Table 14 compares outcomes for PFEC families based on the method they were recruited through. Families recruited through family search and engagement activities became permanent resources for PFEC youth at a higher rate (36% or 8 of 22) than families recruited through Adoption Chronicles videos (12% or 3 of 25). Families recruited through Internet photo listings matched with youth frequently (94 percent) but none of them established a permanent relationship with a PFEC youth. All 15 families found through targeted recruitment were matched with a child, but none resulted in a permanent relationship with a PFEC youth.

Table 14: Family Recruitment Results

Recruitment Method	Family Outcome				Total
	Matched: No permanency	Matched: Legal permanency	Matched: Alternative permanency	Not matched	
	Count				
Adoption Chronicles	21	1	2	1	25
Family Search	14	2	6	0	22
General Recruitment	11	1	0	5	17
Internet Photo Listing	15	0	0	1	16
Targeted Recruitment	15	0	0	0	15
Other ²⁵	23	4	0	0	27
	Percent				
Adoption Chronicles	84%	4%	8%	4%	100%
Family Search	64%	9%	27%	0%	100%
General Recruitment	65%	6%	0%	29%	100%
Internet Photo Listing	94%	0%	0%	6%	100%
Targeted Recruitment	100%	0%	0%	0%	100%
Other	85%	15%	0%	0%	100%

²⁵ This category includes 20 families connected to a PFEC youth prior to the start of the project; 4 families recruited through an adoption panel; and 3 families recruited through unknown means.

Making Matches

Table 15 displays more detailed information pertaining to the matching of intervention youth with recruited families. It is important to note that there can be more than one match per youth and more than one match per family. A match was made and recorded in the database when a family and youth are interested in pursuing a permanent connection. A match does not necessarily lead to permanency; they may dissolve or may continue. This table shows us information about that first step in the process – the matching of youth and families.

Most recruited families (92 percent) became matched to a PFEC youth at some point during the life of the initiative. Eighty-four percent of all families made just one match throughout their time in PFEC; in some cases, a family matched with multiple youth over the course of the project. Of the 88 youth in the intervention group, 58 percent were matched at least once over the course of the project; 42 percent were never matched with a recruited family.

Table 15: Child and Family Matches

	Count	Percent
Number of youth in intervention group	88	100%
Unique youth ever matched	51	58%
Number of families recruited as potential resource parents	122	100%
Unique families ever matched	112	92%
Total number of matches made since project onset	125	100%
For each family recruited, what is the number of unique matches?		
0 matches	10	8%
1 match	102	84%
2 matches	7	6%
3 matches	3	2%
Total	122	100%
For all intervention youth, what is the number of unique matches?		
0 matches	37	42%
1 match	30	35%
2 matches	11	12%
3 matches	3	3%
4 matches	0	0%
5 matches	0	0%
Six or more matches	7	8%
Total	88	100%

The table below (Table 16) shows the methods that resulted in matches and the outcomes for each of those matches. As Table 15 shows, there were a total of 125 matches made throughout the course of the PFEC project period, inclusive of 51 youth and 112 families (since children and families could match multiple times, or not at all, over the course of the project).

The first row of Table 16 shows that there were a total of 33 matches made as a result of Adoption Chronicles videos. Of those 33 matches, five ended with a permanent arrangement in place (one adoption and four permanency pacts). Family search activities resulted in a total of 22 matches; nine of these (41%) resulted in some form of permanency. Internet photo listings resulted in twelve matches; 75% of them dissolved and one ended in legal permanency.

Table 16: Permanency Results for Matches²⁶

Match Method	Match Outcome at Project End				Total
	Final Legal Permanency	Alternative Permanency	Match Active	Match Dissolved	
	Count				
Adoption Chronicles	1	4	0	28	33
Family Search	2	7	3	10	22
Family and youth connected prior to PFEC	2	1	5	11	19
Targeted Recruitment	0	2	9	3	14
Internet Photo Listing	1	0	2	9	12
	Percent				
Adoption Chronicles	3%	12%	0%	85%	100%
Family Search	9%	32%	14%	45%	100%
Family and youth connected prior to PFEC	11%	5%	26%	58%	100%
Targeted Recruitment	0%	14%	64%	21%	100%
Internet Photo Listing	8%	0%	17%	75%	100%

Final Outcomes

²⁶ This table shows a total of 14 matches with finalized alternative permanency arrangements. The number of intervention youth with finalized alternative permanency arrangements is actually 11 as indicated in Table 16. Two youth finalized permanency pacts with more than one family.

Table 17 displays the final status for each youth in the sample at the end of the PFEC project period (April 2013). A total of eighteen youth in the intervention group achieved some form of permanency with a family (six adoptions, one legal guardianship, and eleven youth with a signed permanency pact or commitment contract). In the control group, five youth achieved legal permanency during that same time period; no children in the control group finalized an alternative permanency arrangement.

At the end of the project, seven youth in the intervention group had a permanency arrangement in progress; five adoptions, one legal guardianship, and one permanency pact were pending. A total of one youth in the control group had an arrangement in progress, a legal guardianship.²⁷

Table 17: Study Status at Project End, by Group

	Count		Percent	
	Intervention	Control	Intervention	Control
Finalized Adoption	6	3	7%	3%
Finalized Legal Guardianship	1	2	1%	2%
Finalized Alternative Permanency	11	0	13%	0%
Youth in care: adoption pending	5	0	6%	0%
Youth in care: legal guardianship pending	1	1	1%	1%
Youth in care: alternative permanency pending	1	0	1%	0%
Youth in care: no permanency arrangement is pending	38	53	43%	60%
Exit: Youth left the study with no permanency arrangement in place ²⁸	25	30	28%	34%
Total	88	89	100%	100%

Data were analyzed to understand the extent of the association, if any, between custodial systems at project start and permanency outcome. There were a total of 23 youth who achieved any level of permanency under PFEC. Eleven of these youth had been in an OMH licensed facility at the beginning of the project; three had been in an OPWDD facility; eight resided in an OCFS licensed

²⁷ Permanency specialists noted in the database when a permanency arrangement was ‘pending’ or in progress. Legal permanency is in progress if one of the following has occurred: Intent to adopt contract signed, Adoption Placement Agreement signed or youth has been placed in the pre-adoptive home. Alternative permanency is in progress if both parties have agreed to pursue this agreement and steps to facilitate the signing of that agreement have been taken.

²⁸ Youth in this group ended their involvement with PFEC – either through an exit from foster care or through refusal to participate in services offered by PFEC. As of the date of their exit from the study, no permanency arrangement, either legal or alternative, had been established. Some youth exited foster care by entering into adult residential care.

congregate care facility and one youth was living in a DJJOY facility at the start of the project. With regard to the likelihood of achieving permanency, the effect of system type at the start of the project was found to be non-significant; age category was also examined and found to be non-significant. While there were youth with both severe and mild or moderate disability levels who achieved permanency, the differences between the two groups were non-significant.

