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Resource parents and NC’s permanency commitment

In North Carolina’s 2020-2024 Child and Family Services Plan, a 5-year strategic plan for its child welfare system, our state makes the following commitment to permanency:

Children and youth in the foster care program will experience stability in foster care and achieve permanency in a timely manner and youth who do not achieve permanency will transition successfully into adulthood.

This issue of *Fostering Perspectives* spotlights the important role foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers play in North Carolina’s efforts to live up to this commitment.

Their role is large. Children and their families, judges, social workers, and everyone else—we all rely on resource parents to understand what permanence is, why it matters, and how to support it.

That resource parents do so in a thousand different ways is a daily miracle. It is also a testament to their skill, resilience, flexibility, and care.

To support them in their essential work, this issue features information and suggestions related to reunification, adoption, guardianship, placement stability, the transition to adulthood, and much more.

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It’s the everyday things resource parents do

by Jamie Bazemore

We all know resource parents provide love, nurturing, and care to meet the immediate needs of young people in foster care. But their support for the child’s permanent plan is just as important. In this article, I’d like to highlight some of the ways resource parents take action every day to support permanence.

The Permanent Plan

North Carolina’s child welfare system is built on the belief that children should be raised by their families whenever possible. For that reason, when a child or youth enters foster care, reunification is almost always the first goal—officially this is called a “permanent plan.” If the court eventually determines a child cannot grow up safely with their family of origin, the permanent plan for that child becomes adoption, guardianship, or another form of permanency.

Shared Parenting

When I think about the everyday things resource parents do to help children and youth achieve permanency, shared parenting is at the top of my list. Shared parent-

ing is the practice of developing an active partnership with the young person’s family. Building this relationship bolsters the child’s well-being, and it supports reunification.

As my former colleague and former foster parent Donna Foster has written, “When foster parents and birth parents participate in shared parenting, the child wins! This relationship can continue when the child goes home. I was surprised that I became friends with my children’s birth parents. I was welcomed in their homes after their families were reunited.”

“When I showed them respect for being their child’s parents and looked for shared parenting opportunities,” Donna explains, “the fight in them moved into doing what was required to get their family back together. I was not the enemy, but the advocate” (Foster, 2011).

A shared parenting approach is useful even if reunification is no longer the plan. When resource parents build a relationship with a child’s future adoptive parent or guardian, it makes the child’s transition to

Their countless thoughtful actions encourage both legal permanence and permanent connections for children and youth.

that forever home easier. For more on shared parenting, please see the sidebar on the next page.

Visitation and Contact

Actively supporting visitation and frequent contact is another everyday thing resource parents do to support permanency. Maintaining children’s connections to family

helps their well-being. And, like shared parenting, it can smooth their return home.

Resource parents do a lot to ensure the success of visits and contact. For example, they advocate: if contact isn’t taking place, they ask why. They advocate that birth parents attend medical appointments and school meetings whenever possible. They also provide transportation to visits, supervise visits, host visits in their homes, and set up video calls. Other examples of how resource parents support and enhance connection through visits, include:

- Sending the child to visits with artwork, schoolwork, or even homework they can do with their parents.
- Sending the child to visits dressed in clothing that the birth parents have provided for them, to make it clear that the resource

continued next page

It's the everyday things

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parent recognizes and honors them as the child's parents.

- Writing down important information such as milestones, new food choices, and other updates in a journal and sending it with the child to visits.
- Arranging the child's schedule so the parent can feed their baby a bottle or give their child a snack during the visit.

These and countless other thoughtful actions encourage permanent connections for children and youth.

Real Communication

Resource parents know we can't achieve permanence for kids in foster care without honest, transparent communication. One important example is when resource parents are engaged partners during Child and Family Team Meetings, or CFTs.

CFTs are golden opportunities to discuss and address decisions, barriers, and successes associated with the youth's permanent plan. By actively engaging in these meetings in partnership with the young person, resource parents help everyone focus on the urgent need to achieve permanence. To learn more about Child and Family Team meetings in North Carolina, take the online course "Introduction to Child and Family Teams." You can find it here: <https://bit.ly/3d4Sj7e>.

Resource parents also communicate one-on-one with birth families. They provide daily updates on the child, ask parents for information about the child, model and reinforce parenting skills, and engage as a partner in supporting the family's success.

Managing Feelings

Resource parents also contribute to permanence by acknowledg-

I deeply appreciate all the ways resource parents contribute to permanence for kids in foster care!

ing and managing the complicated, difficult feelings connected to it. This is some of the hardest work they do.

When we achieve or are on the threshold of achieving permanence for a child, resource parents are excited and want to celebrate. At the same time, they often feel a deep sense of loss.

If the young person is leaving the resource parent's home—whether through reunification, adoption, or guardianship—the resource parent often feels sad because they will miss caring for them and seeing them every day. Even if the youth is staying put and the resource parent is adopting them or becoming their guardian, emotions can be mixed. This is especially true if the child is severing legal connections to their family, even if the family will remain an active part of their life once the adoption or guardianship is finalized.

For any resource parents out there who struggle with this, I would encourage you not to struggle alone. Please communicate openly about any feelings of grief and loss you are experiencing with your licensing worker and professional supports. Participating in support groups and attending training on grief and loss (such as the course found here: <https://bit.ly/3lS3rZl>) may also be helpful.

Gratitude

I hope this article makes clear my deep sense of appreciation and gratitude for the many ways resource parents contribute to permanence for children and youth in foster care. To put it plainly, we couldn't do it without them.

Jamie Bazemore, BSW, MSW is the Child Welfare Program Consultant for Cansler Collaborative Resources and the Adoption Facilitator for Stephenson & Fleming, LLP.

Shared Parenting Strategies to Support Permanence

Placement

When children enter your home, everyone and everything is strange to them. They are wondering what they did wrong to make them leave their parents. They are afraid and confused. In this situation, possible child behaviors can include crying, screaming, shaking, running away, cursing, defiance, silence, bed-wetting, and fear (e.g., of the dark, the bathroom, people in the home). Here's what resource parents can do in this situation:

- **Call.** Before the social worker leaves your home, get the parents' phone number and permission to make phone contact. If permission is denied for the child to talk to the parents, get permission to talk to the parents yourself.
- **Have empathy.** When they enter your home, children don't need to see smiles and hear they are going to the zoo tomorrow. They need to hear you say that all of their feelings are okay here. You might say, "It must be scary being here. What can we do to make you less scared? You can ask us anything." Then, listen. Most children will ask about their parents and when they will go home.
- **Make it clear you care about the child's parents.** Tell the child you will try and call his parents. "Your mom is upset too because she didn't want you to leave her. You are here with us while other people are helping your mom so she can take care of you again. I am going to let her know that you miss her. I bet your mama knows what you need at bedtime to help you sleep and she knows your favorite food. You want me to ask her? Tell me about your mom. What does she do to make you laugh?"
- **Get permission for the child to talk to the parents.** Hearing a parent's voice will calm the child. True, the child may cry during or after the call, but the more he feels he can talk to his parents, the less upset he will be. In time, he won't need to make as many calls because he knows he can contact them. The more he hears his birth and resource parents having calm discussions concerning him, the sooner he will feel secure and safe.
- **Offer comfort items.** These can include a nightlight, sleeping bags, their own toiletries, a tour of the house. Prepare an album about your family, with photos listing names and descriptions of rooms, people, and other helpful information for the child to review.

Visits

- Visits can be very emotional for children. Before and after visits you may find that children are defiant, crying, withdrawn, confused about which parents to align with, aggressive, disrupted in their eating and sleeping, etc. Here are some things that can help:

Before and during visits:

- Make a "Visit Box" with the child. The child puts in items he wants to share with his parents. When the visit is over, the parents encourage the child to find more things to bring to the next visit. The parents can bring to the visit a box with items from home.
- Take photos of the child with their birth family. Make a copy for the parents. The child's copies can be placed in his life book and a copy framed for his room.
- With the parents, use a calendar to show the child when the next visit will be. The child can put a sticker on the calendar each day until the visit day.
- If the parents send clothes, dress the child for the visit in those clothes.

After visits:

- Arrange for the child to talk to his parents by phone.
- The parents can share with the resource parent and social worker any of the close relationships the child has so they can be contacted. These people can continue their relationships with the child. Examples: extended family members, teachers, and neighbors.
- Ask the child to share his favorite parts of the visit.
- Be understanding. If the child doesn't want to eat the next meal, have a light snack instead. The child may have eaten snacks at the visit or the child's emotions may make him unable to eat.

Adapted from Donna Foster's "Shared Parenting Can Reduce Disruptive Behaviors," *Fostering Perspectives* Vol. 16, No. 1

Paths to permanence for NC children & youth in foster care

What is “permanence” and how is it achieved in the context of North Carolina’s child welfare system?

Legal Permanence

The courts and child welfare system focus a great deal on achieving legal permanence for children and youth in foster care. **Legal permanence** occurs when the young person has a lasting, legally secure relationship with at least one adult. This adult must have a significant relationship with the young person and agree to protect, provide for, and nurture them into adulthood. Here “legally secure” means the adult has legal responsibility for the child and legal authority to make decisions on their behalf, such as enrolling them in school and consenting for medical care.

The goal is for the child or youth to have a family that will stick with them for the rest of their lives. Everyone needs a home where they know they’ll be safe, loved, and supported for the long haul. Every young person deserves a family where they feel chosen and that they belong.

Children and youth who achieve permanence become more resilient and have better outcomes. The consistent, loving adults in their lives help buffer and minimize the impact of past trauma (Tilbury & Osmond, 2006).

