The ROUNDTABLE

Post-permanency Continuity: Experiences After Adoption or Guardianship

By Nancy Rolock, PhD

A decade ago little was known about youth who emancipated from the foster care system. However, researchers, federal and state initiatives brought focus to this population, increasing our understanding of the needs of these youth (Courtney et al., 2011). Today, a new population of children/youth deserves our attention: Nationally, there are 2.5 children/youth living in federally-assisted adoptive and guardianship homes for every child/youth living in foster care, yet little is known about the long-term success of these placements.

For children/youth who leave their legally permanent (adoptive or guardianship) homes prior to becoming adults, there is no agreed upon terminology for describing these situations. Prior work suggests disruption, dissolution, displacement and post-adoption placement, yet none of these terms fully capture the experiences of these children/youth. In this article I use post-permanency discontinuity to describe these situations, and post-permanency continuity to describe the situation when children/youth remain with their adoptive parent or guardian after legal permanence, through at least the age of 18.

Recent media attention (Twohey, 2013) has brought to light stories from families where adoptions did not work out, and some of those stories were of former foster youth. How representative is that of the population of children/youth previously served by the child welfare systems across the United States?

National Picture

Federal policies and local practices have shifted in recent years to emphasize the importance of achieving legal permanence (e.g., Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997; Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008). During this time, the number of children/youth in the foster care system has decreased from 560,000 in 1998 to 400,000 in 2011, and the number of children/youth living in Title IV-E assisted homes with adoptive parents or kin guardians has increased from 168,000 in 1998 to 417,000 in 2011 (Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives, 2012). While most believe these changes represent an improvement, little research has examined the long-term outcomes of these families.

Most research has focused on outcomes 18 to 24 months post permanence. This study examines records of 21,659 children/youth who exited foster care in Illinois through adoption or guardianship between 1998 and 2002, and tracks their outcomes through their 18th birthday or for at least 10 years.

What did this study find?

The vast majority of children/youth appear to remain with their adoptive parents or legal guardians (87%) until they reached 18 years of age, or at least 10 years post-permanence. While 13% is a small percentage, given the growth in this population in recent years, it is an ever-growing number of children (N=2,720).

Post-permanency discontinuity. This term describes any change in caregiver for a child/youth after adoption or guardianship, or a premature ending of a subsidy payment. Examples are provided below:

No time in state custody (N=188; 7% of discontinuities). Children/youth were assigned a new adoptive parent or guardian the same day they terminated with their first caregiver. Almost one-third (27%; N=51) of these children/youth also experienced the death of at least one caregiver. The timing of the death is unknown, so we cannot state that the discontinuity was due to the death of the caregiver.

At the age of 10, Samuel was adopted by a relative where he lived for two months until he was transferred to the custody of a new adoptive parent where he lived for six years. He was then adopted by his original caregiver where he lived until he reached the age of majority. He did not spend any time in custody between any of these transfers of custody.

Returned to caregiver (N=69; 3%). These children/youth reenter state custody and then return to the care of their original adoptive parent or legal guardian. These children/youth are referred to as post-adoption (or guardianship) placements (Festinger & Maza, 2009).

At the age of 8, Toni exited state custody to live with her legal guardian, a relative. She lived there for eight years, and reentered state custody at the age of 16 when she lived with a different relative for three months, an institutional placement for two months, then back to her original guardian where the subsidized guardianship was reinstated.

Perhaps children/youth in these first two categories should not be classified as having experienced discontinuity. The first group may reflect contingency plans that were in place that allow a new caregiver to take over in instances of the death or incapacitation of an original caregiver or may represent a change from one caregiver to another due to divorce, or other change in life circumstances. Children/youth in the second group appear to reenter state custody to receive services that they cannot access outside the formal foster care system. This may be because the services are cost-prohibitive or because the adoptive parent or legal guardian does not know how to access needed services.

Future work that helps to illuminate the reason for reentry into state custody would help complete this picture.

Reentered state custody (N=1,429; 53%). These children/youth were evenly split between children/youth who reentered and lived primarily in kinship or traditional foster care, and children/youth who reentered and were predominately in detention, group home, institutional care, runaway and specialized foster care. Almost half (49%) of these children/youth had a caregiver who died. Perhaps these cases could be better served if there was a contingency plan in place at the time of legal permanence (e.g., successor guardianship).

Rosa was adopted by non-relatives when she was 4 years old. She lived with her adoptive parents for 11 years, at age 15 she reentered state custody, living in institutions, hospitalizations, group homes, detention and in temporary living placements for the next four years. According to the most recent data she is still in state custody.

We need to understand why these children/youth reentered custody, and if a different array of service options or supports to the adoptive parents or guardians were needed. We may also want to know how many parents remain connected to their children/youth while in state custody.

Subsidy ended prematurely, no reentry (N=1,034; 38%). In Illinois, caregivers of children/youth adopted or who transitioned through guardianship are eligible for a state subsidy until the child/youth is at least 18 years old. For these families the subsidy payments stopped prematurely, with no record of a reentry into custody. One-third (35%) experienced the death of at least one caregiver. Additional research is needed to understand why these subsidies ended.

At the age of 1, Kevin was adopted by relatives. He lived with his adoptive parents for almost 11 years. At 12 years of age, his adoption subsidy payment stopped. At least one of his caregivers died, which may have been the cause of the premature subsidy ending.

Future Directions

This study describes various patterns of post-permanency discontinuity. Given the variety of experiences faced by these children/youth and their families, systems of support and services need to be put in place at the earliest signs of difficulties and should be flexible enough to address a variety of needs. Preparation for the possibility of post-permanency discontinuity should begin prior to adoption

FROM THE DIRECTOR
Melinda Lis

When my husband and I made the decision to adopt two brothers who were seven and eight, we had no idea of the amount of support and services we would need over the course of their years with us. We thought we had it covered. I worked in child welfare and had a good sense of the services and the needs of the children in foster care. My husband was a teacher in an inner city school and had good behavior management skills. Although all of these experiences were extremely helpful and we were more prepared than many families who decide to adopt, we quickly realized that we needed a lot of additional support.