As shown in Table 18, cohort assignment did have a significant effect on whether or not youth in the intervention group achieved permanency. The parameter estimate for assignment to Cohort 1 (when compared to assignment to Cohort 2) is -1.6, which tells us that the log-odds of achieving any permanency decreased (because the estimate is negative) by 1.6 units for those in Cohort 2. The log-odds of achieving permanency continued to decrease for each subsequent cohort. Put simply, youth in the intervention group of Cohort 2 were 1.6 times less likely than youth in Cohort 1 to achieve permanency; youth in Cohort 3 were 1.8 times less likely than youth in Cohort 1 to achieve permanency; and youth in Cohort 4 were 3.3 times less likely than youth in Cohort 1 to achieve permanency. These results were all significant.

Table 18: Results of Logistic Regression on the Effects of Cohort Assignment on Any Permanency

	Estimate (Log Odds)	P- value ²⁹	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Limits
Cohort 1 compared to Cohort 2	-1.6	*	.212	.06, .72
Cohort 1 compared to Cohort 3	-1.8	**	.169	.05, .57
Cohort 1 compared to Cohort 4	-3.3	**	.038	.005, .305

A chi-square test of independence was also performed to determine if group assignment (intervention or control) was related to the likelihood of a youth achieving permanency (inclusive of alternative permanency arrangements). The difference between the two groups was found to be statistically significant, $X^2(1, n = 177) = 8.62, p < .005$. These results indicate that there is a relationship between group assignment and likelihood of achieving any type of permanency. However, the differences between the two groups on finalized legal permanency exclusively (adoption or legal guardianship) are not statistically significant. That is, youth enrolled in PFEC were not more likely to have an adoption or legal guardianship finalized than youth in the control group.

²⁹ * Less than .05

** Less than .005

Table 19 (below) looks more closely at the effect of group assignment on achieving the outcome of permanency (both the PFEC expanded definition and legal permanency). Logistic regression was used to determine whether, and to what extent, assignment to the intervention group influenced the likelihood of achieving either type of permanency. The first row of Table 19 looks at any level of permanency. The parameter estimate for assignment to intervention group is 1.46, which tells us that the log-odds of achieving any permanency increases (because the estimate is positive) by 1.46 units for those in the intervention group when compared to those who were not in the intervention group. This result is significant (Wald chi-square (1, n=177) = 7.60, p<.01). The odds ratio of 4.3 tells us that the odds of achieving permanency are 4.3 times higher for someone assigned to the intervention group than for someone who is not. The difference between the two groups is not statistically significant for finalized legal permanency.

Table 19: Results of Logistic Regression on the Effects of Group Assignment on Permanency

	Estimate (Log Odds)	P-value	Odds Ratio	95% Confidence Limits
Effect of Assignment to Intervention Group on Achieving Any Form of Permanency	1.46	<.01	4.3	1.5, 12.2
Effect of Assignment to Intervention Group on Achieving Legal Permanency	.37	NS	1.5	.4, 4.8

In addition to the primary objectives of recruiting families and making matches for PFEC youth, PFEC also set out to impact the time it would take for permanency specialists to identify potential resources and connect PFEC youth with those resources. The thinking was that targeted efforts would result in not just higher rates of permanency, but that time to permanency would be shorter for the intervention group.

Table 20 looks at the youth who came into PFEC without a connection already in place (n=44) and notes how long it took for them to become matched to a family. Fifty-seven percent of the youth who entered the program without any connection to an adult became matched to a family in the first six months of their time in the project. Twenty-three percent (n=10) took more than a year to make a match. Since information pertaining to matches was not collected for the control group, there is no basis for comparison in this regard.

Table 20: Duration, in months, to matching with a family for those not connected at start of PFEC³⁰

Cohort	Time to first match					
	Less than 3 Months	4 – 6 Months	7 – 9 Months	10 – 12 Months	13 – 18 Months	More than 18 Months
One	2	8	4	4	3	5
Two	2	2	0	1	1	0
Three	3	1	0	0	0	1
Four	5	2	0	0	0	
Total	12	13	4	5	4	6

³⁰ Grayed out cells are censored. Youth in the fourth cohort were exposed for a total of 18 months and what happened beyond the 18 month mark is unknown for this group.

Table 21 looks at the time it took for youth to achieve permanency, inclusive of all forms (adoption, legal guardianship, permanency pact, commitment contract). Most permanency arrangements were finalized within eighteen months of enrollment in PFEC. The intervention group was able to complete permanency arrangements for nine youth within the first year of their entrance into PFEC. The control group had five finalized permanency arrangements; four of these took more than a year from the start of PFEC in order to complete.^{31,32} Table 22 looks at the time to legal permanency. The intervention group finalized six out of seven adoptions or legal guardianships in the first 18 months of the youth's enrollment in PFEC. The control group finalized three out of five in that same time period.

Table 21: Time to Any Permanency, By Group Assignment

	Intervention	Control
Less than 6 Months	6	1
6 – 12 Months	3	0
13 – 18 Months	4	2
19 – 24 Months	3	2
More than 24 Months	2	0
Total	18	5

Table 22: Time to Legal Permanency, By Group Assignment

	Intervention	Control
Less than 6 Months	2	1
6 – 12 Months	2	0
13 – 18 Months	2	2
19 – 24 Months	0	2
More than 24 Months	1	0
Total	7	5

³¹ Of the 23 youth who finalized permanency, two started the project with the arrangement pending. One was in the intervention group and one was in the control group.

³² It is important to note that youth entered the project over the course of a two-year period in four different cohorts. The first cohort of PFEC-assigned youth was exposed to the intervention for the longest period of time - three and a half years. The second and third cohorts were exposed for two and a half years and two years, respectively. The final cohort entered the study in October of 2011 and was exposed for just one and a half years.

Discussion

Broadly speaking, the PFEC program tested the hypothesis that when diligent recruitment efforts are undertaken and enhanced casework is done on behalf of the most challenging cases, resources can be located and permanency arrangements can be achieved. The findings here seem to support that hypothesis. More permanent arrangements (inclusive of permanency pacts and commitment contracts) were put in place for the intervention group than for the control group. However, there was no significant difference between the PFEC group and the control group in terms of achieving legal permanency.

There are some limitations to this study worth noting. First, the small sample size (n=177) makes it difficult to generalize these findings to the broader population of children with special needs in care. The selection criteria for inclusion in the sample were very specific; this too limits the generalizability of our findings. Another study limitation was the broad latitude that PFEC permanency specialists had in how they applied the intervention. There was variability in the outcomes achieved between the five permanency specialists and this may be attributed to varying levels of casework skills, education, professional child welfare or clinical experience, or other factors.