Other Kinds of Permanence

In addition to legal permanence, there are two other important kinds of permanence. **Relational permanence** is an emotional attachment between the youth and caregivers and other family members and kin. Often even when legal permanence isn’t possible, relational permanence is.

North Carolina has made relational per-

manence one of the primary outcomes focused on by NC LINKS, our state’s independent living program. For each teen in foster care we seek to build a personal support system of at least five caring adults.

There’s also **cultural permanence**, which is about maintaining a continuous connection to family, tradition, race, ethnicity, culture, language and religion. The importance of maintaining cultural ties is emphasized in resource parent preservice training and is supported by shared parenting and by proactive, respectful communication with children’s families.

Pathways to Permanence

Reunification, adoption, and legal guardianship are the major pathways to permanency in North Carolina.

Reunification is the primary plan for most children and youth in foster care. Reunification occurs when the young person permanently returns to their parents’ home. Before this occurs, parents must demonstrate they can ensure the child’s safety and well-being. When reunification happens, the court returns legal custody of the child to the parents and DSS “closes the case.”

If the child or youth cannot return home, the first choice for a permanent home is with a relative. If the child is already placed with kin, the kinship caregiver will be approached about becoming the child’s permanent caregiver through adoption or legal guardianship.

Adoption. According to North Carolina policy, adoption is the preferred way to achieve permanency when reunification isn’t possible. Adoption establishes a lifelong relationship where the adoptive parent has the

Every young person deserves a family where they feel chosen and that they belong.

same rights and responsibilities as a birth parent. Blood relatives, kin, foster parents, and other individuals with a substantial relationship with the child can be considered for adoption.

Before a child can be adopted, they must be “legally free.” This can happen when both parents voluntarily give up their parental rights or when social services asks the court to terminate parental rights. This is commonly called “TPR.” Termination of a parent’s rights means they permanently lose their right to make decisions for the child as well as their ability to change or regain custody. Once TPR occurs, the parent cannot ask the court to reconsider.

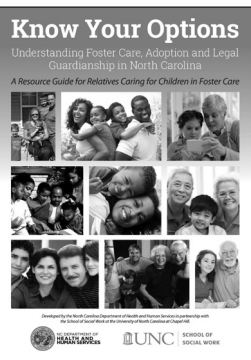
Legal Guardianship is a path to permanence when reunification and adoption are not possible. Guardians have legal authority to provide for and act on behalf of a child. Unlike adoption, guardianship does not require TPR, nor does it give guardians the exact same legal rights and responsibilities as birth parents.

Guardianship is most often appropriate for older youth. It is not recommended for children under age 5 unless the guardian is a relative. Guardianship continues until terminated by a court order, the youth is emancipated, or they reach age 18. Although it legally ends at 18, the hope is that the guardian’s relationship with the child will continue for a lifetime.

Learn More

To learn more about permanence and the different pathways used to achieve it, please consult the resources in the box below.

Learn More

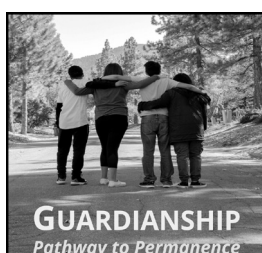


Know Your Options

This guide outlines the resources, supports, and benefits available to kinship caregivers in North Carolina. Explains the foster care, adoption, and legal guardianship processes and includes a helpful chart that compares different types of kinship placements. Available at <https://bit.ly/3dtQPDB>.

Guardianship: Pathway to Permanence

This free, 1-hour course provides North Carolina resource parents information about guardianship. The course explores differences and similarities between adoption and guardianship and includes interviews in which North Carolina guardians explain why they chose this pathway to permanence and what it has been like for them. Hosted on FosteringNC.org, North Carolina’s learning site for foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers. Available at <https://fosteringnc.org/on-demand-courses/#guardianship>



Youth Perspectives on Permanence

Don’t miss this memorable 2-minute video, in which three young people from North Carolina share their thoughts about what permanence means to them. Available at <https://bit.ly/31V0mOQ>

What about Custody?

Custody is when a person or entity (such as a county DSS) has legal responsibility for a child and legal authority to make decisions on their behalf.



The specific rights and responsibilities of a custodians vary because they are defined by the court. As with guardianship, custody can be awarded to a relative or any person chosen by the court.

Custody is not as legally secure as adoption or guardianship. The court can restore custody to a parent at any time if it decides the parent is capable of caring for the child.

Typically, when custody is granted, involvement with child welfare services ends and DSS “closes the case.”

Also, custodians are not eligible to receive some of the financial assistance and other supports available to adoptive parents and guardians.

Supporting cultural permanence by Tonia Deese



Tonia Deese

As a resource parent, you have an important role in supporting all areas of permanence for children and youth in care. Permanency is not just about long-term living arrangements and who has legal responsibility for the child. In this article, I will focus on **cultural**

Children have a right to experience stability and continuity of relationships with their family, community, and culture.

permanence, or maintaining a child's connection to their family, traditions, race, ethnicity, culture, language, and religion.

To put it another way, children and youth have a "right to experience stability and continuity of meaningful relationships" with their family, community, and culture (Bennett, 2015).

Cultural Permanence Matters

Cultural permanence is important in part because it affects outcomes:

- Loss of connection to culture can negatively impact social, emotional, and mental health.
- Strong ties to one's culture improves well-being, coping skills, and self-esteem.
- Cultural ties give youth a sense of connection to a larger community and support system, which are important to building resilience.
- Cultural connections can promote psychological safety by reminding youth they have a community that loves, understands, and accepts them.
- Traditions from cultural and faith communities can help youth heal from grief and trauma.

(Bennett, 2015; Payne, 2017; Stafanson, 2019)

From My Own Perspective

As an Indigenous woman, I know the identity struggle well. For many years, I struggled with identity, as I faced stereotypes and discrimination due to my culture. However, I

had the benefit of being from a tight-knit tribal community. I had parents, grandparents, aunts, and many others who were there to teach me about my culture. This helped me to understand who I am. Without my community, I don't

know if I would have successfully navigated this struggle. For children and youth in care, who do they have to turn to in their search for identity?

For American Indian people, culture is deeply connected to who we are. When we lose our culture, we lose our sense of self and we lose resources that can help us bounce back from trauma. To this point, I'd like to share the words of two Indigenous youth interviewed in *Focus on Adoption* magazine:

- "I've always felt disconnected. I am [now] connected to my culture. It's extremely important. It saved my life. All the missing pieces of the puzzle came together and it makes sense."
- "My parents were not shy about letting us know it [culture] was a part of us...One thing I did get from my biological side is my spiritual side. I found peace and harmony with my spiritual side."

Kelly Davie, the social worker for these youth, also sees the impact of cultural permanency: "I have had the honour of accompanying children and youth to their home communities...It's hard to describe how happy the children were to be on the land, to be with their family and witness the ceremonies, to belong...they stand taller and carry themselves with greater confidence" (Payne, 2017).

While I shared an American Indian perspective, **cultural permanence is important for everyone**. "We must protect and preserve the unique cultural identity of every child and family" (Bennett, 2015).

Conclusion

With so many things to attend to when a child comes into care, it is easy for cultural connections to slip off our radar. Be an advocate to ensure cultural permanency is an area of focus, as it truly is in the best interest of the child. Wondering how you can support cultural permanence as a resource parent? See the box below for ideas.

Tonia Jacobs Deese is a member of the Waccamaw Siouan Tribe and a clinical assistant professor with the UNC-CH School of Social Work.

How Resource Parents Can Support Cultural Permanence

- Advocate for an individualized plan to ensure the child remains connected to their culture.
- Work hard to keep youth connected to their extended family, kin, and their cultural community.
- Take the child to visit their cultural community on a regular basis.
- Make room for the child to learn about their language, traditions, and spiritual/cultural beliefs—preferably from elders in their community.
- Expose youth to positive role models in their culture (through books, TV shows, museums, movies, etc.).
- Similarly, connect youth to a cultural mentor they can learn from and look up to. The tribal office, church, synagogue, mosque, or other community organization can help you find a mentor.

(Bennett, 2015; Payne, 2017; Stafanson, 2019)

June is reunification month!

June is Reunification Month, the perfect time for resource parents to reflect on their role in supporting reunification. There is promising evidence that building a strong relationship between parents and resource parents increases the likelihood of reunification.

"When foster parents support or mentor birth parents, they can enhance the ability of birth parents to stay informed about their children's development while they are in out-of-home care, improve parenting skills, increase placement stability, and lead to more timely reunifications" (CWIG, 2017).

The American Bar Association Center on Children and Law developed a Tip Sheet for resource parents on supporting family reunification based on interviews with experienced resource parents. Their concrete tips center around four key themes.

1. Respect parents and be compassionate.
2. Encourage visitation and regular contact.
3. Communicate with the family regularly.
4. Remember that safe reunification is best for the children.

To access this valuable resource and learn more about concrete actions you can take in these four categories, visit <https://bit.ly/3cmCtFR>.



What do youth think about relational permanence?

SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out), is a statewide, North Carolina-based association of youth aged 14 to 24 who are or have been in out-of-home care. This includes all types of substitute care, including foster care, group homes, and mental health placements.

Every year on the first Saturday in March, SaySo holds a gathering where youth from all over North Carolina can attend workshops, meet new people, and share ideas. They call it "SaySo Saturday."

This year's event included a workshop about building connections. It featured a panel of foster care alumni and adopted youth that was also moderated by foster care alumni.

Afterwards, Erin Conner, our state's NC LINKS Coordinator, shared the following definition:

Relational Permanence:

This concept recognizes that many types of important long-term relationships help a child or young person feel loved and connected, such as relationships with brothers and sisters, family friends and extended family, and former foster family members.

