

National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness

Seneca Family of Agencies: A Non-Profit Agency for Children & Families
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PERMANENCY BLAST

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IN THIS ISSUE

[Introduction](#)

[Responding to Trauma
in Permanency Work](#)

[Webinar Recording
Now Available!](#)

[News from North
Carolina](#)

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Dear Permanency Warriors,

In this month's blast we will share our thoughts about the connection between trauma work and permanency, provide information on how to access the webinar entitled *Family Finding - What Have We Learned?* recorded on August 15 (both video and PowerPoint presentation), and share some exciting Family Finding news from the state of North Carolina.

In our first article, Mike Mertz, MS draws the connection between trauma work and permanency, and highlights the importance of integrating trauma work into permanency practice to go beyond solely restating traumatic experiences - a key part of the treatment process. As both Seneca's Director of Staff Development and NIPFC Trainer, Mike coaches staff and trains providers nationwide on family engagement strategies that foster collaborative endeavors for building lifetime support networks for children and youth. Mike's passionate focus centers on creating connectedness, building permanency, developing positive outcomes and increasing the quantity and quality of engagement of organizations with the youth and families they serve.

Responding to Trauma in Permanency Work

Mike Mertz, MS

Many of the youth in foster care have experienced some form of trauma. Some were traumatized prior to entering the system; others have been harmed while in its care. Trauma-informed practices are quickly becoming the standard in the child welfare field as we try to address the difficulties young people face when dealing with histories of abuse and/or neglect. While adding this trauma lens to the work we are doing is helpful, the current focus tends to be on the effects of trauma in the life of the youth. The result of this focus can limit a worker's perspective to singly framing of a youth's traumatic experiences. Merely attending to the effects of trauma can situate the youth in a victim position, devoid of personal agency. In a permanency context, it is important to provide a

territory of identity for youth to stand on that extends beyond a victim identity. If youth are stuck in a version of themselves that is primarily grounded in victimhood, then it becomes increasingly difficult for them to take a more active role in the healing process, and hopelessness or apathy will dominate the discussion.

The Tree of Life exercise (Ncube, 2006) is one example of a way to help youth situate themselves in an identity that goes beyond being a victim. When young people are engaged around how they have responded to trauma, an identity of action emerges. From here space is opened up to discover their intentions for life - their values, hopes, dreams, purposes, and commitments. Once youth view themselves as one who acts on their own behalf, based upon what they hold as important, the prospect of looking to connect with others seems much less frightening.

Several in the field are offering an alternative practice around trauma work that allows for one to more safely explore the youths' histories of trauma (Beaudoin, 2005; White, 2004; Yuen, 2007). These authors begin their work by inquiring about how people have responded in the face of the traumatic events they have experienced. Even though most youth cannot bring the trauma they experienced to an end, there is always respond to the trauma in some form. These responses don't need to be overt (i.e. fighting back) in order to represent protest or action. Wade (1997) refers to inquiring about micro-level responses. Yuen (2007) provides a description of one such response given by an 8-year-old boy:

I knew that I couldn't show that I was really mad or else she would have hurt me. So I just kept a straight face and instead clenched my hands tight inside my pockets. She couldn't see my hands, but clenching them meant that I could be mad without her knowing or seeing it. I wouldn't give her the satisfaction of having a reason to beat me.

By recognizing the agency represented in accounts such as this, the youth can begin to situate their sense of self within a narrative of purpose and intention. They can engage with how these expressions demonstrate what they value or hold as important. They are now actors within their own story instead of merely victims. When youth are standing in this view of themselves, the risk of re-traumatizing is diminished and the door to making new connections is open.

Wade, A. (1997). 'Small acts of living: Everyday resistance to violence and other forms of oppression.' *Contemporary Family Therapy*, (19)1, (pp. 23-39). Human Sciences Press, Inc.

Yuen, A. (2007). 'Discovering children's responses to trauma: a response-based narrative practice.' *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*. (4)

Ncube, N. (2006). 'The tree of life project: Using narrative ideas in work with vulnerable children in South Africa.' *The International Journal of Narrative Therapy and Community Work*, 1:3-16.

Beaudoin, M-N. (2005). 'Agency and choice in the face of trauma: A Narrative therapy map. *Journal of Systemic Therapies*, 24:4, 32-50.

Webinar Recording Now Available!

As many of you know, we recently hosted a webinar, *Family Finding - What Have We Learned?*, on August 15 to discuss the latest in Family Finding research with Karin Malm, MS, Director of Child Welfare at Child Trends; Melissa Mollard, PhD, Director of Research

at Seneca Family of Agencies; and Kevin Campbell, Expert Consultant/Trainer with Seneca Family of Agencies and author of the Family Finding Model. We held a great discussion and hope those of you that were able to attend found it beneficial and informative.

For those of you that were either unable to attend or would like to review the discussion, we have just posted the webinar recording and the PowerPoint presentation, which you can [view on our website here](#). We plan to soon post answers to all the audience questions we did not have time to address during the webinar as well.

We were pleased with the attendance, interest and response to the webinar and look forward to hosting additional webinars on this and other topics in the future.

Family Finding News from North Carolina

North Carolina recently developed a unique legislative and fiscal strategy to expand permanency services to the 2,000 children and youth living in foster care who are waiting for a forever family. The State Legislature approved two special provisions that direct funding for adoption, child-specific adoption recruitment, Family Finding and permanency focused training services. This initiative began as House Bill 971, introduced by Representative Marilyn Avila, and was eventually rolled into the state budget and titled "A Family for Every Child Initiative." The North Carolina governor authorized this initiative upon signing the state budget on July 26, 2013.

The initiative is composed of three components:

- \$1.5 million per year to supplement the Adoption Promotion Fund, restoring much needed funding for the ongoing operations for adoption of the state's foster youth
- \$1 million the first year and \$2.75 million the second year to establish the Permanency Innovation Initiative Fund, which will support child-specific adoption recruitment, Family Finding and permanency focused training services, and will operate as a demonstration project to test whether the initiative increases permanency outcomes and decreases foster care costs
- An oversight committee of 11 appointed officials from legislative, judicial, public, private, foundation, research and consumer perspectives to evaluate the initiative's success

We are thrilled to see another state taking strong legislative steps to support their children and youth in care. For further information on this exciting initiative, please contact Matt Anderson of Children's Home Society of North Carolina at MVAnderson@chsnc.org or (336) 369-3814. You can also learn more about Children's Home Society of North Carolina at www.chsnc.org.

Sincerely,

Bob Friend & the Family Finding Team

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