Some important questions have been raised from our analysis. While PFEC accepted an expanded definition of permanency to include permanency pacts and commitment contracts, we do not know the extent to which caseworkers serving the control group were working towards these goals in the same way that the PFEC specialists did. Our research turned up toolkits available from national organizations and child welfare websites that encourage the use of permanency pacts (i.e., National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections, The Foster Club, Children Need Families). The use of these types of non-legally binding arrangements is currently being discussed widely in the field of child welfare. In New York State, the Youth in Progress group promotes the use of permanency pacts for older youth who are preparing to permanently exit care with a goal of another planned living arrangement. According to OCFS, permanency pacts are considered to be a meaningful part of transition planning for these older youth. Based on the fact that no control group children entered into a permanency pact during this study, it appears that this option may not have been “on the radar” for caseworkers assigned to the youth in the control group.

Another question that could use exploration is around the impact of various types of permanency arrangements on the long-term well-being of this population of youth. The disability level of some of the youth in this study points to their need, ultimately, for adult residential care. This was a factor in the decision-making around when to focus on relational permanence over legal permanency. Determining whether, and to what extent, various permanency arrangements, including alternative arrangements, impact the well-being of youth with special needs is an area that could use further examination.

One concern of the PFEC project team was the impact the staggered entry of the four cohorts would have on rates of permanency for the group as a whole, with later cohorts at a disadvantage given the relatively shorter time they would have to establish permanent relationships. While the logic is intuitive the results do not support this theory. Although there was a higher rate of permanency and an increased likelihood of achieving permanency among members of the first cohort of the intervention group (14 out of 18 finalized permanency arrangements for the intervention group were members of Cohort 1), it does not appear that this was a result of exposure time alone. Most matches were made in the first year of enrollment in PFEC; for the youth enrolled in the PFEC program, permanency arrangements were typically finalized in the first 18 months.

Overall, the findings here indicate that recruitment work on behalf of some of foster care’s most challenging cases can be effective in bringing forward caring adults interested in establishing long-

term relationships with youth with special needs. This is a promising finding. Yet there is no denying that stereotypes related to adopting older youth with special needs exist among professionals in the field today. One study by Avery (2000) found that caseworkers were highly skeptical about the adoptability of the hardest to place youth in their care. In that study, researchers found that there were indeed reduced recruitment efforts undertaken on behalf of these youth. This finding is consistent with the results of the PFEC project. There were lower levels of recruitment activity on behalf of the control group than for the intervention group. Overall, the findings here suggest that there may be valid reason to push back on (mis)perceptions that there are few families willing to make commitments to freed youth with high or specialized care needs.

PART II: PFEC IMPLEMENTATION STUDY

Introduction

Section I of this report provides a detailed description of the PFEC outcome study, including the target population for the initiative; the computerized data management system that housed information about project activities children enrolled in the study; the design of the evaluation for assessing the impact of PFEC; and an analysis of the extent to which the PFEC program achieved its stated goals. Section II focuses on *how* the PFEC program staff and leadership implemented the program model to achieve program goals. In addition to learning about the permanency outcomes for the children, it is important to understand the PFEC program implementation process. OCFS asked Chapin Hall to conduct a process study.

The purpose of the process study is two-fold. First, information about the implementation of the initiative provides important context to the outcome data presented in Section I. Second, understanding the implementation experience is a vital part of the overall learning process, particularly for program planners and others in the field who might be interested in replicating elements of the PFEC program.

The process study relied on two types of information sources:

- Written documents provided by OCFS that relate to the planning and/or implementation of PFEC. This included progress reports, work plans, written correspondence, presentation slides, and public awareness materials (i.e., advertisements and brochures).
- Structured interviews with individuals who were either directly or peripherally involved with the PFEC project. A total of 19 interviews were completed between June and August of 2013. Interviews were conducted with ten members of the PFEC team (i.e., permanency specialists, supervisors and senior leaders); nine interviews were conducted with individuals involved with the project but who were external to the core PFEC team (i.e., county, agency and OCFS staff).³³

The implementation study results are organized into three sections:

1. The First Year: Planning and Key Decisions
2. Major Themes
 - A. Orientation of stakeholders to the initiative
 - B. Preparation and skills of the permanency specialists
 - C. Barriers to permanency encountered by the PFEC permanency specialists
3. Conclusion: How the major themes relate to the lessons learned over the course of the project.

³³ In total, Chapin Hall attempted to interview 28 people: 12 PFEC team members and 16 outside stakeholders. Nine people did not respond to our outreach or declined to be interviewed.

The First Year: Planning and Key Decisions

The PFEC project was organized around one major goal: *to establish permanency, legal or relational, for youth enrolled in the PFEC program.*³⁴ The project team focused on two main activities in order to achieve this primary goal:

- 1) To identify the specific barriers to permanency for youth freed for adoption and living in some form of residential care due to physical, mental, emotional, and/or behavioral disability. The intention was to gain a more nuanced understanding of this population of youth: what their needs are, what historically has prevented these youth from establishing a permanent relationship with a caring adult, and how to best overcome these challenges.
- 2) To experiment with a variety of permanency models and tools to determine the most effective methods for the cross-system target population with special needs.

Relational Permanence

A major decision made during the project planning phase was the decision to accept relational permanence as a successful outcome for PFEC youth. There was consensus among project leaders that adoption and legal guardianship may not be an achievable permanency option for all youth in care, particularly for youth with complex needs living in residential treatment facilities.³⁵ For example, adoptive families may have a very difficult time accessing and/or affording needed services for youth, whose previous IV-E status allowed for services to be covered through Medicaid. It was the position of PFEC leaders that even if legal permanency is not achievable due to particular circumstances, it is in the best interests of *all* youth to develop lifelong connections to caring adults; that is, to establish *relational permanence*. When appropriate, PFEC staff would work to formalize relational permanence through a “permanency pact”, a non-legally binding contract that the youth and adult would enter into detailing their lifetime commitment to one another (see Appendix 1 for an example of a permanency pact).

Multiple Service Systems

During the planning year (and subsequent years), PFEC’s leadership was concerned about the challenges the PFEC field staff would face due to the multiple service systems and public and private agencies within each system that would be involved with the children in the target population. In New York State, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) provides oversight for the child welfare system; local districts (cities, counties, or tribes), using varying levels of privatization for case planning, case management, and service delivery, are responsible for the administration of social services within their jurisdictions; and private voluntary agencies operate residential foster care institutions. This means that each youth could be assigned (1) a local caseworker who monitors the case, and (2) a private agency caseworker responsible for day-to-day case management,³⁶ not to mention the staff assigned to the congregate care residence, which could

³⁴ Relational permanence refers to the identification and matching of caring, committed families to youth in need of families. Although not sanctioned by law, like adoption or legal guardianship, relational permanence involves a contract to a life-long connection between a caring adult and the youth.

³⁵ All youth in the PFEC project were in the custody of the commissioner of the local department of social services and had been freed for adoption prior to the onset of the study. The PFEC youth were all living in some form of residential care. The target population criteria as well as the literature surrounding the justification for selection of this particular population of youth are discussed fully in Section I.