Conner then asked the youth and young adults what relational permanence meant to them.

One youth opened up, followed by others. As you can see from the responses in the box at right, relational permanence is something youth and young adults with lived experience of North Carolina's child welfare system know a lot about!



SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out), is a statewide, North Carolina-based association of youth aged 14 to 24 who are or have been in out-of-home care. This includes all types of substitute care, including foster care, group homes, and mental health placements.

www.saysoinc.org
email: sayso@chsnc.org

What Relational Permanence Means to Me

Responses from youth attending SaySo Saturday 2021

When I first got into my current placement, I got frustrated about school and raised my voice, and my foster mom told me to go take a break or a walk and I did. When I came back inside I apologized for being angry, and she told me I had no reason to apologize and it was OK to be angry. I almost cried because that was the first time anyone had told me it was OK to express negative emotions.

I think respect is the most important part in relational permanence. A thing a lot of adults that work with foster kids don't understand is that respect goes both ways. You can't have an authoritative or loving relationship with a kid if you're expecting respect from them but not giving it.

Someone that will help you. This means to me that I can have someone who can give you opinions and that you can trust that opinion.

Someone who is loyal, honest, trusted, and reliable.

Someone that is gonna help you through everything and not gonna hurt you even if you do wrong.

What it means to me is the family and friends that I am close to support me in many ways, such as school and supporting me for graduation and supporting me to go to college and not giving up along the way. Someone who believes in me and who I am and who I'm supposed to be and someone I can put all my trust in and be able to talk to them about anything. That's what it means to me.

It means to me a person that can stay down with you even if you're going through some things.

Someone who will be here no matter what. They are the definition of family but don't need to be blood.

Someone that will support you through everything, even if you have nothing. Someone you can trust without a doubt in mind. Even if you are lonely they will be there for you because they care and want you to be happy. My friends and family are everything to me, although some of my family don't care about me. Give me advice when most needed.

Family can be established in so many different ways.

Creating your family of choice of people in your life is often more supportive, even if you do have biological family. Sometimes biological family cannot be what you need so no matter your situation, create your own family of choice... we all have to do it... even those not from the foster care system. That is the family that helps us grow into the person we want to be.

It can be the simplest thing, like give me a hug.

Whenever someone learns my love language so that they can help and assist me makes me feel like they care.

Just you got to be the bigger person. Life is like a running trail, you just gotta keep running and not trip.

I am the person I am today because all of the people who have shaped me in every way. My family and friends show how much they care by supporting me and spending time together.

Point of View: My Adoption Process by Shanita Dildy-Goings

I was 13 years old when my foster parents first proposed adopting my big sister and me.

My big sister said that she would think about it, but I knew she had already made up her mind not to take them up on their offer. They were not bad parents, just not the parent she truly wanted—our mother.

I said I would think about it, but I knew I was going to say yes.

I was very adult about the whole thing up until the day before we were to sign the adoption papers. During all the meetings and discussions leading up to this day it had never occurred to me that I would have to give up my last name. My parents told me I didn't have to, but it would make them feel good knowing I took their name. I felt guilty toward my former guardian whose last name I shared, and guilty to my future parents whose name I was hesitant to take. In no way did they or anyone else pressure me to take on a new name. But my own sense of identity and reluctance to change started to change my mind toward the adoption.

My parents could see the name change bothered me. They were "family meeting" people, so we had a family meeting about it. Together we decided to hyphenate my name so I could always have a piece of my birth family and a piece of their family. I signed the adoption papers (a bit awkwardly) the next day. My new signature was going to need some getting used to.

My new family, however, required no effort at all.



Shanita
Dildy-Goings



Permanence: What does it mean in real life?

Reflections from NC's Child Welfare Family Advisory Council by Jeanne Preisler

The N.C. Division of Social Services entered unknown territory a few years ago to develop the North Carolina Child Welfare Family Advisory Council (CWFAC).

All the Voices at the Table

This council is unique because it has all perspectives “at the table” engaged in meaningful conversations and problem-solving. This includes birth parents, kinship parents, foster parents, adoptive parents, and young adult alumni of the foster care system. These CWFAC members meet with state and county staff to dive in and develop solutions to problems that will work for the families the system serves. I have the great honor and privilege to work with these amazing people, each striving to improve family engagement and develop families as leaders in child welfare.

If you have connected with child welfare in the past few decades, you have likely heard staff often use the phrase “safety, permanency, and well-being.” Each of these words is defined by our federal partners, but they are also words used in everyday language, so many people understand them differently. For this article, we wanted to look more closely at permanency.

Perspectives on Permanency

The federal definition for permanency is “children have permanency and stability in their living situations and that family relationships and connections are preserved.” But what does that mean in real life?

To find out, I asked some CWFAC members. I hope sharing a variety of views on permanency will help resource parents feel better equipped to work in partnership with their child’s family of origin, and that children will heal and thrive more quickly.

CWFAC members thought of permanency similarly but framed it differently. Some thought of it as a destination, others a feeling, while others thought of it as a commitment.

A Destination. From a destination perspective, the word permanency was the resolution of a deeply personal, sensitive, and often painful and complicated family issue. It was the process of interacting with Child Protective Services. It was all of the meetings, the case plans, the anxiety, and emotions. It was a long, transformational experience.

A Feeling. From a feeling perspective, permanency is a place where the child or youth feels supported and feels a connection. When a feeling of connection is made, the youth gains a sense of belonging and can begin to get their needs met. The sense of belonging can be instant or it can take a while. But at the end of the day, the child feels accepted for who they are.

A Commitment. From a commitment perspective, permanency means forever. As CWFAC member Barbara Young put it, “It means being there for a child on their first day of school, their first day behind the wheel,

Some thought of it as a destination, others a feeling, others as a commitment.

their first job, their first love, and their first heartbreak. It means supporting them emotionally and financially, helping them set goals and reach for the stars. It means watching them grow into young men and young women who have

a sense of purpose.” Permanency is providing youth with life-long support so they have a home for the holidays. It means being grandparents for their future children.

It's Never Too Late

And it’s never too late for permanence. My daughters (one through kinship and one through foster care) are in their 30’s now. We processed their adult adoptions just last year. In my mind, I was always their forever home. But their adult adoptions helped them know it more completely. And it’s lovely to be able to legally call them my daughters and have a legal relationship with my granddaughter. I’ll say it again: it’s never too late for permanence.

And no matter which perspective they viewed permanency from—as a destination, a feeling, or a commitment—each CWFAC member I spoke to highlighted the importance of keeping the child connected to their family of origin, even if permanence is not possible with them. As one put it, “We aren’t rewriting the young person’s narrative to remove the child’s first family. We’re only adding to it.”

Jeanne Preisler is a Program Coordinator with the Center for Family and Community Engagement at NC State University. She would like to thank Kelly Kirk, Barbara Young, and Gina Brown for speaking with her for this article.

What to say when children and youth reunify

Agencies often encourage resource parents to use their natural supports and resources while providing care to children in foster care. And rightly so! Having a strong support system helps you weather the surprises and occasional storms that inevitably come their way.

Yet when children must leave your home because permanency has been achieved, the people you rely on and are close to may have a lot of questions.

Here are some tips for responding to those questions, managing the event in your family and community, and making sure the overall transition is healthy and positive for everyone involved.

Tips for a Healthy Transition

- **Maintain confidentiality.** Specifically, avoid sharing significant details about progress made by the parents or the child’s needs.
- **Educate and celebrate.** Make sure your friends and family understand how important resource parents are in your community. This is a chance to celebrate your role in the successful return of the child to their family.
- **Don’t neglect yourself.** Seek support through your licensing agency to ensure you are managing your losses as the children return home. While reunification is positive for all involved, there are inherent losses you need to acknowledge and grieve.
- **Prepare a response.** If this is an emotionally difficult transition for you, prepare a stock answer such as, “The kids have returned to their parents. We’re excited for them but sad for us and not ready to talk about it yet.” Honor and validate everyone’s feelings, even feelings that conflict.
- **Smooth the way for the child.** It is very important that children receive the same message from all adults involved, including “emotional permission” to leave the home and community.
- **Make sure the children get a chance to say goodbye** to friends, family, and community members if they will not remain a daily part of their lives. This will also prepare everyone for the transition and prevent you from having to answer questions once the children have left. Some suggestions would be to have your community add letters, drawings, or pictures to the child’s life book; host a party for the children and their parents; talk to the children about who they want to share news of their transition with and allow them the opportunity to say farewell.
- **Don’t jump to conclusions.** Do not assume that because the children are leaving your home, they’ll no longer be a part of your life or community. The intention of shared parenting is for birth and resource parents to work together to parent children. Shared parenting can continue after reunification, with you and your community providing ongoing support and love to the children and their parents.
- **Always plan for transitions and work with your licensing agency** to manage the conversations and information you share before, during, and after a child’s transition.



How one NC agency is supporting permanence

An interview with Tammy Bradley from Children's Hope Alliance

Knowing where we will be tonight, tomorrow, and even next year is a privilege many of us take for granted. For children and youth in foster care, uncertainty about the future causes a great deal of stress and anxiety that affects them on countless levels.

Tammy Bradley, Foster Care Director at Children's Hope Alliance, says that at her agency the work of removing that uncertainty and achieving permanency begins as soon as a child is placed. "We let our foster parents know from the beginning that for most children the goal is reunification. We expect them to actively participate in shared parenting."

Children's Hope Alliance staff coach foster families weekly on the importance of shared parenting and permanence. Bradley says they expect foster parents to learn about things like the child's favorite foods and how to soothe them at night. "Familiar rituals and routines are important," she explains. "They are part of permanence."

