



GEORGIA PERMANENCY PROJECT REPORT

Phase One: Permanency Roundtables

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Acknowledgements	2
I. Introduction	3
II. Purpose and Strategies	3
III. Expected Outcomes	4
IV. Roundtable Case Consultation Design	4
V. Project Evaluation	8
VI. Early Results	8
VII. Lessons Learned	9
 APPENDICES	
A. Current Child Permanency Status Rating Tool	10
B. Restrictiveness of Living Environmental Scale (ROLES)	11
C. Permanency Roundtable Oral Case Presentation Form	12
D. Permanency Roundtable Case Consultation Phases	14
E. Permanency Action Plan Form	15
F. Common Permanency Action Plan Strategies	17
G. Permanency Roundtable Daily Debriefing Form	18
H. Permanency Roundtable Early Successes	20

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I. Introduction

In October, 2008 the leadership of the Georgia Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) requested that Casey Family Programs (CFP) partner with them in a project that would expedite permanency for 502 Georgia children and youth, the majority of whom had been in foster care for two or more years. DHR leadership had built an agency culture that values learning, urgency and transparency, so the partners agreed that the Permanency Project would be a "learning lab" that focuses on capacity building, that it would be implemented quickly, and involve DFCS state, regional and county staff, as well as experts from across the country.

The first of the project's two phases, the permanency roundtable case consultations, was completed in February, 2009. The second phase, supporting and tracking the implementation of the Permanency Action Plans developed during the case consultations, is underway and will be completed by November, 2009.

The purpose of this report is to provide a description of the Permanency Project purpose, process, tools, expected outcomes, early successes, and lessons learned to interested jurisdictions and consultants. The project's process evaluation due in May, 2009, and the outcome evaluation, due in December, 2009, will offer more information, as will the Roundtable Handbook that DFCS is developing.

II. Purpose and Strategies

The purpose of the Permanency Project is to accelerate permanency for 502 children and youth. While 457 of the cases are from the Atlanta metro area and are part of the Kenny A consent decree, the project also worked with 45 of the more difficult "stuck" cases (three identified by each of the remaining 15 DFCS regions).

The Permanency Project also focuses on increasing the child welfare system's capacity to accelerate permanency for all youth in care statewide through:

- increasing staff competencies (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) related to expediting permanency for youth in care;
- identifying and "busting" systemic barriers to achieving permanency for youth in care; and
- strengthening systems integration (state to county and region to region).

The project included three major strategies:

- Professional case consultation on each of the children and youth that encouraged innovative thinking, the application of best practices and "permanency barrier busting"
- Implementation support for the individual Permanency Action Plans that resulted from the case consultations through training and coaching

- Barrier busting to address identified systemic barriers to permanency through professional development, policy change, resource development, and the engagement of system partners.

III. Expected Outcomes

The Permanency Roundtable process was designed to achieve both case-specific outcomes, as well as outcomes related to staff and system capacity. Desired outcomes include:

Youth outcomes

- reduction in number of days in foster care through the achievement of legal permanence (reunification, adoption, legal guardianship);
- improved permanency status, as measured by the Current Child Permanency Status¹ (see Appendix A); and
- reduction in the level of restrictiveness of living situation, as measured by the Restrictiveness of Living Environmental Scale (ROLES)² (see Appendix B).

DFCS case manager and supervisor outcomes

- increased knowledge of strategies for expediting permanency for youth in care; and
- increased understanding of how to successfully address systemic barriers to achieving permanency for youth in care.

DFCS master practitioner outcomes

- increased facilitation skills; and
- increased consultation skills.

DFCS capacity-building outcomes:

- identification and resolution of systemic barriers to achieving permanency for youth in care; and
- improved integration of DFCS functional units (state office/field, cross-regions, etc).

The project evaluation described below in Section V will measure the first two sets of outcomes listed above.

¹ Scale adapted from Human Systems and Outcomes, Inc., scale used in Indiana Quality Service Review Protocol (2007).