³⁶ In NYC, case management responsibility was completely delegated to private provider agencies in 2009. Children’s Services (ACS) no longer assigns a worker to ‘monitor’ each case in the same way that other

be licensed or operated by OCFS, the Office of Mental Health, or the Office for People with Developmental Disabilities. This multi-layered system required PFEC permanency specialists to coordinate with multiple workers and supervisors in order to gain access to a PFEC-enrolled youth and their case record which turned out to be a higher hurdle than was initially expected.

PFEC Caseload

The project plan called for five permanency specialists (3 full-time and 2 part-time) to identify what was preventing each PFEC-enrolled youth from establishing permanency, through intensive case record reviews and ongoing interaction with the youth and their caseworkers. Through diligent recruitment of families and enhanced casework with youth, PFEC staff would help youth establish permanent relationships with committed adults. Although initially, full-time PFEC Specialists were assigned 10 youth, caseload sizes for each worker varied over the course of the project. After subsequent cohorts of youth were selected for the study, each full-time worker maintained a caseload of about 22 PFEC youth and each part-time worker had a caseload of about 12 PFEC youth.³⁷ Workers had additional responsibilities at their respective agencies, such as facilitating groups or providing training, but each permanency specialist only had PFEC-enrolled youth on their caseload.

Major Themes

Three major themes emerged from the interviews that help provide context for understanding the project outcomes.

- 1) **Stakeholder Orientation:** How stakeholders learned about the PFEC initiative and the effectiveness of these efforts in reaching field staff.
- 2) **Staff Preparation and Skills:** How PFEC field staff members were prepared for PFEC, especially in light of what is now known about the actual demands of the permanency specialist role.
- 3) **Barriers to Permanency:** The reality of accessing, engaging with and providing intensive casework to this unique group of children.

This section of the report concludes with a discussion of the most salient findings and considerations for others looking to implement similar cross-systems programs.

Stakeholder Orientation

Youth with disabilities who are in foster care are frequently involved with multiple service systems and agencies (Hill, 2012). In choosing to target this particular population of youth OCFS leaders were aware of some challenges they were likely to confront. PFEC leadership expressed two main concerns about the project model they hoped to address prior to and in the early days of implementation. PFEC leadership's first concern was that a misalignment between PFEC's primary

counties do. ACS maintains their oversight role in other ways, such as through intensive performance management and attending regularly held family team conferences.

³⁷ The project team made the decision early in the project to assign youth in four cohorts over a two-year period. It was expected that caseload attrition would happen naturally, due to permanency success or aging out of foster care, and caseload size would stay about the same as new cases were added. In practice, things did not happen as expected. Assignment of new youth occurred while previously assigned youth were still active. Caseload size increased over time, rather than staying the same as expected.

goal of helping youth achieve permanency, and the goals of other service systems, that may not prioritize the establishment of permanent relationships, would be a large hurdle to overcome.

Their second concern was whether PFEC staff would be accepted as part of the planning team by the casework staff already working with PFEC-enrolled youth (i.e., agency and county workers) since PFEC staff were not associated with the agency responsible for care of the youth. The inclusion of an additional staff member, one focused almost exclusively on recruiting families specifically identified for randomly selected freed youth, is not the typical casework paradigm. The need for strong communication and high levels of cooperation between various workers becomes even more pronounced as this target population tends to move from one placement to another, sometimes between different service systems.

PFEC Orientation Plan

To proactively address these concerns, PFEC leaders designed an orientation plan intended to spread information about the project and build relationships with staff working in different service systems. The PFEC leadership implemented the orientation plan largely as originally designed. The orientation plan included introductory letters, face-to-face meetings in various settings, a cross-systems advisory board, and memorandums of understanding between state agencies.

Introductory Letters: Informational letters were sent to the directors and commissioners of the various systems (i.e., OMH, OPWDD, DJJOY, and local DSS offices) prior to the start of the project. The purpose of the letter was to introduce senior staff to the project with the intention that news about the PFEC project would be shared with field staff assigned to youth who would later be selected for the intervention.

Personal Meetings: Staff members from within the four service systems that housed PFEC-enrolled youth were invited to attend conference presentations and training workshops about PFEC, and to meet one-on-one with PFEC leadership at their respective agencies. The goals of this part of the orientation plan were threefold: to increase awareness of the PFEC project, to inform staff about the specific needs of the PFEC target population, and to foster relationships with individuals who would be involved with the project.

Advisory Board: The PFEC leadership also convened a PFEC Advisory Board, which met semi-annually for the duration of the project. In addition, PFEC staff facilitated two “Cross-Systems Meetings” during the first year. Both the Advisory Board and the Cross-Systems Meetings invited leadership and staff from within each of the four systems to participate in conversations around the best ways to collaborate around helping youth in care (specifically, those enrolled in PFEC) meet their permanency goals.³⁸

According to the PFEC team members, the Advisory Board and the Cross Systems Meetings were effective at moving staff from various systems toward a mutual understanding of the need for all youth in foster care to develop permanent connections to caring adults, regardless of one’s disability level or placement in residential care. At these meetings, senior leaders from different systems indicated they shared the view that there is a need for greater cross-systems collaboration and that permanency should be a focus of planning for all youth residing in residential treatment settings. As a result of these meetings, PFEC leaders concluded that there was increased understanding or acknowledgement of the project from senior staff across all involved systems of care.

³⁸ Chapin Hall did not review attendance data for the Cross-Systems meetings or the conference presentations, training workshops, and one-on-one meetings with PFEC leadership described above.

Memorandums of Understanding: Similarly, the existence of Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) between OCFS and other service systems contributed to the PFEC leadership team's perception that there would be some level of support for the project from staff working in other service systems. These documents state what role each system plays in a shared case and details that permanency planning is required for all youth in foster care.

Indeed, the extent to which all orientation activities had their desired effect (increasing awareness of the PFEC project, informing staff about the specific needs of the PFEC target population, and fostering relationships with individuals who would be involved with the project) would ultimately have a significant impact on the experience of the project by PFEC staff and by agency and county staff. As described below, it appears that the orientation plan, while implemented with fidelity, did not influence the behavior of other service system staff in the hoped-for ways. Agency and county staff were often distrustful of PFEC staff and skeptical of the goals of the project. The next section offers some examples of how this orientation issue played out in practice.

Impact of Orientation Plan on PFEC Practice: Identifying and Overcoming Misconceptions

The orientation plan, although executed as planned, did not have the intended impact of increasing awareness about PFEC, educating staff working for other service systems about the permanency needs of PFEC youth, and building relationships that could serve to smooth out the casework process. Generally speaking, it appears that information about PFEC did not make its way to the caseworkers and supervisors with whom the PFEC permanency specialists would need to collaborate in order to do their work. For example, while a few stakeholders external to the PFEC team recalled having received the informational letter, which they described as very general, they did not distribute the letter to others in their offices or departments.

The absence of detailed information about PFEC on the front lines opened up the opportunity for caseworkers to develop misconceptions about PFEC that often left them reluctant to collaborate with the PFEC permanency specialists. Based on the interviews conducted by Chapin Hall staff, two misconceptions stood out. The first misconception was that participation in PFEC would put youth with special needs at risk of losing desirable lifetime placements. The second misconception was related to the way youth were selected for participation in the PFEC program.