Bradley's agency uses something called the Teaching Family Model, an approach that helps youth build supportive relationships and social, relational, and interpersonal skills. "Children having strong relationships is key to positive outcomes," Bradley says.

Her agency also provides training for their staff called "Disrupting Disruptions." This course teaches them to spot and respond to warning signs so they can prevent unnecessary placement moves.

Children's Hope Alliance also supports permanency by identifying natural supports for every youth it serves. Natural supports can be relatives, friends, teachers, or anyone else the child would benefit staying connected to. Relationships are part of permanence.

Like many child welfare professionals, Bradley has seen the harmful effects when children struggle to find permanency. "It can seem almost like a domino effect," she says. "If there's a sudden placement change, it can make it hard for them to find stability, which can lead to even more moves." The effects of moving start to compound and negatively impact the young person's well-being.

But Bradley has also seen many successes. As an example, she shares the story of a young man placed with their agency. From the start, his foster parents and birth mother were committed to shared parenting. They communicated honestly and without judgment.

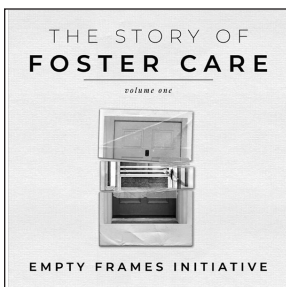
"Then, during what had been a typical meeting, the mom asked the foster parents if they would adopt her son. She said she knew she was not in a place where she could provide the stability the foster parents could and wanted to give everyone her blessing to move forward with adoption."

Bradley says this mom celebrates holidays with her son and his adoptive family and speaks with them frequently.

"There is no right way to achieve permanency," Bradley says. "It can look like reunification, adoption, guardianship, or a variety of other ways."

Everyone involved in North Carolina's child welfare system wants children and youth in foster care to have the reassurance of permanence. We want them to know where they'll be tonight, tomorrow, and next year.

Children's Hope Alliance is a private child-placing agency that provides foster care and other services throughout NC. Visit <https://www.childrenshopealliance.org>.



Book Review

The Story of Foster Care, Volume One by Jeanne Preisler

I initially purchased the book *The Story of Foster Care Volume One* by Empty Frames Initiative (<https://bit.ly/3rVWjMK>) because of its North Carolina connection. Three of the authors were involved with the North Carolina

Child Welfare Family Advisory Council and I wanted to honor them by purchasing their work. Little did I know when the book arrived a short time later just how impactful it would be. *The Story of Foster Care* is a unique compilation of photos, stories, poems, and quotes beautifully woven together to illustrate "the complex nature of the United States foster care system."

Part of the book's success is that it highlights diverse perspectives, including those of former foster youth, social workers, and foster parents. It is not for the squeamish. The first page holds a content warning: "mature content, discretion is advised." But to authentically discuss the experience of foster care we have to hear the stories, and some of those are heartbreaking.

The book sprang out of "Storytelling Through Photography," an Empty Frames Initiative curriculum about helping empower youth as they age out of foster care. Believing that each individual story is important, the Empty Frames Initiative team has created a truly special book. Not only did the book aid in the healing of the authors involved, but it holds enormous value as an educational tool for the child welfare community.

This book is especially timely for the theme of this issue of *Fostering Perspectives*: "resource parents supporting permanence." How can we expect to truly support permanence without fully understand-

ing all the dimensions of foster care? In the excerpt below, Sarah Chambers describes her foster mom as a "breath of restorative air," who showed her she was "worthy of time and healing." Is that not what supporting permanence is all about? Restoration through our time and allowing the love for the youth to prevail no matter what.

For anyone looking for a new book club option, a small group discussion within your faith community, or topics to discuss at your next foster/adoptive support group meeting, I recommend this book. Not only will you have plenty to discuss, you'll get tangible ideas on how to take action after reading it.

Respite for My Soul by Sarah Chambers

At 16, I went to live with my foster mom Chris after being released from juvenile detention. I had spent years running away in search of change. I've described Chris as a breath of restorative air, air which I had been gasping for my whole life. And then one day like an answer to a prayer that I had almost let go ...there she was, a stranger opening her home to me despite knowing my chaos.

Chris wasn't an especially emotional woman, she passed the time with me playing cards, at times validated my past hurts which I only spoke of when prompted, she gave me quiet comfort and a stability I had never known.

I know what created a shift in me; it was how she invested time in me. I vividly remember her glancing at her clock, preparing to take me to visitation, medical appointments, counseling, social activities. Her actions showed me I was worthy of time and healing.

Today, her clock hangs in my home, reminding me to be conscious of what I choose to spend time in; it is our most worthy resource.

From "The Story of Foster Care Volume One" by Empty Frames Initiative

Placement stability: What resource parents can do

Moves for children and youth in foster care can be traumatic. They can also undermine permanency efforts. Changing placements can increase the risk a young person will develop behavioral challenges that make it harder to achieve reunification, adoption, or another permanency outcome (Casey Family Programs, 2018).

The opposite is also true. A stable placement that meets their needs offers children and youth immediate and long-term benefits and can pave the way for timely permanence.

Benefits

Children and youth do better when they have stable, healthy relationships with loving caregivers who meet their needs. These relationships are a foundation that keeps their development on track and makes it easier for them to form trusting relationships when they grow up (Wulczyn, 2010). Kids in out-of-home care need the adult connections, consistency, and predictability that come with being in a stable home (Pecora, 2010).

What Can You Do?

As a resource parent there are things you can do to help ensure stability for the young people in your care. They include:

Make an informed decision. On an ongoing basis, be mindful of where you are as a resource family. What child needs can you meet? Which can you not? When your agency calls about a possible placement, ask as many questions as you need. Only you can say whether the child is an appropriate match for you and your family.

Ask for help. Placements sometimes disrupt because families wait too long before seeking help. Ask for help before you are past the breaking point.

Use respite. Respite care is not just for emergencies. It is a break that allows resource parents to renew their energy, which can enhance the quality and the longevity of placements.

Learn. Research suggests placements are more stable when resource parents have a clear understanding of the issues children are struggling with and have the knowledge and skills they need to parent them successfully. In particu-

lar, resource parents should learn all they can about:

- Trauma and other issues that affect children and youth in foster care;
- How to advocate effectively for mental health and educational services; and
- Appropriate behavior management techniques, especially for young people struggling with trauma, mental health issues, and oppositional/aggressive behavior.

Support family connections. The child's connections with their parents, siblings, friends, and other family members can add to their sense of stability. Maintaining a sense of connection and stability is important for children, especially those with a history of trauma.

Maintain your own support system. Strong connections to your own family, friends, faith community, and other resource parents help you stay healthy and ready to look after the children and youth in your care.



How agencies can (and should) support children and resource families when placements end

Foster care placements are temporary—they are meant to end. This is made abundantly clear in recruiting materials and in foster parent pre-service training. In court and in ongoing meetings there are frequent reminders of this fact.

Nevertheless, the ending of a placement can be particularly hard for the children and resource family. Fortunately, there are things child welfare professionals can do to help resource parents and children achieve closure. Helpful steps agencies can take include:

1. Talk with the Children. It's important to allow children the chance to express any feelings they may have about saying goodbye, which can include feelings of abandonment, sadness, anxiety, or unworthiness. Some children might act out around this time, so agencies should help resource parents prepare to provide extra support as needed. Don't let feelings of guilt or stress lead the adults to minimize or avoid talking about negative feelings (Bostic & Shadid, 1996). While ideally this process could happen before a child leaves, in reality it might be the new caregivers who give the child this opportunity.

2. Talk with the Resource Parents. Foster parents and kinship caregivers also need a chance to express their emotions, which may come out gradually. While they can share feel-

ings of sadness with the child, there may be other feelings (such as relief or fear for the child's future) that cannot be shared with the child but need a safe outlet.

Resource parents may still need support AFTER the child has left the home. Agencies can sometimes help families process their feelings—and avoid burn-out and turnover—by asking them to reflect on the experience after a week or two. What were their expectations when the child arrived? What was it like while the child lived with them? What are their hopes for the child's future?

3. Pictures and Letters. Families and children can write letters or draw pictures for each other, depending on the child's age. This can be done either in preparation or after the fact, by mail. Resource parents should also consider spending time with the child updating his life book so the child has something to help him reflect on his time in the home. Make sure resource parents understand how important it is for them to tell the child he will be missed. Parents may also want to share something special that the family will remember or has learned from the child.

4. Reinforce Strengths and Lessons Learned. Families can also use time before a placement change—or the letter they send after the move—to reinforce and acknowledge



Agencies can reduce trauma to children when placements end by teaching resource parents to anticipate child reactions and by suggesting activities that help everyone reach closure.

the positive changes or successes the child has had, even if they were small steps. They can also help smooth the way for the new placement by asking the child what she's learned during their time together and what should be shared with the new placement providers about what was helpful or not helpful for her.

5. Assess Resource Parent Supports. When a child leaves is an excellent opportunity for workers to reassess with the family what informal or formal supports, information, or training might be helpful. Resource parents can use the change as a positive opportunity to make new connections, learn new skills, or simply think about how they might handle similar situations in the future.

Connections matter during the transition to adulthood

by Amy Huntsman

I have seen too many young people leave foster care without a trusted adult to help guide them. Sometimes they've spent years in group homes with no consistent caregiver. For some, the court and child welfare system has not allowed them to have an ongoing relationship with their family. For others, their trauma hinders them from being able to trust adults.

But I've also seen lots of success stories in which resource parents and other supportive adults have played an important role.