This extra assistance ranged from emotional support as we went through many cycles of ups and downs to educational advocacy as we fought to provide our children with an appropriate education. We also sought guidance to find adoption competent counseling that would help our boys heal and help our family function as a unit. Bottom line… we needed way more than we originally expected and our needs changed as the boys grew up. My family's experience is not unique.

Although no two adoptions are the same, most families will need support as their adopted children grow up. The level and type of support will vary, but at some point we should assume that adoptive families will reach out for assistance. How we as a system respond when this happens and how we prepare families in advance for the issues they may experience throughout the adoption life cycle are critical for the stability of these families.

It is exciting to see a national movement taking place that recognizes the need to provide long-term support and services to adoptive and guardianship families. States are investing more resources into developing post-permanency programs. The Children's Bureau is investing funding to determine the most effective interventions for these families and the social-work community as a whole is recognizing the long-term effects of trauma.

All of the articles enclosed in this edition focus on post-permanency. The articles highlight some of the newest research in the field and offer different perspectives on adoption.

This will be the last edition of *The Roundtable* under the banner of the National Resource Center for Adoption. Spaulding for Children has lead the Resource Center since 1985, helping states improve and enhance their adoption systems. The Resource Center will close as of October 1, 2014. Resources and publications for the National Resource Center for Adoption will continue to be available on Spaulding's website at www.spaulding.org. Although it is sad to see this chapter close, I have no doubt that Spaulding will continue to be a trailblazing force in the field of adoption. ⚕

Post-permanency *(continued from page 2)*

finalization or legal guardianship and continue after legal permanence has been achieved.

Most adoptive parents and guardians are able to manage the needs of their children/youth without additional state involvement. For families who need assistance, adoption/guardianship-competent services and support should be available at the earliest signs of difficulty. New research (Testa et al., in press) has found that there are factors that can serve as early warning signs to identify families most at risk of post-permanency discontinuity. Families most at risk of post-permanency discontinuity should be identified early so that services and supports targeted at addressing their needs can be offered.

For additional information on this study please see: Rolock, N. (in press). Post-permanency continuity: What happens after adoption and guardianship from foster care? *Journal of Public Child Welfare*.

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Finding Adoptive Families for Sibling Groups

By Ruth McRoy, PhD

According to AFCARS estimates, there were about 397,000 children/youth in foster care as of September 30, 2012, (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013), with two-thirds having at least one sibling also in care (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013). Of these children/youth in care, 101,666 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013) were in need of adoptive placement, many of whom have siblings also needing placement.

Children/youth in care typically have experienced neglect, abuse, and parental loss. Their sibling relationships often are essential for maintaining some continuity of attachment, mutual support and overall well-being. Leathers (2005) found that, despite the known advantages of consistent placements with siblings, often siblings are separated while in care due to a number of factors including a lack of available placement resources willing to take sibling groups and the children/youth's emotional and behavioral problems.

Other reasons sometimes given for separating siblings in foster care include the size of the sibling group, age gap between siblings, the number of children/youth who can be placed in a foster home (licensing standards), and assumption that there is no established relationship between the siblings or the wide range of the children's different needs. Even if siblings may have been separated while in care, it should not be assumed that it is acceptable to place them apart in adoption. In many instances the siblings provide the only source for continuity of relationships and important connections (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2013).

Federal policy provides guidance on sibling placements. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P. L. 110-351) is the first federal law to address the importance of keeping siblings together. This law requires State agencies to make reasonable efforts to maintain sibling connections in order to receive federal funding. Moreover, the law requires that if siblings are placed apart, States must make reasonable efforts to allow for frequent visitation unless it is determined that it would be to the detriment of a sibling's safety or well-being (P.L. 110-351, Section 206).

Therefore, in order to successfully maintain sibling connections, it is essential for agencies to seek prospective foster and adoptive families who (1) recognize the importance of preserving sibling connections and (2) are open to adopting sibling groups. In addition, agencies must provide ongoing training on adoption and adoption preparation to professionals to enhance their understanding of the importance of maintaining sibling connections, whether or not joint placements are possible. Professional training will increase the capacity of professional staff to understand the clinical impact of the sibling connection and in turn help families understand the critical importance of keeping siblings together.

AdoptUSKids (AUSK), a project of the U.S. Children's Bureau was launched in 2002, as a resource to States, Territories and Tribes in their efforts to find families for children in foster care, particularly the most challenging to place such as older youth, those who are part of a sibling group that need to be placed together, and children/youth of color.

The online matching tool at AdoptUSKids' website can be a useful resource in increasing the likelihood

of finding a family willing to adopt sibling groups. Between October 1, 2002, and December 31, 2013, 9,190 children/youth who were photolisted with siblings on the AUSK website were subsequently reported as placed in adoptive homes. This number represents 3,669 sibling groups and although, the majority 65% consisted of two siblings, 24% had three siblings, 8% had four siblings and 3% had five or more siblings.

Other characteristics of these children placed together in sibling groups included the following: 55% were males, 39% were African American, 33% Caucasian, 19% Hispanic, and 3% American Indian or Alaska Native. It is also important to note that many of those children/youth successfully placed as part of sibling groups were older. Only 3% were less than age 3; 41% were between ages 3 and 8; 36% were between 9 and 12; and 20% were between 13 and 19 years of age.

Also, it is important to note that of those photolisted with one or more siblings and successfully placed, 33% had at least one moderate or severe disability and about 14% had multiple disabilities.

Clearly, by being photolisted, all children, and especially sibling groups, receive greater exposure to potential families interested in considering them for adoption. Of the 3,669 placed sibling groups, approximately 81% received a range of 1 to 417 inquiries, and the average number of inquiries was almost 35.

If agencies have families who are interested in adopting sibling groups, as of December 31, 2013, there were 403 sibling groups (1,025 children) actively photolisted and awaiting placement on the AdoptUSKids site. The majority, 66% were sibling groups of two children, 22% were sibling groups of three, 8% were sibling groups of four and 5% were sibling groups of five or more children. The majority of these children, were male (58%) and were African American (52%). An additional 27% were Caucasian, 15% were Hispanic and 1% were American Indian or Alaska Native. Thirty-nine percent of these children/youth were between 13 and 19 years of age, and 36% were between 9 and 12 years of age as of December 31, 2013 (AdoptUSKids, 2014).