² Adapted from Hawkins, R.P., Almeida, M.C., Fabry, B., and Reitz, A.L., "A Scale to Measure Restrictiveness of Living Environments for Troubled Children and Youths," *Hospital and Community Psychiatry*, 43, 54-58 (1992).

IV. Roundtable Case Consultation Design

DFCS staff, Casey consultants, and Care Solutions, Inc (CSI) designed the Permanency Roundtable case consultation process in November, 2008. DFCS staff then scheduled and prepared cases for the roundtable case consultations. Ten Permanency Roundtable Teams met simultaneously over five weeks in January and February, 2009 to provide consultation on 50 cases each.

Roundtable case consultation objectives

The Permanency Roundtable case consultation teams brought fresh perspectives to the cases, encouraged innovative thinking and applied best practices. The objectives of the case consultations were:

- to stimulate thinking and learning about pathways to permanency for these and other children and youth in foster care; and
- to develop a Permanency Action Plan (see Appendix E) for each child/youth that can realistically be implemented over the next nine months.

Roundtable team composition

Each core roundtable team was composed of a mix of local, state, and national participants that included:

- Master Practitioner(s) from DFCS regions across Georgia chosen for their expertise in permanency practice. They will implement permanency roundtables in their own regions in the future;
- A Permanency Expert provided by Casey from a pool of 19 (16 Casey staff and three contract consultants);
- Case Manager of the case
- Supervisor (of the case manager); and
- Administrator (second-line supervisor)

In addition, DFCS state policy experts, DFCS state legal experts, and DFCS regional adoption coordinators were on-site throughout the roundtable process and available for in-person consultation when requested by roundtable teams. In some cases, state-level mental health experts also provided consultation as requested to permanency roundtable teams.

Many others, including court monitors, DFCS leadership, and Casey staff, sat in on various permanency roundtables. They were welcomed as participants and observers.

Youth did not participate in the roundtable case consultations. While both DFCS and Casey have a strong commitment to youth involvement, they decided that the Permanency Roundtable was a professional case consultation with a relentless, yet supportive, focus on achieving permanency. The Case Manager was expected to discuss the Permanency Action Plan with the youth and family either individually or in the context of a Family Team meeting or multi-disciplinary team meeting following the roundtable consultation.

Roundtable roles

The key role of all roundtable team members was to think creatively and to contribute to the development of an effective Permanency Action Plan. Each team member was regarded as an equal and as an expert.

Other roles included:

- Master Practitioners – facilitate the roundtable and provide consultation;
- Case Managers – present the case and respond to questions;
- Supervisors – provide supplemental information and response to questions;
- Administrators - provide supplemental information and response to questions;
- Permanency Experts – provide consultation and assist with facilitation, documentation, flip-charting, etc.

The process worked more smoothly when there were two Master Practitioners on the roundtable team. One would facilitate the process and the other would document it.

Roundtable orientation

A broad range of stakeholders participated in a day-and-a-half orientation in early December, 2008. The learning objectives of the orientation were:

- all participants will understand the roundtable purpose and process;
- all participants will understand research-based “pathways to permanence”;
- the roundtable case consultation participants will understand their role in the roundtable, and will practice the needed skills;
- the roundtable case consultation participants will understand the five structured phases of the roundtable case consultation process (see Appendix D); and
- supervisors will understand what they and their case managers would need to do to prepare cases for the case consultations.

Participant evaluations reflected an average 4.04 rating on a 5-point scale agreeing that “the meeting gave me enough information to understand and/or participate in the Permanency Project”.

Preparation for the roundtable

Before the case consultation, DFCS Case Managers completed a standardized case summary form containing information related to demographics, history, current status, barriers to permanency and other relevant data. Plans to populate data on part of the form directly from the department’s SHINES system were not successful.

This form, along with other relevant reports, was then uploaded into a database. Members of the roundtable team assigned to consult on a particular case had access through a website to the completed case summary form and other case information.