Kendra

Take Kendra, for example. Now 23 and an alumna of foster care, Kendra says her last foster mother was very supportive. When she was 17, her foster mother spoke with her often about being a responsible parent and encouraged her to look into career paths that would support her now and in the long run.

Kendra appreciates the way her foster parent, in combination with her Foster Care 18 to 21 program social worker and her birth family, helped her adjust to her first apartment. She also says the constant support she felt from her social worker was imperative. "In the program I had all the help I needed," Kendra says. "They were always there when I needed them the most."

Asked if there was one thing she wanted to say to resource parents, Kendra replied: "If you say you're going to always be there for a young person, you have to mean it. When young people reach out for help, they really need it. Reaching out isn't always easy—for anyone."

Our Responsibility

In my experience, young people exiting the

What teens in foster care really want is acceptance and an adult connection that is supportive, honest, and real.

system can be very guarded. Because of what they have been through, many feel rejected. Some personalize a sense of abandonment while others are able to overcome it and find motivation to persevere. Resource parents are critical to helping

teens in care be seen, heard, and feel normal after their tumultuous, traumatic childhoods.

I encourage the teams and social workers I work with to look outside the box to connect older teens with supports. Children who have been in foster care for a long time often had their connections to family severed due to unsafe conditions. However, by the time they are 16 or 17, circumstances in their family may have changed.

It is our responsibility to ask if there is still a valid reason for those family connections to be broken. If not, we need to help reconnect and rebuild them. This is what supporting our young people looks like. It's also a way to help to break cycles of neglect and systematic dependence.

Lack of Connection Means Real Risk

Without resource parents and adult supports, young adults exiting foster care are very much at risk. Youth who age out of foster care are at increased risk for homelessness, young parenthood, and unemployment (Rosenberg & Abbott, 2019). Despite access to education funding, less than 3% earn a college degree (National Foster Youth Institute, 2017). As many as one in four are incarcerated within two years of leaving the system (Pew, 2007).

But as Kendra's example shows, statistics are not destiny. Better short- and long-term outcomes are possible.

Listen to Kendra

Kendra entered foster care when she was 15. She had four placements in 2 years before she found the foster mom who would see her successfully into adulthood.

With support from her adult connections, Kendra graduated high school and completed an educational certificate to be a CNA and home health aide. She has an apartment in her own name and a beautiful car she financed on her own. Kendra has a daughter who just started kindergarten and is the light of her life.

Kendra's advice to teens in foster care and those who support them is to have an open mind. To that I would add:

- Don't judge a teen who appears to have a chip on their shoulder—what you're seeing is the pain they carry.
- Don't criminalize them if they break a window or you catch them smoking marijuana—they are just experiencing a normal teen life.
- Don't keep biological relatives away, even if they treated the young person poorly in the past—teens deserve the chance to form their own opinions.
- Understand that academics may not be their biggest priority—they may be more worried about last week's missed visit or if they will have to move again.

What teens in foster care really want is acceptance and an adult connection that is supportive, honest, and real.

Amy Huntsman is a licensing supervisor and adoptive parent from Asheville, NC. She has been working with children and families for over 20 years and is the proud mother of two girls, ages 7 and 8.



Amy Huntsman

Online Resources for Resource Parents



National Foster Parent Association

Supports foster parents in achieving safety, permanence, and well-being for the children and youth in their care. <https://nfpaonline.org/>



Resources for Foster or Adoptive Families

Center for Parent Information and Resources. Information and resources for foster or adoptive parents on raising or caring for a child with disabilities. <https://www.parentcenterhub.org/fosteradoptive/>



Support for Foster Parents

AdoptUSKids. Describes the basic aspects of fostering, including partnering with caseworkers, meeting the child's needs, preventing burnout, and learning resources. <https://bit.ly/3wlBvIm>



10 Resources for Foster Parents

Annie E. Casey Foundation. Resources to help you parent children in your care and navigate the child welfare system. Includes blog on keeping siblings together, a site on raising grandchildren, a magazine by parents who have experienced the system, and more. <https://bit.ly/3mdZqyr>



Families and Caregivers

National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Examines the effect of trauma on children throughout development and provides resources to guide parents. <https://bit.ly/3udNb7J>



Foster Care

Sesame Street in Communities. Helps children in out-of-home care cope with separation from their parents, placements in care, and reunification. <https://bit.ly/3cDYjEZ>



Never too old to have a family

by Jennifer Nehlsen

“When I was 16, I wasn’t ready for permanence in a family because I was hanging on to the hope that even after six years my mom would sober up and bring me back home. Since I was 13, I had never been in a placement longer than four to six months and I didn’t foresee this placement being any different.”

That’s how our daughter says she was thinking when, seven years ago, my husband and I received a call from our foster care licensing agency to say they had a 16-year-old girl in need of a placement. She asked if we would consider bringing her into our home. After speaking with our kids, then ages 11 and 18, we all said yes.

I cannot remember what her official permanent plan was, but efforts to achieve reunification had not been successful. Her wish was to have a safe place to stay until she aged out of the system. She had visits with her family and begrudgingly tolerated us until she moved out on her 18th birthday.

Little did she know, we had no plans to say goodbye. We were like a bad penny that kept appearing with check-in texts and calls, invites to grab coffee, and inclusion in holiday and vacation plans. Six and a half years after she first moved in, we undertook an adult adoption when she was ready to officially become part of our family.

“By the time I was 23,” she says, “I had a stable and consistent life with my [former foster] family. After feeling what a home was supposed to be and having parents and siblings who never turn their back when it gets bad, I realized that family sometimes chooses you and that it’s okay to allow yourself the luxury of an actual family and a forever home.”

North Carolina statute allows an adult to adopt another adult as

long as the adoptee consents to the adoption and they are not spouses. There is paperwork, of course, but it is a relatively easy process compared to the adoption of a child. Once the paperwork was filed, the fee paid, name chosen, and the 30-day notice to our other adult daughter had passed, the entire family met at the courthouse to sign the papers. The bureaucratic process did not do justice to the emotions felt by all present. My husband described it best when he said, “Trauma doesn’t stop when a young adult turns 18. Things do not magically fall into place with the blowing out of candles. Family is defined by love, not a timeframe.”

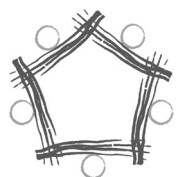
Sometimes older teens are not ready to commit to everything an adoption requires and signifies. Sometimes they need more time to heal and learn to trust. And sometimes they say yes when you ask if you can adopt them.

Adult adoption may be an option to explore for individuals who have aged out of the foster care system but either remain connected to or form a connection with a resource family. I encourage resource families and social workers to discuss this option, if appropriate, with older teens in foster care and those who opt into the Foster Care 18-21 program.

Additional information on adult adoptions can be found at <https://www.nccourts.gov/help-topics/family-and-children/adoption>.

Jennifer Nehlsen is the Guardian ad Litem Regional Administrator for NC’s 26 western counties. Jennifer leads a staff of 44 who recruit, train, and support 1,200 volunteers to serve as the voice for 3,200 abused and neglected children in this region. To learn more about Guardian ad Litem, visit www.volunteerforal.org.

My husband said it best: “Family is defined by love, not a timeframe.”



FFA-NC is here for you!

Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina is the voice of Foster Parents across NC. We have been incredibly busy working on a Bill of Rights. We had over 550 people fill out our survey; a draft bill is currently in progress. We hope to have it sponsored by a legislator before the close of this legislative session.

FFA-NC offers training to foster parents on the third Thursday of every month at 7 p.m. Sign up for our email and/or follow our Facebook page to get the information. Training topics covered in the past few months include FASD, neurobehavioral approaches to parenting, an introduction to the Resource Parent Curriculum, adoption, and guardianship. You can view recordings of our webinars here: <https://www.ffa-nc.org/events-training-webinars>.

FFA-NC is looking for volunteers for committees, the Board of Directors, and other areas. Please fill out our application, which you can find here: <https://www.ffa-nc.org/membership>. Indicate if you are interested in volunteering and in what capacity.

Lastly, FFA-NC is sponsoring a virtual summit for foster parents on **May 22, 2021**. Be on the lookout for a signup email, or go to our website (<https://www.ffa-nc.org>). There will be presentation about the NC Department of Juvenile Justice Raising the Age, IEPs, kinship, and many great presenters.

Come connect with other resource parents across North Carolina!

FFA-NC Board



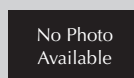
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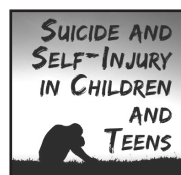
A learning site for North Carolina’s foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers

The NC Division of Social Services is proud to offer fosteringNC.org, a learning site for our state’s resource parents. This site features online courses, webinar recordings, videos and podcasts, and answers to frequently asked questions.

Free Online Courses Include:



Human Trafficking 101 for Resource Parents. This 90-minute course explains what human trafficking is, how to recognize it, and how North Carolina resource parents can respond.



Suicide and Self-Injury in Children and Teens. This 1-hour course helps foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers understand suicide and non-suicidal self-injury in children and adolescents and teaches them how to respond.

Foster parents are encouraged to talk in advance to their supervising agency about obtaining training credit through fosteringNC.org.

Join the fosteringNC.org List

To sign up to receive news and updates go to:

<http://eepurl.com/cEiAYP>

Explaining the concept of permanence to children in foster care

by Dina Gerber, MS, LCSW and Kelly Sullivan, PhD



Dina Gerber



Kelly Sullivan

Providing children with permanency is always part of the case plan from a DSS and legal point of view when children enter the child welfare system. However, from the child's point of view, the term permanence can be abstract and hard to understand. Even understanding why they are in care can be confusing!