Agency professionals can also search the website for families open to adopting sibling groups of two or more children. As of December 31, 2013, 3,023 or 85% of all prospective adoptive families actively registered on AdoptUSKids indicated that they were open to adopting two or more children. Over 3,000 approved families are currently registered and waiting throughout the United States.

The AdoptUSKids' website, adoptuskids.org, can serve as an excellent resource to find both waiting prospective adoptive families and waiting children/youth. Permanency can be achieved, sibling bonds can be maintained, and children/youth can be placed together.

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Maltreatment as a Predictor of College Retention in Adopted, Foster Care and Guardianship Youth

By Angelique Day, PhD, MSW and Megan Pennefather, MSW

Much has been documented about the poor educational outcomes for youth who are in or have been placed in out-of-home care, which in this context includes foster care, guardianship and adoption. Day (2011) found that youth who are in the foster care system are particularly at risk. These youth are less likely than their peers to attend college, and of those who do attend college, only 6% earn a degree within six years (Day, 2011). Similarly Forsman & Vinnerljung (2013) stated that youth placed in out-of-home settings were considerably less likely than their peers to pursue post-secondary education.

What is less clear is whether specific permanency arrangements (adoption, guardianship, long-term foster care) predict college retention and degree obtainment. To address this gap in the literature, the authors examined a sample of 104 college students enrolled at a Midwestern university during the 2012-2013 academic year to determine attrition rates among foster care youth and/ or those individuals who had in their histories substantiated cases of abuse or neglect. The sample was drawn from secondary data maintained by the university's financial aid office. This data was matched with the state's Department of Human Services which provided placement and foster care status records for the individuals in the sample.

Of the 104 students in the sample, the type of permanency placement (adoption, guardianship, long-term foster care) was not a significant predictor of whether or not students dropped out. By contrast, those individuals with substantiated claims of abuse and/ or neglect were much more likely to drop out than students without child protective service substantiated abuse or neglect histories. Of students with substantiated claims of abuse and/ or neglect, 51 percent of them had dropped out of school, compared to only 30 percent of students who did not report abuse or neglect.

These findings add to the growing body of research that supports the notion that the presence of maltreatment in a youth's history

> **The presence of maltreatment in a youth's history is the main predictor of poor social and educational functioning.**

is the main predictor of poor social and educational functioning. Taussig (2002) found that children who experience maltreatment (physical and sexual abuse) are more likely to exhibit mental and behavioral problems than those children who experienced neglect or parental substance abuse. Meanwhile, Robinson's study found that maltreated children fared worse in cognitive functioning than non-maltreated children. This effect persisted even when controlling for placement type (Robinson et al., 2012).

Taussig (2009) found that although children placed in out-of-home care are at risk for negative life outcomes, maltreated children who were placed outside of the home actually fared better in the long-term than maltreated children who stayed in their homes of origin. She went on to state "the sequelae of maltreatment . . . likely contributed to the identified problems for foster youth" (Taussig, 2009, p. 422).

This assertion has considerable implications for child welfare practitioners, foster parents, adoptive parents and legal guardians. Despite the type of placement in which a youth is placed matters less than dealing with the aftereffects of trauma and abuse.

Discussion and Recommendations

These findings lend further support to the notion that the presence of maltreatment significantly increases the risk that youth will drop out of a higher education institution. It bolsters the notion that maltreatment has lingering effects that transcend the nature of permanency placements. This may be especially salient for those who interact with youth who have histories of maltreatment yet never entered the foster care system.

Current federal policies restrict eligibility of post-secondary education benefits to youth who were in foster care on or after their 14th birthday and

to youth who were adopted on or after their 16th birthday. Youth in adoptive and guardianship placements who fall outside of these criteria are not eligible for the same educational resources as youth who are in foster care system.

Additionally, youth who may have been removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect but were instead placed with family members or with legal guardians and never entered the formal foster care system are not eligible for such incentives. These youth may have similar trauma histories as their Chaffee-eligible foster care peers, but they do not qualify for the same incentives due to the nature of their placement types.

In light of these findings, it may be beneficial for practitioners and policymakers to expand eligibility when determining appropriate service provisions for youth with histories of maltreatment. Specifically, we offer the following recommendations:

- Child welfare workers should continue to ensure that adoptive parents, foster parents, reunified biological parents and guardians have continued parenting support and academic resources to strengthen the home environment.
- Youth placed in guardianships and those who were adopted have similar risks entering and staying in college as students who aged out of foster care. There is a need to provide trauma-informed, specialized support services in the collegiate environment for non Chaffee-eligible youth, but those with any type of foster care history, including adopted youth and those who grew up supported

by a relative guardianship living arrangement as a result of a substantiated child abuse and neglect allegation.

- There should be an effort to expand the scope of college support programs for adopted, guardianship and foster care youth. Such campus support programs would offer wrap-around services for adopted, guardianship and youth aging out of foster care that would include not only help with accessing financial and academic resources to stay in school, but the necessary psychological services that may be needed to assist youth with trauma histories.
- Research has found that youth without strong social support from caring adults was a strong predictor of college dropout rates among foster care youth (Day et al., 2011). Guardianship and adopted youth can also benefit from such mentorship, especially if they were raised in home settings with caregivers who may not have experienced navigating a college campus. College support services should offer mentoring programs to ensure youth have reliable, supportive adults, as well as tutoring and life skills training.
- Federal and state governments should support the implementation of college support programs for current or former court wards, which include adopted, foster care and guardianship youth. These programs would offer counseling, tutoring, year-round housing, and financial aid to

youth with trauma histories who may encounter learning, mental and/or financial difficulties while in a higher education institution.

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R.I.P. "Special Needs" Adoption

By Penelope L. Maza, PhD

In any field, terminology becomes outmoded such as the term "orphan" in child welfare. It is now time to retire the term "special needs" adoption. It has outlived its usefulness and, in some instances, is detrimental to children/youth. This article will discuss some of the historical circumstances that led to the use of the term and demonstrate why it is time to retire it.

