It Takes a Village: Signs of Safety and Family Finding Aligning Two Parallel Approaches

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It Takes a Village: Aligning Two Parallel Approaches to Participatory Child Protection
A child separated from parents is inherently vulnerable, even when in the care of the government or a charity.

Kevin Campbell
What is Family Finding?

Beliefs and strategies that connect children, youth and parents to family and community supports

Legally mandated in United States

Helps keep children in foster care connected to relatives and safe community supports

Prevents or shortens child’s placement

Quick and extensive notice to family that child is in care or at risk of entering a care system
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WHAT IS FAMILY FINDING CONTINUED

Works on principle that relatives should be located and consulted regardless of where they may live or have immigrated from.

Considers that parents and relatives may be seeking assistance in planning and providing for the basic needs and future needs of their children and must be communicated with even if formal systems disagree with parents decisions.

Emphasizes the importance of Article 26 of the Geneva Convention of 1949 “The Right to Know” and the importance of “The Restoration of Dignity”.

Works to preserve relationships, context, culture, language, membership and faith that provides protective factors and fosters resilience;

Recognizes the profound influence that normative childhood and adolescent experiences play in health development including support to sustain friendships through frequent opportunities to experience sibling relationships.
WHY FAMILY FINDING?

Six step process to find, engage and organize supports

Traditionally used for youth waiting the longest in care in Canada and United States

Typically a fairly quick undertaking but can take longer and require more time and effort if a cold case or international family.

Permanent, safe, consistent, and affectionate relationships

Based on Three Framework Ideas, Four Core Beliefs and Six Steps.
THREE FRAMEWORK IDEAS

1. International Tracing
2. How big are families?
3. Families are the most normative setting for raising children (even those with the most complex needs)
FOUR CORE BELIEFS OF FAMILY FINDING

1. Every child has a family, and they can be found if we try

2. Loneliness can be devastating, even dangerous, and is experienced by most children in out-of-home care

3. A meaningful connection to family helps a child develop a sense of belonging

4. The single factor most closely associated with positive outcomes for children is meaningful, lifelong connection to family
SIX STEPS TO FAMILY FINDING

1. Discovery
2. Engagement
3. Preparation and Planning
4. Decision Making
5. Evaluation
6. Follow on support
STEP ONE
DISCOVERY

Find at least 40 or more relatives

Interview parents and youth
  - Focus on the goal of finding relatives and supports
  - Find a family leader

Use technology as a way to connect
STEP TWO
ENGAGEMENT

Ask family members these questions:
  o how big is your extended family?
  o If you really wanted to know, who would you ask first?

Build initial team of support

Stress urgency

Be transparent in your approach

Authentic family engagement
STEP THREE
PREPARATION AND PLANNING

Involve 12 or more family members in Blended Perspective or Preparation Meeting.

Professional supports should be present

Natural supports should be greater than professional supports in these meetings
Those committed to create a plan meet to explore resources

Consider making a commitment to becoming a forever relationship (or Lifetime Network of support) to the children, youth and parent(s) involved.
STEP FIVE
EVALUATION

Participants consider a list of five questions

- Tests their commitment to decision and strategies
- Tests the durability and strength of their decisions and strategies
STEP SIX
FOLLOW ON SUPPORT

Members meet to begin the process of integration
Begin to offer support to children, youth and parents.
BEST PRACTICE VALUES & FAMILY/COMMUNITY MEETING APPROACH VS. TRADITIONAL APPROACH

Limitations of traditional case work may isolate children and parents.

- May exclude aboriginal people, extended kinship groups and siblings.

Child in the Context of Family, Anchored in Relationship, Grounded in Community, Accessible, Inclusive and Diverse; Collaborative and Responsive, Sharing Responsibility, Focused on Action and Outcomes, that is Sustainable with Subsidiarity.
WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

Extensive family and community networks existed for parents and children involved with Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems even when we looked up to four decades later.