The metaphor of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly can be helpful to understand how each phase builds on the other.

Often a child's therapist is asked to help a child understand the situation or help a resource parent explain to a child what being in care means. While it can be helpful for children to use supports, such as a therapist, it is best when resource parents feel comfortable explaining to children about foster care and their permanency plan because resource parents often are the primary source of emotional support to children in care.

Though they may not bring it up, children are wondering whether they will have permanency and with whom it will be. Therefore, it is important to talk with children in care about permanency, particularly when reunification is impending, when the plan shifts from reunification to adoption or guardianship, and when real permanency is currently lacking. Generally, humans, children included, function better when there is a sense of consistency and understanding of what to expect. To help a child or youth understand their situation there are several ideas a foster or kinship parent can keep in mind.

Three Phases

Ideally, caregivers can help break down the concept of permanence and the three phases that occur during a child's time in foster care. One way to describe permanence to children is to state it concretely, saying that permanence is when a child is living with the same person or people until they are grown. It is helpful to add that it can take a while to figure out something so important, like studying for a big test or building a house or any other metaphor the child may understand.

To get to a place of permanence there are three different phases the child and those around them will be going through: (1) waiting phase, (2) transition phase, (3) and permanence. Two books that can be helpful in breaking down the foster care situation are *Maybe Days: A Book for Children in Foster Care* by Jennifer Wilgocki and Marcia Kahn Wright and *Kids Need to be Safe: A Book for Children in Foster Care* by Julie Nelson.

The metaphor of a caterpillar turning into a butterfly can be helpful to understand how

each phase builds on the other and how each is important in its own way. Waiting for a caterpillar in a cocoon can take a while; it may not seem like many things are happening, but that cocoon phase is an important time for the caterpillar. Over time the caterpillar will emerge from the waiting and growing stage and change

into a butterfly. The butterfly's wings need some time to get strong (the transitioning phase) and then the butterfly is able to fly to a permanent home.

Waiting

The waiting phase can be the hardest for adults and children alike because there aren't many concrete answers to questions such as: "Where will I be living next month?" "Who will I be living with next?" "Will I get to go back with my mom/dad?" Even though everyone is working towards permanence and there are plans in place to be able to answer these questions one day, often adults don't know the answers when children ask them.

Questions should be answered as truthfully and age appropriately as possible and it is important to remember that saying "I don't know, but I will see what I can find out," is a powerful answer. No matter the situation, it is important to normalize and validate the child's questions and feelings of anger, fear, disappointment, and confusion. Being transparent about what you do or don't know can help a child give shape to what is happening and provide some relief from all the confusing feelings and questions that arise. Foster parents and kin caregivers should be prepared to have several conversations about permanency during this phase as information evolves and children change developmentally.

Transition

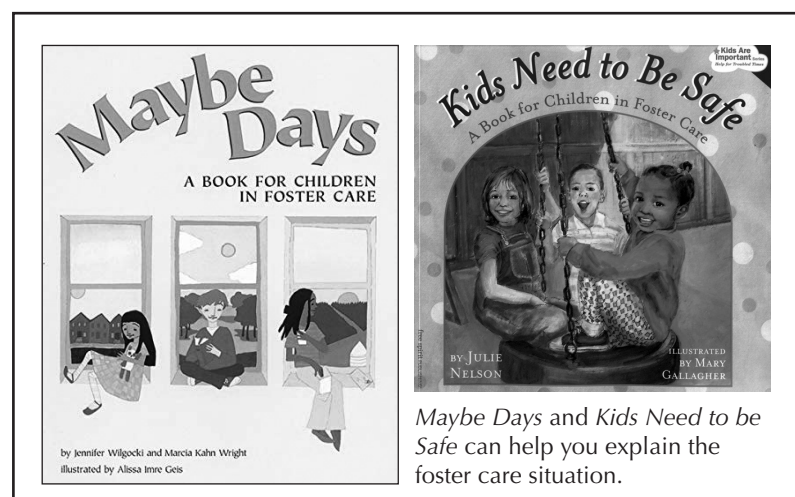
A child is in the transition phase once the permanent arrangement for the child is known and is not expected to change (e.g., reunification efforts have been successful or, conversely, termination of parental rights has occurred and a viable caregiver has agreed to adopt). Sometimes this phase can feel sudden, short, and discombobulating after all the unknowns that occurred during the waiting phase. To a child, and possibly some of the adults, this phase may emphasize the lack

of control they have over the child's permanence, since the judge has the final say in where the child will be living. One way to support children during this transition phase is by giving them control over choices they can influence. You can't often give them a choice about whether a step happens, but you can give them input into decisions about how or when something will happen. For example, the child's team may be able to give the child options about the type of continued contact they have with a former caregiver. Being able to exert some influence over their world is important for children to build their confidence and learn to understand how one's own behaviors affect themselves others.

Permanence

After waiting and transitioning comes actual permanence. When permanence is achieved there can be many different and mixed feelings, including anger, joy, and grief, sometimes experienced all at once and for years to come. It is important for the permanent caregiver(s) to make space for whatever feelings come up for the child, honoring any sense of loss or grief and realizing that feelings of doubt about true permanence are normal. During permanence, we have also learned from adults with childhood experiences in care that it is important to respect the connections and routines that developed during their time in care rather than pushing children to "move on and forget the past." While a butterfly may look completely different than the caterpillar, how the butterfly turns out is dependent on the phases that occurred before it.

Dina Gerber is a clinical faculty member and Kelly Sullivan is Director of Mental Health Services at the Center for Child & Family Health (<https://www.ccfhnc.org>).



Maybe Days and *Kids Need to be Safe* can help you explain the foster care situation.

Foster Care 18 to 21: A path to permanency

In 2017, North Carolina implemented an extended foster care program, Foster Care 18 to 21, for youth who exited foster care at age 18. National research shows that former foster youth are more likely to be unemployed, homeless, have no high school diploma, have a low income, and be incarcerated compared to the general population (National Youth in Transition Database, 2019). The Foster Care 18 to 21 program provides support and guidance as youth transition out of foster care and into adulthood. The program also helps to increase opportunities for youth to be successful and have their well-being needs met.

Young adults who age out of foster care face additional obstacles compared to their peers who have not experienced foster care. The National Youth in Transition Database report (2019) emphasized the importance of assisting young adults in identifying natural and system supports to aid in successful transition into adulthood. Ongoing participation in an extended foster care program was found to improve outcomes for young adults, compared to their peers who elected to exit from a foster care program.

Young adults are eligible for Foster Care 18 to 21 if the following criteria are met:

1. Was in foster care on their 18th birthday, and
2. Is between 18 and not yet 21 years of age, and
3. Meets one of the following criteria:
 - a. Completing secondary education or a program leading to an equivalent credential; or
 - b. Enrolled in an institution that provides postsecondary or vocational education; or
 - c. Participating in a program or activity designed to promote employment or remove barriers to employment; or
 - d. Employed for at least 80 hours per month; or
 - e. Incapable of completing the educational or employment requirements due to a medical condition or disability.

Foster Care 18 to 21 provides young adults more control over their goals and placement options. The social worker or case manager will work with the young adult to identify safe and stable living arrangements. Placements may be in licensed family foster care homes, residential facilities or semi-supervised living environments that may include their own apartment, college dorms, military housing, and other options approved by the local agency. North Carolina's ongoing commitment to safety, permanency, and well-being for older youth and young adults is outlined

in the 2020-2024 Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), the state's five-year strategic plan. The plan can be found at <https://bit.ly/301ZMyq>.

Foster Care 18 to 21 and Permanency

As some young adults may age out of foster care, support and resources are critical to successful transitions. Resource parents play an essential role in this process. Here are some ways to help:

- Discuss what permanency is and how it may look different to each individual. The **ENGAGE** model (<https://bit.ly/31wYlbq>) can help in conversations with youth and young adults about permanency:
 - E – explain what permanency means in general and what it can mean for the youth or young adult
 - N – not a one-time conversation, but an ongoing discussion
 - G – give youth opportunities to explain their feelings about adoption and other permanency opportunities
 - A – ask youth who they feel connected to
 - G – give youth choices so they can practice self-determination
 - E – explain their options and help them understand the pros and cons
- Encourage eligible youth and young adults to participate in the NC LINKS program. NC LINKS is North Carolina's Chafee program which provides youth with independent living skill building. This opportunity is for those age 13 up to their 21st birthday who have been in the legal custody of a local department of social services. In NC LINKS youth not only increase skills but also form important connections to peers, positive adults, and community resources.

Ongoing Supportive Resources for Older Youth and Young Adults

Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer (P-EBT)	Foster Care to Success	Assurance Wireless	NC 2-1-1
P-EBT resources were issued for qualifying school aged youth and young adults to help purchase food during the pandemic.	The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) and NC Reach programs continue to provide outreach and supportive services. These programs provide scholarships for eligible youth and young adults transitioning out of the foster care system.	Assurance Wireless is a Federal Lifeline Assistance program that can help eligible low-income individuals receive free data and unlimited texting, free monthly minutes, and a free phone.	NC 2-1-1 is an information and referral service for free and confidential resources, including food access, mental/physical health needs, housing resources and other community resources.
For more information: https://bit.ly/2QLVb1i	For eligibility information: https://bit.ly/2PLEFOw	For more information: https://bit.ly/3weHdFo	For more information: https://nc211.org/

Meet Our Foster Care 18 to 21 State Program Coordinator



LeAnn McKoy

LeAnn McKoy is the Foster Care 18-21 State Program Coordinator.