The push for the adoption of children/youth from the foster care system and the use of the term "special needs," gained prominence in the 1970s. The people who worked on this issue can best be described as visionaries. They challenged the boundaries of the child welfare system, some specific to adoption and others more generally associated with permanency planning. Their major accomplishment was to move the field from the use of long-term foster care to permanency.

Information about the feasibility of achieving permanency for foster children/youth was mostly generated from small research and demonstration projects. One of the most prominent was the Oregon Project. This was a small demonstration project funded by the Children's Bureau which showed that children/youth who had been in care for long periods of time could be returned home. If they could not return home, they could be adopted. The major strategies utilized by this project were eventually disseminated nationally.

The adoption world also was moving from working with healthy white infants to children/youth living in foster care. It was a major change to consider that children/youth living in the foster care system could be adopted given their challenging characteristics and the perceived limited demand for them. Even within this context, the underlying principle then and now is that every child is adoptable and that the child's adoptability is a function of the agency's ability to find him/her a home. This was a major change in thinking about adoption practice: the child/youth is not hard to place, but is a child/youth for whom it is difficult to find an adoptive placement.

This underlying principle led to the development of strategies to address two major barriers: (1) finding ways to present the children/youth in a more positive light to potential adoptive parents; and (2) finding a way to provide financial assistance to meet adoptive children/youth's needs. The strategies used to confront these barriers are intrinsically linked to the use of the term "special needs."

To present the children/youth waiting to be adopted in a positive light and to avoid negative labeling, a term without negative connotations needed to be used. The concern about the negative labeling of children/youth was also present in other fields, specifically health and education. The child welfare system along with health and education settled on "special needs." However, the term has a different meaning in health and education than it does in child welfare. In health and education, the term applies primarily to children/youth with various kinds of disabilities. In child welfare, the term is used to describe children/youth waiting to be adopted who have a wide variety of characteristics and who qualify for adoption subsidy/assistance. These differences have caused confusion as child welfare and other service systems began to work more collaboratively. For example, children/youth being adopted as part of a sibling group who would be identified as special needs in the child welfare system might retain the label in the educational system even though he or she had no disabilities.

To address the financial needs of the children/youth, during the 1970s, some states developed adoption subsidy programs to provide financial support to a subgroup of children/youth adopted from the foster care system. In 1980, Public Law 96-272, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, established the Title IV-E Adoption Assistance Program, a non-means tested entitlement program (no limit in the overall appropriation) based on the needs of the child or youth. Thus, children/youth adopted by a relatively well-off family could receive adoption assistance on their behalf if they met the other criteria of the program. The maximum amount that could be received on behalf of the adopted children/youth was the maintenance payment received while in family foster care. Because there were no reliable national data about children/youth who were waiting to be adopted (e.g. how many were waiting, what their characteristics were, etc.), it was expected that there would only be a small subset of the children/youth being adopted from foster care who would qualify for adoption assistance.

The Federal Adoption Assistance Program forever linked the concept of "special needs" to adoption assistance eligibility. The statute let the states define special needs but listed a number of categories as examples: member of a minority or sibling group; age; and medical, physical, emotional handicap. As frequently occurs with federal legislation, these suggestions became "musts" and "onlys" in many states.

It has been about 40 years since this process started. Through both improved data and practice, it has become clear that almost all waiting children/youth qualify as having "special needs." Using receipt of state or federal adoption subsidy/assistance as a proxy for "special needs," in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2012, 92 percent[1] of approximately 48,000 children/youth adopted from the foster care system received either state or federal adoption subsidy/assistance. This is not a new phenomenon. As far back as FFY 2003, 87 percent[2] of children/youth adopted from foster care were receiving adoption subsidy/assistance. The approximately 10 percent of adopted children/youth who are not receiving adoption subsidy/assistance most likely do not meet the other criteria of the program, (e.g. wording of court orders, financial requirements, etc.), although there may be a few healthy infants.

These data suggest that there are probably virtually no children/youth being adopted from the foster care system who are not "special needs" as the term is currently used in child welfare. Rather the field is trying to make a distinction when there really is no difference because the non-special needs children/youth are so rare. The children/youth who are being adopted from foster care today have been removed from their homes, experienced abuse and/or neglect, lived with strangers in many cases, and had a court state that they could not return to their parents. All of these children have many challenges.

In addition, it is a stretch to apply the term to some foster-care populations about which there is growing interest and need for adoptive homes to meet their unique circumstances. An early group that required some adjustments in definition was infants who had experienced in utero drug exposure where a child may not exhibit some kind of need when they are adopted, but may be at high risk in the future to do so.

More recently, there are some other groups which, because of their unique circumstances, may need some other types of services to meet their challenges. For example, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBT) and non-English speaking children/youth, and children/youth from dissolved international adoptions who do not appear to qualify under the model of special needs from the 1980s.

In conclusion, the term "special needs" should be retired. Because of the definitional differences in the various service systems, children/youth can be misclassified. Furthermore, it should be retired because it is not a meaningful descriptor of children/youth being adopted. Under the current child welfare definition, there are few, if any, non-special needs children/youth being adopted while the definition excludes other groups of children/youth in the foster care system. Children/youth in care and/or adopted from care should be consulted as to what term they think would be appropriate. The term "foster child adoption" should be used until that can be accomplished.

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[1] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, The AFCARS Report: Preliminary FY 2012 Estimates as of November 2013 (20).

[2] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau, The AFCARS Report: Interim FY 2003 Estimates as of June 2006 (10) Data from earlier years are not considered reliable.

Does Legal Permanence Translate into Relational Permanence Among Young Adults with Foster Care Histories?

By Alfred Pérez, MSW

> **The findings suggest that child welfare efforts should shift from focusing on legal permanency outcomes to maximizing young adult well-being, however, that might be attained.**

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-351) promotes, among other things, legal permanence through adoption, guardianship, and long-term fostering with relatives for older youth. The Act recognizes the importance of permanent, emotionally sustained relationships for older youth to reach self-sufficiency and thrive during young adulthood. The Act therefore implies that the legalization or formalization of familial relationships results in relational permanence—enduring, lifelong connections between older youth and parental figures (Samuels, 2008; Cushing, Samuels, & Kerman, 2014). However, little is known about the post-permanency experiences of these youth and whether legal permanence translates into relational permanence.

