

## FAQ's – Family Finding

### **What is Family Finding?**

*Family Finding is promising practice in child welfare aimed at reestablishing family connections between children in out-of-home care and their relatives. It is based on the idea that every child deserves a special connection only family can provide. Family Finding, and other programs named family search and engagement or intensive relative search, provides strategies to find and engage relatives of children living in out-of-home care.*

### **Why is this happening?**

*Every child has a family and a meaningful connection to family helps a child develop a sense of belonging. The most important factor contributing to positive outcomes for children in out-of-home care is meaningful connections and lifelong relationships with family.*

### **Where did this idea come from?**

*Kevin Campbell is considered the pioneer of the Family Finding idea. Many factors likely influenced the rise of this promising practice. One factor is the information age we currently live in. Family can be found for children. Another factor is the success the International Red Cross had in reuniting families and children in war-torn countries and in areas of natural disaster.*

### **What if the child is already in a safe and stable placement away from their family?**

*Family Finding is not just concerned with the child's placement. Family Finding can keep the child connected to, or get them re-connected to, their family. It allows the child and family to be involved with the decisions that are occurring about their family member.*

### **Why would you want to re-connect a child to a family that hurt them?**

*Children who are abused or neglected are often in family situations where insufficient support systems and other stressors exist. An average person might have 100 or more living relatives. When one person in a family struggles, it does not mean that the whole family is struggling. Family Finding seeks to identify and engage healthy branches of a child's family to support that child and sometimes their parents too. Family Finding should not put children in increased risk to be hurt. Criminal checks and child protective service checks should be completed on any individuals being considered to be involved with the youth. If a family member does not successfully pass the screenings they can still share information with the team.*

### **What is permanency?**

*Permanency can have many definitions. For a youth in the child welfare system it can mean an emotional and legal relationship with a safe and secure parent or parent-like individual. It can mean they are loved. It can mean they are receiving unconditional support and commitment. The relationship is intended to be enduring and meant to last a lifetime.*

**What happens in the Family Finding case? How is it different?**

*The model started with six major steps. Many agencies have used the model and influenced it in small ways but only one significant component was added and that was a beginning step. The first step is called – Setting the stage. All the professional team members meet to determine the need and course of action. The second step is Discovery. The team uses all necessary means to discover 40 or more relatives and possible supports. The third step is Engagement. The team contacts the family members to gather information and encourage them to join and actively participate with the youth's team. In the fourth step – called Preparation and Planning – there are meetings with the family team which allow them to understand in a significant way their opportunities, their obligations, and the critical need for their involvement in the child's life. The fifth step is called Decision-making. This takes place with the child, family team, and professional team. Decisions are made about how to safely integrate the child into family life and family relationships. The decisions and commitments made there are expected to be lifelong. In the sixth step the team evaluates whether the plan is going to work to achieve legal and emotional permanence. Lastly, in Follow-up the team completes the plan.*

**How can family be involved for a child living in a foster home or on his or her way to be adopted?**

*Family can be involved with a child even if placement with a relative is not the best option. Phone calls, kind cards or notes, attendance at sporting events or recitals, visits and invitations to family holidays can all mean the world to a child living out of the home. It is essential that the foster parent or care giver be supportive of family involvement so the process can be successful. Building a team of family and caregivers is the best way to ensure the team will agree upon the support and connections for the child for life.*

**How do you determine which children get Family Finding service?**

*It must be a team decision. Some agencies do this for the longest waiting youth. Some try to do it very early in a case. For any child disconnected and lonely it is necessary to determine if they can be safely re-connected with family ---THEIR family. The professional team must be in agreement on the problem – a child is disconnected – and then in agreement on the solution – family connectedness intervention.*

**Are there legal issues to be concerned with?**

*Every state and jurisdiction has laws related to contacting relatives and sharing confidential information. Before starting the Family Finding project be sure you know the laws in your area. Federal law has influenced states on this topic and the process for notifying relatives, sharing information, and involving them should be clear.*

**I need more information. Where can I get some help?**

*Children's Hospital of Wisconsin Family Finding staff want to help. We are excited about this. Please find us through our website – look under "Community Services" and "Family Finding" or see us on Facebook. You can call our corporate office and ask to speak to a Family Finding team member at (414) 453-1400.*