She has extensive experience with over 16 years of direct child welfare and mental health agencies across the state of North Carolina. She can be reached at leann.mckoy@dhhs.nc.gov.

Each county has staff who work with the youth for the local LINKS program. Contact your local agency or Erin Conner, the State LINKS Coordinator, at erin.conner@dhhs.nc.gov, for additional information and resources.

Supporting Young Adults through the Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, additional supports have been provided to young adults aging out of foster care. Young adults were provided additional flexibility in meeting eligibility criteria while participating in the Foster Care 18 to 21 program. When employment and educational activities were interrupted due to COVID-19, counties were encouraged to explore other creative, skill building ways to help young adults remain eligible for the program. Additional financial assistance was provided to support housing and technology needs. An additional \$100 was provided to supplement room and board costs for young adults. Young adults participating in the Foster Care 18 to 21 program and enrolled in public schools qualified for the Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) funds. Additional supports and flexibilities are being evaluated to assist young adults transitioning out of foster care.

Reinstatement of parental rights in NC: Myths and facts

by David F. Hord IV, JD

In 2011, legislation was passed in North Carolina that allows a juvenile court to reinstate the parental rights of a parent whose rights have been terminated (N.C.G.S. § 7B-1114). Reinstatement of parental rights is a permanency planning option for primarily older youth in very limited circumstances.

When they first learn about reinstatement of parental rights, resource parents often have questions, and some feel an initial concern that reinstatement isn't in children's best interests, or that it puts planned or finalized adoptions at risk.

Following is an attempt to sort the myths from the facts when it comes to reinstatement of parental rights in North Carolina.

Myth: It makes no difference whether a child is in a pre-adoptive home.

Fact: A motion to reinstate parental rights can be filed **ONLY** if the child is not in an adoptive placement and is not likely to be adopted within a reasonable period of time. Therefore, if the child has an identified caregiver who is willing to adopt the child, reinstatement of parental rights cannot be considered.

Myth: A parent can file a motion to reinstate his or her parental rights.

Fact: Only the juvenile, the juvenile's guardian ad litem attorney advocate (GAL), or the county department of social services (DSS) agency with custody of the juvenile can file a motion to reinstate parental rights.

Myth: Any child whose parents' rights have been terminated may be subject to a motion for reinstatement of parental rights.

Fact: Except in extraordinary circumstances, the juvenile must be at least 12 years old.

Myth: Reinstatement of parental rights is an alternative to appealing a decision to TPR.

Fact: Three years must pass between a TPR hearing and a motion to reinstate parental rights unless the court has changed the child's permanent plan or the juvenile's GAL attorney advocate and county DSS agree that the child's permanent plan is no longer adoption.

Myth: DSS, the GAL, and the juvenile can agree to change the permanent plan to reinstatement of parental rights.

Fact: One or more of these parties may file a motion to change the permanent plan, but it is up to the district court judge to decide whether reinstatement of parental rights should be granted. The standard the judge uses to make this decision is the best interest of the juvenile.

A motion to reinstate parental rights in no way affects an already-finalized adoption.

Myth: Reinstatement of parental rights can be granted even if the parent's circumstances haven't changed.

Fact: The court must determine whether the parent has remedied the conditions that led to the juvenile's removal and the termination of the parent's parental rights. The court must also determine whether the juvenile would receive proper care and supervision in a safe home if placed with the parent.

Myth: If the parent's situation has changed, the court must reinstate their parental rights.

Fact: The court's decision must always be based on the child's best interests. The court must determine the needs of the juvenile. The court should also assess what services would need to be in place if the parent's rights were reinstated.

Myth: The child doesn't have a say.

Fact: If the juvenile is not the party motioning for reinstatement, the juvenile must be properly served with the motion. ("Serving" is an official handing over of documents, to ensure the child is aware the motion has been filed.)

If a motion is filed and the juvenile does not have a GAL, the court must appoint one. The GAL represents the best interests of the juvenile at every stage of the reinstatement of parental rights proceeding. The GAL also must provide reports to the court. In addition, the court must consider the juvenile's willingness to resume contact with the parent and to have the parental rights reinstated. The juvenile is also required to receive notice of the hearings on the motion for reinstatement of parental rights.

Myth: The juvenile's foster parents don't have a say.

Fact: While they are not parties to the reinstatement proceedings, placement providers do have the right to attend hearings and provide information to the court.

Myth: A reinstatement of parental rights case will drag out for years.

Fact: The court must either dismiss or grant the motion for reinstatement of parental rights within 12 months of the motion being filed, unless the court makes specific findings as to why the decision cannot be made and specifies a time frame for when the final decision will be made.

Myth: The granting of a motion to reinstate parental rights is the same as overturning the termination of parental rights proceeding.

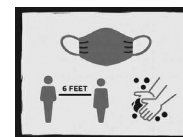
Fact: If a judge reinstates a parent's parental rights, the original order terminating parental rights is not vacated, deemed invalid, or overturned. Therefore, if two or more children are subject to the original termination of parental rights proceeding, but only one child is the subject of a reinstatement of parental rights proceeding, the other child is still legally free for adoption if he or she has not been adopted already. A motion to reinstate parental rights in no way affects an already-finalized adoption.

Conclusion

Reinstatement of parental rights is a fairly new permanent plan for children. It may not be a realistic plan for most children and may be emotionally charged from all sides. It is important for DSS, the GAL, the caregivers, the parent, and especially the child to fully understand what it means. As with all permanency options, considering reinstatement of parental rights must be done with the child's best interest as the central concern.

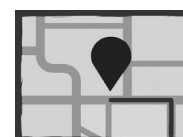
David F. Hord, IV, is a Staff Attorney Advocate for Wake County's Guardian ad Litem program.

YOU HAVE A
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TAKE YOUR
SHOT.



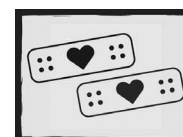
Practice your three Ws

<https://bit.ly/3sWjcRx>



Find a testing place

<https://bit.ly/2PtReyh>



**You have a spot.
Take your shot.**

<https://bit.ly/3mklpDX>



Help us find families for these children and youth

For more information on these children or adoption in general, contact the NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care Network (tel: 877-625-4371; email: nc.kids@dhhs.nc.gov; web: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/social-services/child-welfare-services/adoption-and-foster-care>)



Jade (age 12)

Jade is a charming, bright, and bubbly young girl. She is very affectionate and loves to give hugs. Her resiliency, loving spirit, friendliness, and energy are what make her unforgettable! She loves playing with her Barbies and making crafts. Jade is truly a survivor with a heart desire to have a family while maintaining contact with her older brother. It is extremely important that her adoptive family be committed to maintaining ongoing family contact as frequently as possible. The agency is requesting a family that is willing to provide Jade with the attention, affection, and supervision she needs to thrive and blossom!



Jazmine (age 14)

Jazmine is a creative, loving, and social teenager! She is always willing to try new things and develop new skills. She is currently learning how to ride dirt bikes competitively and is engaged in a leadership group on her campus. She loves to listen to music, dance, sing, draw, and write poetry. Her agency is seeking a loving and open-minded forever family that is willing to provide Jazmine with the love and support she deserves.



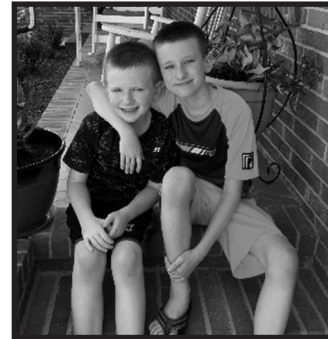
Nicholas (age 17)

Nicholas is an inquisitive, energetic, and observant young man who likes watching action movies, baseball games, and playing electronics. He enjoys science and being outdoors, especially nature walks and going to the beach or lake. Nicholas is very funny, resourceful, and values his family, especially his sister, uncle, and aunt. He prefers a two-parent home with a mother and a father that will set aside quality time to make memories with him and provide him with the opportunity to grow and excel!



Tiquana (age 17)

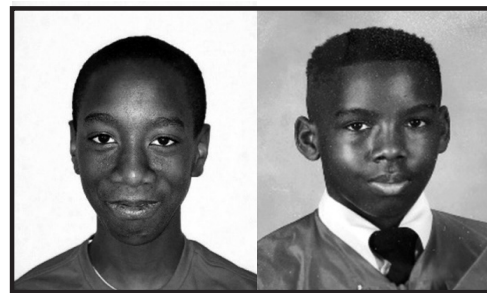
Tiquana is a dynamic teen who is frequently described as helpful, observant, funny, and insightful. One of her teachers shared, "She is pleasant, personable, and good conversationalist." She has a bright smile that lights up the room and she is great company with her sense of humor. Tiquana is a well-rounded young lady who has an array of interests. She enjoys physical activities, such as basketball, volleyball, and swimming. Hobbies and activities such as doing hair, shopping, and playing board games pique Tiquana's interest as well.



Brent (age 11) and Bentley (age 8)

Meet this adorable sibling group of two boys, Brent and Bentley. This pair will add delight and amusement to any family! These boys love to laugh and have a good time. These two are an active duo full of energy! Both love to play with their video games, Legos,

and electronics. Brent and Bentley have a strong bond and would love to be in a forever home together. The forever family for the boys should be able to provide a guided environment where the boys can explore, be active, and develop emotionally and developmentally. They will bring so much love, laughter, and happiness to the family unit.