Lifetime Placements: The most pervasive misconception was that the PFEC permanency specialists sought to place youth in family settings, even if the youth required residential placement. The position of PFEC was that youth in need of long-term residential care should remain in those placements. At the same time, the project would work to connect youth to caring adults who could make a lifetime commitment to the youth, be it through adoption, legal guardianship or a permanency pact.

A number of interview respondents stressed the high value placed on lifetime residential placements, noting that the structure and support offered in these settings are ideal for youth facing the types of challenges common among PFEC youth. There was a sense that lifetime placements could be lost if PFEC staff were granted access to particular youth.

Selection of Youth for PFEC Intervention: In addition to concerns over the potential loss of lifetime placements, some stakeholders expressed concern that the project team did not consult with staff at their agency about which youth were to be selected for inclusion. In fact, the PFEC project was a controlled experiment, with participants randomly assigned to either the PFEC program or a control group by the evaluation team. The lack of understanding of this key element of the project design seemed to contribute to the resistance experienced by several PFEC specialists.

To promote more collaborative relationships with the caseworkers and supervisors with responsibility for PFEC-enrolled youth, permanency specialists and other PFEC team members

spent considerable time talking one-on-one with casework staff. In some cases, these efforts bore fruit; caseworkers and supervisors described as initially reluctant to work with a PFEC permanency specialist came to welcome the permanency specialist's services. In other cases, resistance persisted for the duration of the project.³⁹

Staff Preparation and Skills

The PFEC partner agencies hired five permanency specialists with child welfare work experience to work with and on behalf of PFEC enrolled youth. During the initial year of the project, all permanency specialists completed training activities in three areas: parent recruitment training, casework skills training, and database training.

Staff Training for Work with Youth and Families

As each specialist would be expected to mine youth case records for potential permanency resources and locate and engage these individuals, the first training type centered on family recruitment. This training emphasized locating and vetting kin and non-kin resources to serve as permanent resources for PFEC-enrolled youth. There are several different family search and engagement models available in the field; PFEC leaders honed in on two models: Family Finding and The Six Steps to Family Search and Engagement.

Each PFEC specialist attended one day of training in Family Finding, a model developed by Kevin Campbell and his colleagues at Catholic Community Services of Western Washington. The Family Finding model utilizes six overlapping phases of activity to locate and engage family members as permanency resources for youth in foster care. Each specialist also completed one day of training on The Six Steps to Family Search and Engagement training, a model developed at The National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning at the Hunter College School of Social Work. Together, these models provided permanency specialists with methods for identifying, locating, and engaging both kin and non-kin resources in the lives of PFEC-enrolled youth.⁴⁰

Next, PFEC staff attended training on how to move youth toward either legal permanency or a (non-legal) formalized permanent relationship. Specialists attended a one day workshop titled "Adoption Competency," which focused on assessing and preparing youth and families for adoption; decision-making during the adoption process; and placement selection.⁴¹ Additional training based on the Foster Club's permanency pact model was also provided.⁴² This half-day of training focused on identifying situations in which a permanency pact might be explored and how to work toward achieving this goal.

³⁹ There is a perception amongst PFEC team members that in larger counties, where staff turnover is more frequent, relationship building proved a particular challenge.

⁴⁰ In addition to these trainings, specialists attended a workshop on photo listing, a presentation around the completion of genograms and a four-hour workshop in 'Extreme Recruitment' philosophies and tools.

⁴¹ Placement selection refers to strength and needs review of families that determines the family with the most likelihood of providing a successful permanent placement. It is used when multiple families have identified a child they would like to begin the permanency process with.

⁴² The Foster Club, Inc. is a national network for young people in foster care. Foster Club produces websites, publications and events intended to give youth a role in their own experience. <http://www.fosterclub.com/>

Lastly, all PFEC staff was trained in the use of the PFEC database. Permanency specialists were provided with laptops and received ongoing training and support on proper recording of case activities and outcomes.

The training provided was consistent with the training outlined in the original project proposal. The PFEC leadership team and the PFEC permanency specialists felt they had the skills needed to effectively work with youth and families.

Staff Training for Work with Casework Staff

There was an important aspect of the job that the PFEC permanency specialists were not prepared for extensive communications with casework staff about the objectives and perspectives of the PFEC initiative and the role of the PFEC permanency specialist. Communications of this type turned out to be a major aspect of the permanency specialists' work. All of the permanency specialists agreed that the need for ongoing "public relations" work was both high and unexpected.

What project staff often referred to as agency "resistance" to PFEC's efforts may reflect something more nuanced, perhaps best described as an issue of "cultural competence". On the one hand, agency and facility staff members have investments in the youth's case plans and some workers may have had long-term relationships with certain youth. They may have been working with the youth on skills such as developing independent thinking and decision-making skills to help meet the goal of increased well-being. They may have interacted with family members in an effort to build relationships, or helped youth cope with disappointment over failed family relationships or adoption plans. Prior unsatisfactory experiences with family or foster parents may have engendered in these caseworkers a strong inclination to protect the youth against additional disappointments.

On the other hand, the PFEC permanency specialists knew from their own field experiences and the PFEC-specific training that too many youth remain in care without the benefit of a committed relationship with a caring adult. The PFEC permanency specialists knew that without these kinds of relationships, the prospects for older youth aging out of care could be quite dire. The permanency specialists saw their role as doing whatever they could to help youth build up their support systems, in and of itself an important well-being goal.

Although the agency/facility staff and the PFEC permanency specialists' ultimate goal was the same (improving the well-being of the youth), their immediate priorities were not (protecting youth against emotional disappointment and behavioral setbacks versus assisting the youth to allow loving and caring adults in his/her life). Skill building around "culturally-competent" communications, messaging, and relationship-building with other professionals involved in the children's care was not an explicit element of the PFEC training model. To the extent the project offered guidance to permanency specialists in this area it was done in one-on-one supervision with the Project Director. In fact, permanency specialists who were less inclined to invest the time in rapport and relationship building with casework staff often asked the Project Director to negotiate with the local district or agency staff on their behalf.

Permanency specialists who handled this part of the work themselves reported having more success at building relationships with agency staff – and gaining access to youth and their records – than those who declined to do this part of the work. Permanency specialists who intentionally approached agency/facility staff with respectful deference to their role and expertise on the youth's circumstances seemed to make quicker, deeper in-roads than the permanency specialists who did not explicitly focus on developing relationships with casework staff.

Essential Skills Required of Permanency Specialists

In addition to the critical cultural competence and communication skills needed to collaborate with casework staff (described above), PFEC leaders and permanency specialists identified four other essential skills.