My research begins to fill this important gap. I recruited and interviewed a small non-representative sample of 31 young adults from the Chicago area who exited the foster care system through adoption (32.5%), subsidized guardianship (35%), or long-term foster care with relatives (32.5%). Their average age at the time of interview was 27 and their average age of achieving these permanency outcomes was 15 years old. The majority of young adults were African American (87%). The adoption group (20%) was less likely than the subsidized guardianship group (73%) to achieve legal permanence with a relative; however, by study design, all of those in the relative group achieved permanence with a relative.

To understand whether legal permanence translates into relational permanence, interviews focused on young adults' relationships with their caretakers currently and historically. Several levels of analyses were conducted, including a line-by-line textual analysis and cross-case and within-case analyses. Particular attention was paid to the affective tones with which young adults talked about their relationships with caretakers, their current relational status, and five dimensions of relational experiences that emerged from their stories (feeling loved or cared about, caretaker commitment, caretaker openness to biological family, sense of belonging, and unwavering support from caretaker).

Based on the young adults' affective tone, current relational status, and dimensions of relational experiences, I ultimately classified young adults into one of four conditions of relational permanence—enduring, ambivalent, spurned, and severed. I briefly describe one young adult in each condition to illustrate the diversity of relational permanence represented in this small sample that exemplifies the complexity and nuance involved in the translation of legal permanence to relational permanence.

James, a 27-year-old, exited foster care at age 17 through subsidized guardianship with his maternal grandparents. He is among the 35% (11) of sampled young adults classified as having an enduring sense of relational permanence with

their caretakers. James' relationship with his grandparents remains intact; he resided with them at the time of interview. This group typically expressed a positive affective tone with their caretakers and affirmative responses across all dimensions of relational experiences. Driving James' enduring sense of relational permanence was "the peace . . . and consistency" his grandparents provided him, which generated a strong sense of belonging.

In contrast, Robert, a 25-year-old who exited foster care through adoption at age 16, expressed a mixed affective relational tone and mixed responses on the dimensions of relational permanence, revealing both positive and negative experiences. While Robert's relationship remains intact with his adopted parents and he expressed that he feels loved and has been treated well, he also expressed a diminished sense of belonging with his adopted father. He uncomfortably told a story about his adopted father not including him while publicly acknowledging his two biological sons. Robert explains, "[My adopted father] treat[s] me real good, but [not being acknowledged] just felt like he just—I don't know how to explain, but it made me feel like maybe, to him, I am not 100 percent his son."

Robert's case is illustrative of the 26% (8) young adults who comprise the ambivalent group. They typically expressed "no" responses on the dimensions of sense of belonging and unwavering support, which created an ambivalent sense of relational permanence.

The *spurned* group consists of 13% (4) of the sampled young adults. These young adults did not have an intact relationship with their caretakers, specifically because the caretaker cut off the relationship. All of the young adults expressed to me a strong desire to retain ties to their caretakers despite the cut-off. These young adults expressed both positive and negative relational tones regarding their caretakers, and mixed responses on the dimensions of relational permanence.

Dawn, a 29-year-old, who exited foster care at age 14 through subsidized guardianship with a non-relative caretaker, is illustrative of this group. Over time, she built what she considered a "strong" relationship with her guardian. However, her relationship with her guardian abruptly ended when she moved to her college dorm. Dawn recalls her guardian telling her to "make sure you have places to go . . . during breaks" because she was not welcome at her home. As a result, Dawn experienced bouts of homelessness during college breaks.

The *severed* group comprises 26% (8) of the sampled young adults and are concentrated in the adoption and guardianship groups. These young adults lack an intact caretaker-young adult relationship, expressed a negative relational tone, and reported a distinct pattern of unaffirmative responses across the dimensions of relational experiences.

Latrice, a 27-year-old, exited foster care at age 15 through subsidized guardianship with her sister. Latrice cut the relationship with her sister because she did not feel a sense of belonging, among other things, with her sister despite their biological relationship. She explains, "My sister [who] was my guardian is just evil . . . we have not talked in four years. But this is my choice now not to talk to her."

Study findings accord with one primary assumption of P.L. 110-351: the importance of permanence as a child welfare goal. However, achieving legal permanence does not assure relational permanence, as the young adults' stories reveal varying degrees of an enduring relationship with their caretakers or the relationships were cut off all together. Moreover, achieving relational permanence does not seem to be a function of biological relationships or type of legal permanence.

The findings suggest that child welfare efforts should shift from focusing on legal permanency outcomes to maximizing young adult well-being, however, that might be attained.

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Internationally Adopted Children with Disabilities in Out-of-Home Care: Emerging Research on Adoptive Parent Perspectives

By JaeRan Kim, MSW, LISW

Introduction

Americans have been adopting children/youth from other countries since the end of World War II. Since 1993, nearly 250,000 foreign-born children have been adopted by U.S. citizens (Seleman, 2000, U.S. Department of State, 2014). According to the most recent Census report nearly 17 percent of adopted children/youth were born outside the United States (Kreider & Lofquist, 2014). While the majority of these adoptions are stable, recent media stories of international adoption dissolutions underscore the reality that some adoptive families struggle.

There is a misconception that children/youth adopted internationally do not have the same troubled histories as children/youth in the foster care system. Yet, in reality, many internationally adopted children/youth have also experienced poverty, prematurity, low birth weight, prenatal exposure to drugs and alcohol, abuse, neglect, disabilities and multiple placements. Additionally, these children often have cultural and linguistic differences that impact their adjustment in their new families.

The most recent Census report found that almost 8 percent of internationally adopted children/youth under 18 had at least one disability (Kreider & Lofquist, 2014). As the Reuters investigation series on "re-homing" highlighted (Twohey, 2013), children/youth with intellectual, developmental and mental health disabilities often have behaviors that parents are unable to manage, thus prompting out-of-home care.

Research

In order to better understand the experiences of why adoptive parents choose out-of-home placements for their internationally adopted child, I interviewed 19 parents of 26 children/youth adopted from 12 different countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe. The age at time of adoption ranged from four months to 16 years. Of these, 26 children/youth, 24 had one or more intellectual, developmental and/or mental health disability and 17 of these children/youth had experienced one or more disability-related out-of-home placement.