Jeremiah (age 14) and Jayden (age 13)

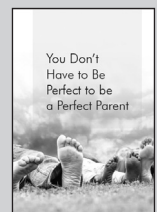
Jeremiah and his younger brother Jayden are an extraordinary duo seeking their forever family together. Jeremiah is described as artistic, helpful, and patient. He has a great sense of humor and enjoys a good laugh. Jayden is a handsome young gentleman who has big dimples and big brown eyes. He has a big heart and is lovable. He is described by those around him as smart, charismatic, and independent. Jayden is thoughtful and often thinks of others. Their lives would be enriched by a family committed to providing them with unconditional love, guidance, and structure. These brothers are family-oriented and desire to be in a family unit together, sharing life experiences. Jeremiah and Jayden would benefit beyond measure from achieving permanence!

Steps to Adoption in North Carolina

- 1. Choose one adoption agency.** You can choose your local county department of social services or a private agency. Call NC Kids or go to www.adoptnckids.org for information on all of your options.
- 2. Submit an application.** To begin the process, you will first complete an application for adoption at the agency you select. The agency will ask about your family and the children you are interested in parenting.
- 3. Complete the Pre-Placement Assessment** or PPA (adoption home study). You will participate in preparatory and consultation sessions to help you understand the adoption process and your responsibilities as an adoptive parent. The Pre-Placement Assessment is different from a home study for foster parenting.
- 4. Work with your social worker to find the right child.** Once your Pre-Placement Assessment is complete, your social worker will work with you to locate a child whose needs can be met in your family.

- 5. Visit with your child.** Once a child has been identified for you, a visiting plan is set up so that the child and your family can get to know each other before a placement is made.
- 6. Bring your child home.** All children, even very young children, will go through a period of adjustment when they join a new family. A child moving into a new home needs patience, tolerance, and love. Your social worker should be there to support you.
- 7. Supervisory period.** North Carolina law requires your child to be in your home at least three months before the adoption process can be legally completed. In some instances the time needed for adjustment will be longer. During this time your social worker will visit with you in your home to provide support and assistance.
- 8. Legalize the adoption in court.** While some adoptive parents choose to file their own legal documents, it is recommended that you use an attorney for filing the legal proceedings. If the child is a special needs child who is in the custody of an agency, funds are available to assist with legal fees.

For more on how to become an adoptive parent, answers to common



questions, information about children who need adoptive homes, and resources for adoptive families, read North Carolina's brochure "You Don't Have to be Perfect to be a Perfect Parent" online at: <https://bit.ly/3ft436q>

How are child welfare agencies supporting older youth and young adults in foster care during COVID?

Foster Care 18 to 21 should be offered to young adults who are 18, 19, or 20 years old and wish to enter or remain in the program. No one should be terminated or denied entry to North Carolina's Foster Care 18 to 21 program as a result of the unique challenges from COVID-19.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act (Public Law 116-260) was signed into law on December 27, 2020 and Program Instructions were provided to the NC Division of Social Services on March 10, 2021. The law provides supplemental appropriations for the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood, Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program, as well as temporary provisions related to foster care and extended foster care programs.

Provisions

- Child welfare agencies may not require youth to leave foster care solely due to age from December 27, 2020 through September 30, 2021.
- Young adults who left the Foster Care 18 to 21 program during the COVID-19 public health emergency (defined currently as January 27, 2020 – April 20, 2021, subject to be extended) because of age are

permitted re-entry. Re-entry expires after September 30, 2021.

- Agencies are to provide to each youth who was formally discharged from foster care during the COVID-19 public health emergency a notice designed to make the youth aware of the option to return to foster care.
- Young adults should not be exited from the Foster Care 18 to 21 program for failing to meet education or employment eligibility criteria. If they fail to meet education or employment eligibility criteria, the young adult's Transition Living Plan should be developed, reviewed, and/or revised to meet another eligibility criterion of the program.
- For fiscal years 2020 and 2021, Chafee funding may be used to provide services and assistance to any otherwise eligible youth or young adult who experienced foster care at age 14 or older and has not yet attained age 27.
- From April 1, 2020 through September 30, 2021, agencies may use Chafee room and board amounts for any otherwise eligible youth who experienced foster care at age 14 or older and who is not age 18-26.

Child welfare agencies may not require youth to leave foster care solely due to age from Dec. 27, 2020 through Sept. 30, 2021.



- From October 1, 2020 to September 30, 2022, the maximum ETV award amount has increased from \$5,000 to \$12,000.
- Additional ETV funding may be used to help support youth who remain enrolled in a post-secondary education or training program.

What can you do?

If you know young adults who may be eligible, please have them contact their NC LINKS Coordinator at their local Department of Social Services. For additional information concerning the Foster Care 18-21 program and NC LINKS services, please visit: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/assistance/state-guardianship/independent-living-services-for-foster-children>



fostering perspectives (May 2021)

Sponsors. NC Division of Social Services, SaySo, and the Family and Children's Resource Program, part of the UNC School of Social Work.

Contact Us. *Fostering Perspectives*, c/o John McMahon, Family and Children's Resource Program, UNC School of Social Work, 100 Europa Dr., Suite 571 – CB# 5220, Chapel Hill, NC 27517. Email: jdmcmaho@unc.edu.

Advisory Board. Jamie Bazemore (child welfare consultant); Glenda Clare (Center for Family and Community Engagement); Carmelita Coleman (Children's Home Society-NC); Shanita Dildy-Goings (foster care alumna); Jodi Franck (NC Division of Social Services); Amy Huntsman (Buncombe Co. HHS); Rochelle Johnson (foster parent); Trishana Jones (NC Coalition Against Domestic Violence); LeAnn McKoy (NC Division of Social Services); Jennifer Nehlsen (Guardian ad Litem Program); Gaile Osborne (resource parent); Jeanne Preisler (Center for Family and Community Engagement); Jonathan Rockoff (UNC); Shirley Williams (NC Division of Social Services).

Newsletter Staff. John McMahon (Editor)

Mission. *Fostering Perspectives* exists to promote the professional development of North Carolina's child welfare professionals and foster and adoptive parents and kinship caregivers and to provide a forum where the people involved in the child welfare system in our state can exchange ideas.

Disclaimer. The opinions and beliefs expressed herein are not necessarily those of the NC Division of Social Services or the UNC School of Social Work.

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Online. www.fosteringperspectives.org

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References. See the online version of this issue for references cited in this issue.

HOPE 4 NC HELPLINE 1-855-587-3463

Writing Contest

First Prize: \$100 • Second Prize: \$50 • Third Prize: \$25

If you are or were enrolled in North Carolina's Foster Care 18 to 21 program, please send us a response to the following questions:



They say having at least one adult that you feel close to and can really depend on can make a big difference when you are in foster care. If you have a person like that in your life, tell us a little about them and why they're special to you.

(Responses should be 200 words or less.)

DEADLINE: July 7, 2021

E-mail submissions to jdmcmaho@unc.edu or mail them to: Fostering Perspectives, Family & Children's Resource Program, 100 Europa Dr., Suite 571, CB# 5220, Chapel Hill, NC 27517. Include your name, age, address, and phone number. In addition to receiving the awards listed above, winners will have their work published in the next issue. Runners-up may also have their work published, for which they will also receive an award.

Seeking Other Writing Submissions

Submissions can be on any theme. There is no deadline for non-contest submissions: submit your work at any time.



Join the Fostering Perspectives List!

To be notified by email when new issues appear online, go to <http://eepurl.com/brPe9b> and sign up.

Get in-service training credit for reading this newsletter!

Enjoy *Fostering Perspectives* and earn credit toward your relicensure. Just write down the answers to the questions below and present them to your licensing social worker. If your answers are satisfactory, you'll receive 30 minutes of training credit. If you have questions about this method of gaining in-service training credit, ask your worker.

In-Service Quiz, FP v25 n2

1. Explain the differences between legal permanence, relational permanence, and cultural permanence.
2. Name three everyday things resource parents do to support permanence for children and youth in foster care.
3. What are two ways in which adoption and legal guardianship are different?
4. List three ways resource parents can support cultural permanence.
5. What are four things resource parents can do to help ensure stability for young people in foster care?
6. What advice does Amy Huntsman have for resource parents interested in supporting older teens in foster care during their transition to adulthood?
7. When is the Foster Family Alliance of North Carolina's next virtual summit?
8. Name three things North Carolina is doing or has done to support young adults during the COVID-19 pandemic?
9. This issue features two pairs of brothers, each of which wants to find a forever family. What are their names and ages?
10. What is your reaction to the insights and advice Kelly Sullivan and Dina Gerber share in this issue?

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Fostering Perspectives Turns 25!

Fostering Perspectives is celebrating its silver anniversary. This publication was born 25 years ago because the NC Division of Social Services and its partners wanted a way to inform, support, and speak directly to our state's resource parents and child welfare professionals.

To ensure it is accessible, practical, and helpful, from the beginning *Fostering Perspectives* has had an advisory group made up of people who have experience with and a stake in North Carolina's foster care program: foster care alumni, resource parents, and representatives from county, state, and private agencies. This group helps plan every issue by suggesting topics, sharing article ideas, identifying potential authors, and contributing articles themselves.

The conviction that we need to hear and learn from those touched by the foster care program is a cornerstone of *Fostering Perspectives*. That's why its pages so often include the voices of children and youth in foster care, their parents, foster care alumni, foster and adoptive parents, kin caregivers, judges, social workers, guardians ad litem, mental health providers, and others.

Two and a half decades in, *Fostering Perspectives* remains a vital way for the NC Division of Social Services to communicate directly with key stakeholders. In May and November each year, this newsletter goes out to every North Carolina foster parent and to child welfare social workers in every county. It's also read online by a host of kin caregivers, foster and adoptive parents, and others.

We mark this anniversary with deep gratitude. We're thankful for our advisory group members, past and present, and especially for you, our readers. We look forward to our next 25 years of supporting you and cheering you on.

THANK YOU

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