Working with older youth: As reported in Section I, there was a high level of resistance among PFEC youth to exploring adoption, guardianship, or other permanent relationships at the beginning of the intervention. In some cases, the specialist and youth spent considerable time working together prior to the youth agreeing to embark on identifying and building a caring relationship with an adult. PFEC leaders reported that the permanency specialists who were the most skilled in working with older youth were the most successful in moving toward and achieving permanency goals.

Recruitment skills: Identifying and encouraging suitable people to consider becoming permanency resources were a major part of the permanency specialists' work. In addition to the family search and engagement work discussed earlier, permanency specialists were expected to conduct a variety of general and targeted recruitment activities. Determining which types of recruitment activities were likely to be most effective for each youth required some skill and expertise. For example, a particularly outgoing youth might fare better at a Heart Gallery opening than a shy and nervous youth would. PFEC leaders agreed that recruitment work is not "one size fits all" and that permanency specialists with higher levels of clinical aptitude were best able to make good choices on behalf of youth.

Cross Systems Awareness: PFEC-enrolled youth lived within four unique service systems. Permanency specialists who were particularly knowledgeable about these systems reported greater success in developing relationships with system staff than the permanency specialists with less knowledge in these areas. Similar to the previous discussion on effective communications with agency/facility staff, the issue here is also about cultural competence: understanding that the primary goals of the mental health system are different, but no less commendable, than the primary goals of the child welfare system – and that there is common ground to be found. As one PFEC leader pointed out, workers within each system are doing what they believe is best for the youth in their care; when workers from different systems come together, it is essential to maintain this perspective and to have respect for the goals of the other.

Computer Skills: In addition to recruitment activities and casework with youth, permanency specialists were expected to submit regular updates to the PFEC database. The PFEC database was a new electronic data management system in which each specialist was trained at the onset of the project and throughout the project's duration. The PFEC database was a way for project leadership to monitor the work being done at sites all across the state as well as being critical to the external outcome evaluation. The database was also available as a case management resource. For example, workers in different regions could share information about recruited families with one another via the database.

Permanency specialists came to the project with widely varying levels of computer skills. According to the permanency specialists and their supervisors, the extent to which data entry consumed the time of each permanency specialist varied to a great degree. Some workers struggled throughout the project and required extensive, ongoing technical assistance.⁴³

⁴³ This impacted the outcomes analysis insofar as figures reported therein were not wholly consistent with what was verbally reported as happening.

Barriers to Permanency

Specialists were asked to record the “barriers to permanency” they experienced for each youth they were assigned over the four years of the project. They were asked to consider what obstacles each PFEC youth had experienced, or was currently experiencing, to being adopted or otherwise establishing permanent connections with caring adults. Through interviews with specialists and a review of the barriers section of the PFEC database, four key issues were repeatedly mentioned as obstacles to permanency for PFEC youth.⁴⁴

Geography: First, project and non-project staff agreed that youth are often placed in facilities that, although well-suited to address their complex needs, may be far away from their families and/or from the provider agency with primary case planning responsibility. Professionals from all four systems (OMH, OPWDD, OCFS, and DJJOY) noted the difficulty of working with families or potential resources not in close proximity to the facility in which the youth resides. In an effort to overcome these issues, the PFEC project used various forms of technology, such as video chats and video messages via Skype to connect youth with potential resources.⁴⁵

Complex Needs of PFEC youth: A second barrier that consistently emerged was the complexity of the challenges associated with this population of youth. Among the PFEC youth were individuals with violent tendencies, youth with sexual aggression, youth who set fires, and youth with suicidal ideation and behaviors. Identifying a family for youth with these behavioral concerns was a real challenge and, according to permanency specialists, one that they could not always overcome. On a number of occasions, mental health professionals advised PFEC staff that a particular youth was too unstable to meet with the specialist or to explore permanency and requested PFEC efforts to cease until further notice.

Resistance to forming new relationships: A third barrier was the level of resistance among the youth themselves to exploring new relationships with adults. This was a barrier anticipated by project leaders; nonetheless, it posed significant challenges for the permanency specialists doing the work. Prolonged stays in foster care, often characterized by multiple placement and relationship disruptions, can engender mistrust and a desire to leave foster care independently, without the involvement of any adults or family. Permanency specialists were trained in helping youth reverse this stance and, as discussed in Section I, there were some successes. However, in some instances youth steadfastly refused to meet with them or to engage at all in discussions around permanency.⁴⁶

Difficulty engaging caseworkers: As discussed above, PFEC staff confronted resistance to their efforts from the primary caseworkers assigned to youth. This resistance appears to have been created through a combination of a lack of information about PFEC goals and methods by casework staff and a lack of anticipation and preparedness for the professional relationship building and communication skills required of the specialists for almost every assigned case. Regardless of the cause, the problem was pervasive, and in some cases, resulted in extreme delays characterized by months of unreturned phone calls, repeatedly meeting cancellations, and unanswered e-mail inquiries.

⁴⁴ PFEC permanency specialists tracked barriers to permanency identified during the course of the project in a sub-section of the database. This information was qualitatively analyzed for this report.

⁴⁵ The extent to which these efforts were or were not successful was not addressed in our interviews.

⁴⁶ In NYS, youth who are 14 years of age or older have the right to refuse adoption services. Once the youth turns 18, he/she can sign out of care and refuse any additional services.

Conclusion

The intention of Chapin Hall's evaluation of PFEC was not to render a thumbs up/thumbs down assessment of whether or not PFEC "worked." Rather, it is part of a broader Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process. In any CQI process, data is used to consider and improve specific aspects of the initiative's implementation. The findings from this study can be used to adapt the model (or its implementation) to better accomplish the initiative's goals.

After five years, there remains a widespread and deep belief among PFEC leadership and staff that permanency is indeed possible for all youth in care. There is also a deeper appreciation and understanding of how difficult it is to achieve this goal. The PFEC project had a goal of achieving permanency for more than half of the PFEC-enrolled youth. Over the course of four years, 21 percent of enrolled youth achieved permanency. While short of the target, achieving permanency for nearly a quarter of randomly assigned youth is no small accomplishment, considering the special needs of the youth and the ongoing obstacles that confronted the project.

As detailed above, there were three challenges that had the greatest impact on the ability of permanency specialists to do their work. First, misperceptions among county, foster care and residential staff about PFEC and its goals contributed to the difficulty permanency specialists experienced when starting work on each case. While the PFEC team made considerable effort to reach senior staff at the agencies and counties, the same level of effort was not directed to orient frontline staff. If given the opportunity to do something like this again, PFEC leaders said they would direct efforts at frontline staff in a more deliberate way.

Second, a key element to success in meeting project goals was relationship building, not only with youth, but also with – perhaps especially with – their casework staff. For some permanency specialists, the appeal of this job was the work they could potentially do with a particularly challenging group of foster *youth*. Although permanency specialists likely understood there would be some amount of collaboration required with youth's assigned caseworkers, they would have benefited from greater preparation (and training) for the degree to which their efforts would be directed at professional staff rather than the youth themselves.