Out-of-home placements included hospitalizations, foster care, residential treatment centers, juvenile detention centers, group homes, long-term shelters, wilderness "camps" or "ranches," and dissolution leading to adoption or guardianship with another family.

Many of these adopted children/youth experienced more than one of these placements. The major themes can be categorized into three themes: (1) lack of pre-adoption information and education about the risk of parenting a children/youth with a disabilities, (2) difficulty navigating systems that don't understand the needs of adopted children/youth with a disability, and (3) the impact on the family.

Lack of pre-adoption information and education

When asked how disability was mentioned or discussed in adoption orientations, trainings, or the home study process, nearly all responded that it was not. "They didn't at all" said one parent. "And that's where I felt like I was really naïve to the situation . . . there was no discussion about that whatsoever."

Several parents completed a check list of special needs they might consider. One parent said, "I think that people thought if they checked 'I prefer a child that did not have a disability' that is what would happen." Interestingly, two families attended training for foster parents and stated that in contrast to their pre-adoption training, the foster parent training was very comprehensive in discussing disabilities. One stated, "[the foster care training] was extremely clear about disabilities. Like, this is what I should have had for the foreign adoptions as well. It was extremely explicit."

Navigating systems that don't understand adoption and disabilities

Once parents learned of their child/youth's disability, they felt overwhelmed trying to navigate systems in order to access resources. The systems described as most problematic were school systems, county or state child welfare systems, insurance companies, and clinical hospital psychiatric systems.

Parents recount having to appeal multiple times for SSI disability benefits for their children/youth, spending long hours with insurance companies to cover treatment costs, hiring attorneys when school systems refused to give their children/youth an IEP, and battling county/state

child welfare systems. Nearly every parent mentioned the importance of having teachers that understood their children/youth's disability and described how quickly the school setting deteriorated when the teachers only saw the children/youth as behavior problems. For example, one parent described her attempt to get an IEP for her child. "I told [my child's teacher] I really wanted to start the IEP process and she said that would be a waste of her time."

Another family sued the school district when they refused to fund their child's educational services at a residential treatment facility. This family ended up having the State take guardianship of their daughter in order to receive the services she needed.

Parents expressed frustration with professional mental health providers as well, particularly hospital psychiatric staff.

Some families reached out to state or county child welfare agencies and were met with resistance. One county social service agency told a parent, "We don't have money for this. We don't have resources. How dare you bring this child from [a foreign country] and expect us to take care of him." This parent said, "[the county] was the last place you wanted to go for help because you weren't going to get it."

Impact on family

Clearly, the challenge of parenting children/youth with disabilities that ends in out-of-home care takes a toll on the whole family. "It isn't just the child that's away, it's the whole family," said one parent. Out-of-home placements impact other children/youth in the home. Said one parent,

"I think our other children, they've admired our perseverance but have also felt I think a little cheated at times."

Stress contributed to relationship and marital strife as well, particularly if a couple had different parenting styles. One couple acknowledged, "We are fortunate to have—we are both on the same page. A lot of families don't have a spouse that is on the same page with them."

Finding respite is difficult as it is challenging to find people willing or able to supervise children with such high needs. Parents also describe isolation, loneliness and depression resulting from parenting their children/youth, and frequently express feeling judged as "bad parents." Said one parent, "Don't pass judgment so quickly about what a situation may be that you're looking at."

Implications for practice

The experiences of the parents in my study have important practice implications for professionals who may work with internationally adopted children/youth with disabilities. On the front end, it is clear that adoption agencies must be more explicit about the potential risks of children/youth, given their pre-natal, pre-adoption and pre-institutional histories and need to provide more education about parenting children/youth with disabilities.

Many of the families adopted their children prior to the 2008 ratification of the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption, which offers guidelines and protections for children/youth and adoptive parents involved in intercountry adoption.

Under the new standards, prospective adoptive parents must complete 10 hours of training from an accredited program if they are adopting from another Hague Convention country. These trainings aim to educate prospective parents on the effects of malnutrition, environmental toxins, prenatal exposure to alcohol or other substances, and the potential risk to the child/youth's development and health associated with the country as well as effects due to institutional experiences.

Although several of the families in my study adopted from non-Hague countries including Russia, Ethiopia, South Korea and Kazakhstan which may not have the same requirements for pre-adoptive training, agencies can be proactive and provide opportunities for similar training. Many agencies provide in-person and webinar or video online training on international adoption that prospective families can complete.

Some agencies provide post-adoption services yet the families in my study stated they were unaware these services existed, so prioritizing outreach efforts to the adoption community is another way of ensuring that families are accessing the resources that are available.

Another important practice implication to consider is that other providers that interact with these families may have relatively little knowledge about internationally adopted children/youth. Professionals working with families must improve their own knowledge, skills, and attitudes about international adoption if they are to effectively assist these families.

In Keeping the Promise, the Donaldson Adoption Institute found that the lack of adoption-competent professionals contributed to poor outcomes for families. Certificate programs in adoption competency for mental health professionals, such as the one implemented in our state through a partnership with the Center for Adoption Support and Education (CASE), the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare and our Department of Human Services, is one way to address the need for increased post-adoption support.

Despite the challenges of parenting children/youth with disabilities and having to choose out-of-home care when needed, parents are re-defining what it means to be a family. Said one parent, "We've had to create a family where we are at all times in different places." Others spoke about how strongly they feel committed to the child even when the child is rejecting. "We took the parenting pledge pretty seriously," said one mother.

Families also emphasize that finding support for themselves, in addition to supports for their children/youth, is key. Some find support through friendships and networks with others parenting adopted children/youth with disabilities, and some utilize personal therapy.

Finally, one of the most interesting ways in which parents found meaning in their experience was by becoming advocates. Several parents became active in their communities through speaking on panels and at conferences, training other adoptive parents, educating school systems and professional communities and organizing and facilitating support groups. By sharing their stories, both for this study and in the advocacy work they do, these parents hope that other families will find it easier to find support.