Locating relatives can be completed quickly for most youth using effective parent and youth engagement approaches. (Most staff locate 40 to 65 relatives in four hours)

Web based family search tools can be accessed quickly for many adults when interviews are not successful or possible

The number of participants in Family Meeting models can be increased with Family Finding

Family and Social supports for children and youth in out of home care or at home can be increased, providing protective factors and promoting resilience.

Relatives and community members can be included at the beginning of child welfare emergencies rather than waiting until parents have been ruled out or children face removal.
BIG TAKEAWAYS:

There are relatives and community connections, even for the most isolated caregivers and longest waiting youth in foster care.

There always were relatives (and a father) for the longest waiting in foster care. In fact they told us that we didn’t find them because they weren't hiding. They went on to say we had finally decided to call or visit them.

In most cases, even for the most troubled and long waiting youth in foster care some of the relatives were willing to offer help. (typically 5 to 8)
KEY CHALLENGES AND LESSONS

In all of the evaluation sites and other projects (over 200) finding the family and engaging them into planning was the easiest part. The real challenge was a system that saw relative participation as a distraction from the “real job” of offering reasonable efforts and managing out of home placement resources and the experiences that go with them.

The workforce complained that it largely does not possess the time, skills or training to comfortably join with and facilitate a process of recovery for youth and families who are in struggle.

The philosophical and programmatic segmentation of child welfare services: reunification, kinship, adoption and transition to adulthood undermines a common philosophy and practice of authentic parent, youth, family and community engagement and participation.

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RESEARCH RESULTS FOR FAMILY FINDING

The single confirmatory finding: Youth who receive Family Finding and are living in residential care move to family settings, youth who are living in family settings move to relative or kin placements.

13  Completed evaluations to date, 12 more underway in the United States and Canada. Findings are mixed due to a broad range of designs of service and evaluation approaches. Of note is that small scale pilots fare less well than larger systemic implementation. The most promising results were achieved in Hawaii and South Carolina focused on families on the front step and at the front door of child welfare.

It appears once children, youth and families are drawn more deeply into child welfare systems their chances for a rapid resolution to challenges reduces. For older youth and teens the possibility of Permanency largely evaporates within one year and after two case worker changes.
VALUES AND PRINCIPLES TO INCREASE PARTICIPATION

Parents, youth, and relatives are approached and supported with the belief that through their experiences and challenges they are made uniquely creative, capable and responsible to lead and participate in creating the solutions to the challenges that most effect their lives.

Services, without family, community and Tribal participation isolate parents and children furthering their vulnerability and compromising their health, safety and well-being across the life-span.

Models or initiatives that take case workers and supervisors away from promoting healthy, safe and permanent membership in a family are the wrong models or at least being offered at the wrong time.

Even in instances of adoption by non relatives, the birth family has a seen or unseen role to play, now and in the future.
TOOLS TO IMPROVE AND EXPAND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION:
DISCOVERY TOOLS AND STRATEGIES

Before search and engagement activities are initiated a safety conversation must be had:
What are the immediate and foreseeable consequences that can be reasonably identified were we took undertake a searching and engagement process for this child or parent?
What role will or does the child and parent play in their own search process?
If the child or parent is not consulted about this how will they be told of your decision to explore their family relationships without them and of any results from your efforts?
How will we ensure to the best of our ability that we do not inadvertently expose the child or parent to a dangerous person or circumstance during the search and engagement phase?
If risks are identified during the safety conversation can they be mitigated by adding or changing a strategy or decision?
DEFINING RISK VERSUS SAFETY ISSUES

There is no intervention in child protection that does not include taking risks. Identifying risks provides an opportunity to mitigate risk through the use of Foreseeability, this provides an opportunity to alter strategy, timing, intensity, purpose, goals or gathering more information.

There is no intervention that poses a direct safety threat to a child that should be undertaken without significant consultation and the inclusion of all key decision makers. Think of informed consent in a healthcare decision.

Examples of risk versus safety

An infant is showing signs of being near crawling, the parent or caregiver recognizes the risk and “baby proofs” the home.