Third, the youth targeted for the PFEC project had very complex problems. In some cases youth were considered so unstable – or were simply AWOL for so long – as to preclude contact with a member of the PFEC team over the course of months, if not years. It is worth stressing that *those youth too fragile to take advantage of what PFEC had to offer are certainly no less deserving of support and permanency*. They may, though, require a different kind of intervention, a different version of PFEC, one that is better able to respond to youth's unique – and oft-times extreme – circumstances.

The idea behind PFEC is a powerful idea and powerful ideas are often difficult to bring to bear, especially when they are trying to respond to complicated social problems. Despite the challenges faced by the PFEC team, there are now more freed youth with permanency resources in place who, without the intervention of PFEC, may have left foster care with no attachments to caring adults. In addition, the work of the permanency specialists helped bring about a better understanding of some of the key challenges to establishing permanency for this particular population of youth. There is a greater sense now than there was before the project started of the strategies professionals might employ in order surmount those obstacles. Future work with this population can capitalize on the learning – and successes – experienced by PFEC to refine their approach to helping the most vulnerable older youth establish permanent caring relationships that will enrich their lives for years to come.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Intervention Group Variable List

The following twenty three variables come from CCRS and were loaded into the PFEC database:

- First name
- Last name
- CIN
- Birth date
- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- IVE status
- Date freed
- Number of siblings
- Siblings in placement
- Agency
- OCFS Regional Office
- LDSS County
- Last FC admission date
- System
- Facility County
- Facility name
- Facility address
- Facility city
- Facility state
- Facility zip
- Permanency goal

For all youth, the following information is recorded:

- Date sampled
- Date entered into PFEC (date name given to project director for assignment)
- Date assigned to specialist (actual date child was assigned to specialists caseload)
- Permanency specialists enter the following information on an ongoing basis for all youth on their caseloads.
- Health Information
- Disability Type and Level (mild/moderate/severe for physical, emotional, educational)
- Permanency Information
- Permanency planning goal / date
- Receptiveness to adoption / date
- Prior adoption disruptions
- Prior adoption dissolutions
- Was there a potential resource parent already connected with this child prior to PFEC involvement?
- Relationship to the child (i.e., relative type or not related)

- Recruitment Activity Participation – For each of the following activities, date of participation is collected (if relevant):
- Bridges to health
- Adoption mentoring
- Family/Other search and engagement
- NYC Heart Gallery
- OCFS Adoption Album
- Agency website
- Adopt Us Kids
- PFEC website
- OCFS Adoption panel
- Youth panel
- Adoption exchange
- Televised outreach
- Gallery exhibits
- Video conference
- Radio outreach
- Community recruitment event
- Family finding program
- Adoption Chronicles
- Parent specific recruitment (targeted recruitment)
- Facebook
- YouTube
- Twitter
- For FSE activity, the following additional information is requested:
- Name of person contacted
- Relationship to child
- Date
- Result
- Outcomes: For each adoption milestone, the corresponding date is noted:
- Intent to adopt contract
- Adoption placement agreement
- Placement in pre-adoptive home
- Finalized adoption
- Legal guardianship
- Commitment Contract/Permanency Pact
- Other Committed Connection

Appendix 2: Control Group Variable List

The first nine variables are taken from CCRS and loaded into the PFEC database on all control group youth. Regional specialists are then asked to confirm the accuracy of this information. In the event of conflicting information, the information from the regional office overwrites the CCRS data in the PFEC database.

- Birth date
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- IV-E status
- Date freed for adoption
- Number of siblings
- Number of siblings in placement
- Permanency Planning Goal
- OCFS Regional Office

The following questions are answered via a hard copy form. These questions are answered at enrollment and then annually for all control group youth.

- System responsible for the physical care of the child
- Placement type
- Date child entered this placement type:
- Child Health
- Level of disability (mild/moderate/severe for physical, educational, mental health and developmental needs.
- Permanency
- Receptiveness to adoption (or another permanency arrangement)
- Was there a potential resource parent involved in the child's life prior to PFEC?
- If there was a potential resource parent involved in the child's life, what was the relationship of that child to the potential resource parent?
- Prior adoption disruptions in this child's care?
- Number
- Year(s)
- Reason(s)
- Prior adoption dissolutions in this child's care?
- Number
- Year(s)
- Reason(s)
- Status of this child's permanency [i.e., Study Status]. ⁴⁷ The options are:
- Adoption pending (pre-adoptive agreement has been signed)
- Adopted (adoption has been finalized)
- Legal guardianship pending (legal guardianship is in the process of being finalized)
- Legal guardianship final (legal guardianship has been finalized)

⁴⁷ If permanency is pending or final, the dates of various milestones are recorded (i.e.: intent to adopt signed, adoption placement agreement signed, placed in pre-adoptive home).

- Commitment Contract / Permanency Pact / Other Committed Connection pending
- Commitment Contract / Permanency Pact / Other Committed Connection final
- Active (Case is active with no pending or final permanency activity)
- Case closed (case has been closed) ⁴⁸

⁴⁸ If case is closed, the reason for case closing is recorded.

Appendix 3: PFEC Family Variable List

- Agency that recruited / entered family into study
- Study status
- Unmatched
- Matched
- Adoption pending
- Adoption final
- Legal guardianship pending
- Legal guardianship final
- CC/PP/OCC pending
- CC/PP/OCC final
- Match dissolution
- Exit⁴⁹
- Date enrolled in PFEC
- How was the parent/family recruited to the PFEC program?⁵⁰
- At the time of recruitment, was parent/family already an approved foster or adoptive parent?
- Have they adopted youth before?
- Number
- Was this family assigned an "Adoption Navigator"?
- Date assigned
- Actions towards certification that parent/family completed⁵¹
- Background Check / date
- MAPP / date
- Home Study / date
- SCR Check / date
- General PFEC Parent Training completed
- Name / description / date

⁴⁹ If a family exits PFEC, follow up questions are asked: has the family connected with or established permanency with another (non-PFEC) child?

⁵⁰ If family was connected to child prior to PFEC, that information is recorded. Prior to PFEC is a recruitment option herein.

⁵¹ If steps are completed prior to PFEC, that information is captured with a 'Prior to PFEC' option.

Appendix 4: Family Study Status Definitions

Unmatched: Family is not matched to any child, but they are willing to establish permanency with a child with special needs similar to those served by PFEC.

Matched: Family is working with a child. They are both interested in establishing permanency.

Adoption pending: Adoption with a PFEC child is in progress.

Adoption final: Adoption with a PFEC child has been finalized.

Legal guardianship pending: Legal guardianship with a PFEC child is pending.

Legal guardianship final: Legal guardianship with a PFEC child has been finalized.

CC/PP/OCC pending: Either a Commitment Contract/Permanency Pact/Other Committed Connection with a PFEC child is pending.

CC/PP/OCC final: Either a Commitment Contract/Permanency Pact/Other Committed Connection with a PFEC child is final.