Information on the Training for Adoption Competency (TAC) certificate program is available at http://adoptionsupport.org/index.php/the-tac-training-for-adoption-competency/

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Minority Adoption Leadership Development Institute

By Janice King, LMSW

In 2005, the National Resource Center for Adoption (NRCA) set in motion the Minority Adoption Leadership Development Institute (MALDI) to address the children/youth of color who were disproportionally overrepresented in the child welfare system as well as in the population of children/youth whose parents' rights have been terminated.

Since the beginning of MALDI, 34 participants have successfully completed the program; enhancing their leadership skills and increasing their knowledge of child welfare issues that impact children of color who are over-represented in the child welfare system. Participants have come from 22 states, several states have had two participants during the 2005-2013 period. NRCA's aim for MALDI was to support emerging leaders through the implementation of practice interventions that would impact the lives of children of color and increase the number of children/youth who would gain permanency.

MALDI Participants in States

Emerging leaders were selected from States, Counties, Tribes and/or State Regions with the highest number of children of color awaiting adoption and/or high-disproportionality rates. In the selection process, efforts were made to ensure diverse-regional representation. Applicants had to be a member of one of the following groups of color (African American, Hispanic/Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander or Native American), be representative of minority children awaiting adoption in their State system, and have experience in at least two areas of the child welfare system (e.g., adoption, foster care and protective services). These emerging leaders were provided mentors from the National Association of State Adoption Programs (NASAP) who worked with the participants as they completed 12 months of on-the-job project assignments (Action Research Projects).

The mentors also received training in effective mentoring and coaching and were supported by NRCA staff throughout the mentoring process. The Action Research Projects provided opportunities for the mentees to have on-the-job experiences designed to build technical expertise and leadership capacities while receiving concurrent mentoring. MALDI provided participants with the opportunity to:

- Assess their own leadership skills.
- Become acquainted with and have direct contact with child welfare adoption leaders.
- Observe state adoption leadership at work.
- Explore the multicultural implications of leadership and governance in adoption.
- Develop a network with other mentored participants and mentors.
- Contribute knowledge to the field.

Each participant attended two-three day learning sessions that included presentations by national child welfare experts, in the following areas:

- Adaptive leadership
- Leadership in Adoption—Change from the Middle
- Working with your State Legislature
- Permanency in the Courts
- Overcoming Barriers in Minority Adoption/Disproportionality
- Youth in Adoption
- Trauma and Well-Being
- Disproportionality – A Historical Perspective
- Management Strategies

The Center
NEWS *That You Can Use!*

WEBINARS: View webinars "Understanding and Complying With Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Multiethnic Placement Act of 1994, as amended by the Interethnic Adoption Provisions of 1996 – Part 1 & 2" and "Subsidized Guardianship" at NRCA's website: http://www.nrcadoption.org/webcasts-2/

ADOPTION STORIES AROUND THE NATION: Adoption Tapestry is a project of the NRCA. Recognizing that adoption is a unique journey and that there is not one story that exemplifies the experience, Adoption Tapestry collects and shares adoption stories from various perspectives across the nation. It is our hope that these short audio clips will help to inform practice, strengthen the links between individuals connected through their unique permanency stories, enhance our communities understanding of permanency and preserve our families' voices and insight for future generations. The stories are intentionally not scripted so that participants can engage in a rich dialogue that provides a glimpse of their domestic child welfare adoption and guardianship experience. NRCA will continue adding stories to the map throughout the year so that there is eventually a story from every state in the nation. To listen to these stories or if you or someone you know is interested in submitting their own story, please go to NRCA's website: http://www.nrcadoption.org/map/.

RECENT ADOPTION RESEARCH SUMMARIES: Check out the NRCA website for Recent Adoption Research Summaries (RARS). One article will be highlighted on the NRCA website the first of each month. The purpose of RARS is to transfer knowledge to State, Tribal, and local systems about evidence-based/evidence-informed approaches related to adoption. You can find these summaries on the NRCA website at: http://www.nrcadoption.org/wp-content/uploads/Beyond-pre-adoptive-risk-The-impact.pdf.

MALDI *(continued from page 15)*

- Assessing and Developing the Organizational Culture for Using Data

Over the years of 2005 through 2013, participants in MALDI shared the following about the impact of the program on their growth as leaders:

- One hundred percent (100%) of the mentee respondents (n=13) reported that as a result of the Institute, they were better prepared to work at becoming a future leader.
- Participants, 86.4% (n=22), reported that the sessions regarding the on-the-job project discussions contributed to their preparation/participation as future leaders in adoption *to a great extent*.
- Participants 100% (n=11), *strongly agreed or agreed* that as a result of this Institute they were better prepared to begin their journey as emerging leaders.

In 2014, the first Minority Adoption Leadership Development Institute Alumni Association Forum was held in Detroit, Michigan. The Forum brought together graduates from the four institutes that were held from 2005 through 2013. Our purpose was to learn how MALDI has led to individual leadership development as well as organizational change and or capacity building within the child welfare system the particpants worked. MALDI graduates presentations highlighting the impact of their projects within their jurisdictions and the career movement for the individual leaders can be viewed at http://www.nrcadoption.org/programs/maldi/action-research).

Included in this issue of *The Roundtable* newsletter (page 17) is an article by Ivana Maplanka, a Michigan MALDI participant. This article shows how MALDI has impacted one of the 34 participants.

Janice King, LMSW, is Program Manager of the National Resource Center for Adoption and Coordinator of *The Roundtable*.

My Professional Growth Through MALDI

By Ivana Maplanka, MA

When I was asked to apply to be part of the Minority Adoption Leadership Institute (MALDI), I had no idea how it would impact the trajectory of my professional career.

My experience with MALDI allowed me to obtain a much more expansive perspective of the child welfare system. Instead of focusing on just my part of the child welfare continuum, I was able to take a more holistic view, understanding how the work in my unit impacted the children/youth throughout their time in care and even after they obtained permanency. I gained a new perspective on the work collectively done in child welfare to improve the lives of children/youth from the initial stages of removal through adoption. I received a close and in-depth look at what children/youth are experiencing after they left Children's Protective Services, which showed me the importance of my job at the front door of the child welfare system.

