# More About Family Finding

## Brief Description

The Family Finding model seeks to build or maintain the youth's Lifetime Family Support network for all youth who are disconnected or at risk of disconnection through placement outside of their home and community. The process identifies relatives and other supportive adults, estranged from or unknown to the child, especially those who are willing to become permanent connections for him/her. Upon completion of the process, youth have a range of commitments from adults who are able to provide permanency, sustainable relationships within a kinship system, and support in the transition to adulthood and beyond. Keeping safety at the forefront and using a family-driven process, families are empowered to formulate highly realistic and sustainable plans to meet the long-term needs of children and youth. Child outcomes may include increased reunification rates, improved well-being, and placement stability, transition out of the child welfare system, decreased re-entry rates, and stronger sense of belonging for children.

## Goals

The goals of the Family Finding model are to:

▶ Support foster youth in developing meaningful and enduring connections with adults who will support them across their lifespan.

▶ Ensure safe and stable family-based living arrangements for all youth with dependency needs. For youth in out-of-home care due to protection needs, ensure a timely and permanent exit from the formal service system through the development of a resilient and comprehensive network of supportive adults.

▶ Support youth in developing a healthy sense of identity and regain dignity as well as providing family members with the opportunity to meet the needs within their family system. Enable young adults emerging from care to live safely and productively within their communities.

▶ For individuals with lifetime care needs, increase connectedness, decrease dependence on the formal service system, and enhance family-driven decision making.

▶ For all individuals, prevent recidivism within or between formal service systems, including prevention of youth "graduation" into the adult correctional system.

## Essential Components

The essential elements of the Family Finding model include:

1. **Urgency:** Family Finding views meaningful, supportive, permanent relationships with loving adults to be an essential need that is closely tied to youth safety. Family Finding asks practitioners to urgently pursue these relationships for lonely youth by assertively engaging

family and strongly challenging the structural barriers to developing or strengthening these relationships.

2. **Expanded definition of permanency:**  Although physical legal permanence is an explicit outcome for most cases, Family Finding defines permanency as a state of permanent belonging, which includes knowledge of personal history and identity, as well as a range of involved and supportive adults rather than just one legal resource.

3. **Effective relative search:**  Family Finding employs a variety of effective and immediate techniques to first identify no fewer than 40 relatives or other meaningful connections for each youth. The number 40 serves to create a large group of people from which to form a smaller tight-knit, unconditionally committed permanency team.

4. **Family-driven processes:**  Family Finding recognizes that families are disempowered by the placement of relative children outside of the family system, and it seeks to remediate that harm through identifying the strengths and assets of each family member and facilitating processes through which families are able to effectively support their relative children.

5. **Development of multiple plans:**  The Family Finding process will result in not just one plan for legal permanency, but multiple plans that are each able to meet the needs of disconnected youth. No fewer than three plans are developed and evaluated by family members to ensure that they are realistic, sustainable, and safe.

6. **Well-defined and tactical procedures:**  Family Finding begins first with careful preparation and alignment of current team members in order to pursue the six steps of the Family Finding model. While it is a strongly values-based model, it also has clear and definable goals and activities that are easily tracked with a fidelity tool. The six steps include:

- Discovery
- Engagement
- Planning
- Decision Making
- Evaluation
- Follow-up on Supports

**REFERENCE**

National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness (© 2020). www.familyfinding.org, *More About Family Finding*, http://www.familyfinding.org/moreaboutfamilyfinding.html