Match dissolution: Family was matched with a PFEC child, but the match has not worked out. Family is interested in working with another child with special needs similar to those served by PFEC. Note: A family does not have to be interested in a specific child to remain as a PFEC family.

Exit: Family is no longer interested in working with a child with special needs similar to those served by PFEC. The family is exiting from the PFEC study as a potential resource family.

Appendix 5: OCFS Severity Levels and Definitions of Special Needs

Mild

Medical/Physical Needs: Child has a condition(s) which require non-acute medical attention such as: visual or hearing impairments, allergies, asthma, controllable epilepsy or follow-up conditions which have been surgically corrected such as open heart surgery.

Educational/Learning Needs: Child is slightly behind in one or more subjects but attends regular school classes. Child may have some minor learning disabilities.

Mental Health Needs: Child has a diagnosed condition that may mildly impair their ability to function such as an adjustment or attachments disorder. Child is generally emotionally stable but may be facing a situation (disruption, new foster home) that has created a temporary emotional stress and may be addressed. Child has or has had a problem controlling their behavior, usually associated with a specific incident such as a disruption.

Developmental Needs: Child has a mild delay in development and may be receiving speech, occupational or physical therapy.

Moderate

Medical/Physical Needs: Child that has a moderate level of cerebral palsy, cleft defects which have not yet been surgically treated, sickle cell disease if severe complications are not present, partial impairment of normal movement, diabetes, heart defects which can be repaired, spina bifida without the most severe complications.

Educational/Learning Needs: Child is 2 to 3 years behind in subjects and receiving resource room help or other special tutoring aside from being in the regular classroom.

Mental Health Needs: Youth with one of the described conditions requiring on going intervention services and a higher level of supervision and or treatment. Child is experiencing emotionally related problems that may interfere with child's school performance or interaction with others. Child has a history of acting out causing problems in school and in interpersonal relationships.

Developmental Needs: Child needs assistance with skills of daily living. Child is receiving early intervention services for significant lags in speech, fine/gross motor skills.

Severe

Medical/Physical Needs: Youth with Spina Bifida with severe complications, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy with severe retardation and or paralysis, total paralysis, cystic fibrosis, blindness, total deafness, and terminal illnesses.

Educational/Learning Needs: Youth diagnosed as learning disabled or mentally retarded that are in special classroom settings.

Mental Health Needs: Youth who are schizophrenic, autistic and /or who act out destructively such as a fire-setter or a serious suicide risk. Youth that are seriously emotionally disturbed, are in residential treatment, are receiving intensive therapy, or are in emotionally handicapped classroom settings. Youth who exhibit severe acting-out and/or violent behavior. Youth on medication to control their behavior.

Developmental Needs: Youth with severe mental retardation. Youth receiving intensive therapy to obtain skills of daily living, youth needing extensive supervision for daily functioning.

Appendix 6: Glossary of PFEC Database Terms

Permanency Options

Adoption final: Adoption with a PFEC child has been finalized.

Adoption pending: Adoption with a PFEC child is in progress. Date entered would be the date that the Adoption Placement Agreement was signed.

CC/PP/OCC final: Either a Commitment Contract/Permanency Pact/Other Committed Connection with a PFEC child is final.

CC/PP/OCC pending: Either a Commitment Contract/Permanency Pact/Other Committed Connection with a PFEC child is pending.

Legal guardianship final: Legal guardianship with a PFEC child has been finalized.

Legal guardianship pending: Legal guardianship with a PFEC child is pending.

Permanency Pact: Agreements that an adult and child can enter into as a way of certifying their lifelong commitment to each other. While these agreements are non-legally binding, they represent an emotional and moral commitment that the youth and the family make with one another.

Family Specific Study Status Options

Unmatched: Family is not matched to any child, but they are willing to establish permanency with a child with special needs similar to those served by PFEC.

Matched: Family is working with a child. They are both interested in establishing permanency.

Match dissolution (dissolved): Family was matched with a PFEC child, but the match has not worked out. Family is interested in working with another child with special needs similar to those served by PFEC.

Note: A family does not have to be interested in a specific child to remain as a PFEC family.

Exit: Family is no longer interested in working with a child with special needs similar to those served by PFEC. The family is exiting from the PFEC study as a potential family.

Child Specific Study Status Options

Active: Case is open but no permanency is formally in progress.

Case Closed: Child exited the study with no permanency achieved.

Other Definitions

Adoption Disruption: An adoption disruption is when an adoption is not completed after process has begun.

Adoption Dissolution: Adoption dissolution occurs when an adoption is disrupted after it has been finalized.

Adoption Navigator: An adoption navigator is an experienced foster or former foster parent assigned to assist a potential family with navigating through the process of becoming a foster parent and possibly adopting a child

Recruitment Activities

Adoption exchange: Meeting for workers from various regions and geographic locations to come together with photos and background of freed youth in order to present to other workers who may have matches in their location.

Adoption Chronicles: Video of child available on Adoption Chronicles website.

Community recruitment event: Certified parents (or nearly certified) who are ready to adopt and actively looking for youth are given opportunity to see kids and interact in a social setting; families and kids get together in informal social setting (i.e., Meet and Greet, aquarium trip, baseball games, picnics etc.)

Family connected to a child prior to PFEC: If family was visiting with or otherwise involved with a PFEC child prior to enrolling in PFEC.

Family / other search and engagement: The activity undertaken on behalf of a child in order to locate family members (or non-family members) who might be interested in establishing a more permanent connection to the child [for example, reaching out to aunts, uncles, former foster parents, teachers or coaches]. Family Finding is a specialized version of this method with training and certification by Kevin Campbell.

Gallery exhibit: Presentation at a gallery displaying picture, information and background about various youth and their needs

Internet photo listing: When pictures are placed on a website in order to provide information to the public about various youth's needs and availability for adoption. Can include the following:

NYC Heart Gallery: Photo is displayed on NYC Heart Gallery website

Agency / PFEC website: Photo is displayed on agency or PFEC website

Adopt Us Kids: Photo is displayed on Adopt Us Kids website.

OCFS Adoption Album: Photo is displayed on NYS photo listing webpage. All youth are required to be listed on this site within 10 days of being freed.

OCFS Adoption Panel: State / OCFS sponsored forum wherein agency presents youth to a group / panel of trained professionals in order to discuss barriers, needs and opportunities for adoption of those youth

Parent specific recruitment / Targeted Recruitment: Recruitment events where specific groups are targeted (e.g. persons who work with youth who have disabilities).

Social networking: Specialist may utilize Internet based social networking sites such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter or others in order to reach out to potential adoptive parents.

Television / radio outreach: When agency representative goes on television (or radio) to provide information to the public about availability of youth for adoption.

Videoconference: Use of Skype or other video conferencing technology to connect freed youth with interested parents from other locations – can be used for recruitment, introductions and/or relationship development.

Youth panel: Forum where agency presents youth to a group of certified parents (or almost certified) in order to discuss experiences, needs and opportunities for adoption of those youth (may also be called permanency panel in some locations)