MALDI also connected me with professionals within the state of Michigan and on a national level. These connections created a professional network for me and opened doors professionally within my state child welfare system.

My MALDI project was titled, "Post-Adoption Services from the Eye of a CPS worker." At the onset of the project, my knowledge of the child welfare system was primarily limited to Children's Protective Services. Although I would occasionally investigate cases that involved an adopted child/youth, I had little knowledge of the unique issues of adoptive families or the services that are available to them.

In reviewing these investigations, I was surprised by the lack of services being utilized by the families. As I began my research, I realized that Michigan had also begun looking into disruptions/dissolutions of adoptions. I was able to consult with the work groups looking into this area. I also consulted with contracted agencies that provide post-adoption services to get a better handle on the reasons so many of the cases I investigated with adoptive families had not participated in post-adoptive services. The more I researched my project, I realized that one reason

for this gap was the fact that the child welfare system was divided into programs. Each program was responsible for being an expert in their area without knowing how the other programs functioned.

Through the MALDI program, I not only gained a better understanding of the needs and strengths of other child welfare programs, I learned how my role impacted the entire child welfare continuum. My mentor for MALDI had experience in adoptions and thus was able to help me connect the two worlds. I was given the opportunity to look beyond my specific duty, ask questions, and creatively identify ways for the system to work more cohesively.

My action research project has resulted in contracted agencies being more proactive in sharing post-adoptive information with our entire agency. Child Protective Services staff now have a better understanding of services available to adoptive families. The State of Michigan is currently in the process of looking at a different model of training called Continuum of Care. This model will train child welfare staff on the whole system instead of focusing on a specific program.

My experience with MALDI has given me the courage to ask questions and find solutions. It has also opened new opportunities for me professionally. Since participating in MALDI, I have seen tremendous growth in my professional trajectory. I obtained a permanent position as a Supervisor with Children's Protective Services. The work and experience that I gained from the MALDI program also prepared me to work as an Interim Section Manager for Children's Protective Services. One of my greatest honors was to be a recipient of the "Good Government Symbol of Excellence" award from my State.

I sincerely believe that my research and leadership experiences at MALDI gave me the confidence and drive to continue to achieve greater success for the children in my state.

Ivana Maplanka, MA, is employed at the Department of Human Services in the state of Michigan where she serves as an Interim Program Manager for Children's Protective Services.

The Center Source

Listed below are a several products and training resources that are featured in the Spaulding Institute's Catalog. View complete catalog at http://spaulding.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/CS-Spring-2013.pdf.

BARGAINS!

Adoption Competency Curriculum DVDs,
National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption
These DVDs are designed to be used with the *Adoption Competency Curriculum*. This comprehensive curriculum speaks to all the issues in the adoption of children/youth from the child welfare system and focuses on some of the common issues and challenges that occur in transition: The Day Everything Changed, Child Assessment and Preparation, Family Assessment and Preparation, Decision Making and Matching, Talking About Adoption Assistance and Post Adoption Services. No shipping or handling charges!

DVDs	2010	$20/each	$120/set of 6

Attaching in Adoption: Practical Tools for Today's Parents, Deborah D. Gray
This book provides adoptive parents with specific information that applies to children like theirs. It matches children's emotional needs and stages with parenting strategies designed to enhance their children's happiness and emotional health.

#181	2002	~~$24.95~~	$19.95

Adopting: Sound Choices, Strong Families, Patricia Irwin Johnson, MS
Winner of the 2009 Benjamin Franklin Award as best new book in the self help genre. It tackles very personal questions and addresses the difficult issues that must be examined, preparing the reader to make the best decisions possible as they embark on the journey to family-building through adoption.

#500	2008	~~$28.95~~	$21.95

Brothers and Sisters in Adoption, Helping Children Navigate Relationships When New Kids Join the Family, Arleta James
Winner of the 2010 Benjamin Franklin Award as best book in the psychology genre. This comprehensive book goes beyond the common concerns for foster and adoptive families, and focuses on families which already contain children born into them or adopted by them who are developing normally and assists the family in accepting unfamiliar behaviors and different cultures, ultimately helping the new children heal so that the family can forge strong connections and attachments to one another.

#501	2009	~~$30.00~~	$21.95

BEST SELLERS!

Parents As Tender Healers (PATH), Spaulding for Children
PATH is an eight-session competency-based curriculum designed to prepare resource parents (foster, adoptive and kinship parents) for parenting children who have been abused, neglected and spent time in the child welfare system. The jargon-free Trainer's Guide is readily used by both parent and professional trainers. The six video vignettes highlight experiences of children and resource families and provide guidance to potential resource families (1997). Now available on DVD.

First Curriculum	#124	$495.00
Participant Handbook	#125	$12.95

Core Issues in Adoption, Spaulding for Children
This DVD discusses issues unique to adoption (separation, loss and grief; bonding and attachment; claiming; entitlement; mastery and control; unmatched expectations; family integration; identity formation) through interviews with adoptive parents, adult adoptees and birth parents. By discussing the ways that they have worked through these issues, the individuals reinforce the idea that adoption is different. Their candor provokes excellent discussion about these core issues and helps the audience gain an understanding of the lifelong impact of forming a family in this way. (25 min.)

#119	1996	$95.00

The Children Who Wait, Spaulding for Children
Special needs adoption practice is shaped and driven by the needs of children who wait for adoption placement. This DVD illustrates how children come into the child welfare systems, behaviors they develop to survive living in the system, and the implications for parenting. It includes parents, children and professionals speaking to these issues. (30 min.)

#035	1989	$95.00

Your Feedback is Important to Us!

The National Resource Center for Adoption (NRCA) needs your feedback about *The Roundtable*. Please go to the following website to participate in a brief survey provided by Public Research and Evaluation Services, Inc., the independent evaluation firm of the NRCA: http://surveys.pres-online.org/s3/NRCA-Roundtable-Survey-2014-2.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary and will not affect your interaction or participation in services with the National Resource Center for Adoption. Your responses are confidential and will be reported in group summary only. Thank you.

Sharonlyn Harrison, PhD, Director
Public Research and Evaluation Services, Inc.

The ROUNDTABLE

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