An infant is crawling and gets access to cleaning supplies becoming sick or injured, parent or caregiver removes dangerous items after the fact failing to foresee the danger and mitigate risks.

Family Finders make efforts to work from a risk management and consultation footing.
PREPARATION AND APPROVAL

Before search and engagement activities are initiated it is prudent to consider if the Family Finder has the support of and approval from key decision makers involved with the child. These include, case worker, parents, supervisory staff, older youth and young adults, probation and CASA partners etc.

Proceeding with search and enjoyment steps without preparing and seeking agreement from key decision makers can lead to conflict between professionals and systems that cause secondary harm to young people and engaged parents, relatives and community members.

An extra few hours preparation and approval can prevent disappointment and days, weeks or months of delays and extra work and costs.
ITS TIME TO SEARCH...

For many people who have heard of Family Finding the strategies that come to mind are those that use technology. In fact there are creative ways to use technology and other search tools to assist in locating relatives and others.

But these can be time consuming and uncertain. The most effect and speedy approaches rely on person to person interview. These approaches also provide for opportunities to empower and involve young people and parents in creating solutions to the challenges effecting their lives.

Techniques like, connectedness conversations, connectedness mapping and mobility mapping are very effective and engaging strategies for rapidly identifying and restoring relationships of support and affection for separated people.
CONNECTEDNESS CONVERSATIONS
MOBILITY MAPPING AND FLOW DIAGRAMS
CONNECTEDNESS MAPPING
MAPPING AND TECHNOLOGY

Connectedness conversations and Mobility Mapping can provide critical clues to the process of field tracing. Identifying full names that are “culturally complete” as well as nick names, approximate ages or birth dates, date of death, geographic details and landmarks all can increase the possibility, accuracy and speed of tracing efforts.

These clues can be used in conjunction with internet resources and theories of search to re-open communication between separated people.

Social media
People Search Sites
Google Earth
Obituary Searches
Locating aid agency personnel in or near a target area
Email address sites
TECHNOLOGY CONTINUED

Video chat and meeting software can be used to create meeting participation opportunities.

Use of internet tools to learn more about a community or country and its resources and risk factors.

Human technology: Cultural Consults and Family Guides.
COLD CASES... WHAT ABOUT DAD?
THE SECOND PART OF ENGAGEMENT

The search for functional strengths and unconditional commitment

Screening

Grief

Exposure to risks with the government

Burned Bridges

“Easter Stories”

“Changing the Story”

“Better on the way to Best”

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NON RELATIVE SUPPORTS, A GIFT AND A DISTRACTION
SUSTAINING ENGAGEMENT: THE SELF FULFILLING PROPHECY IN CHILD WELFARE
FAMILIES FACE A MOUNTAIN Sized OBSTACLE IN CHILD WELFARE... ATTITUDES

They don’t care
Just want money.
Are all “crazy”
All addicted...
Don’t want to be deported...
Are criminals..
Don’t trust the government
Kids too sick for anyone...
Kid burned all of his bridges
Relatives don’t adopt
Maternal and paternal families don’t get along...
THE PARTICIPATORY CONTINUUM

Co-option: Token representatives are chosen from the family and community, but have no real input or power.

Compliance: Tasks are assigned with incentives; agency staff/ case manager decide agenda and direct the process.

Consultation: Parent(s), youth, family and community opinions are asked, agency staff/ case manager analyze and decide course of action.

Cooperation: Parent(s), youth, family and community members work together with agency staff/ case manager to determine priorities, responsibility remains with agency staff/ case manage.

Co-learning: Parent(s), youth, family and community members and agency staff/ case manager share their knowledge to create a new understanding and work together to form action plans with outside facilitation.

Collective action: Parent(s), youth, family and community members set their own agenda and mobilize to carry it forward in the absence of outside initiators and facilitators. (Legal Permanency)
THE RESCUE 100
RAPID STRENGTHS
APPRASIAL
NO PLACE LIKE HOME: STRONG RELATIONSHIPS AND WEAK TIES