

FAMILIES for KIDS

Final Cluster Evaluation Report

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Exhibits.....	iii
Appendices.....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Foreword.....	vii
Executive Summary.....	viii
CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND.....	1.1
Origins of <i>FFK</i>	1.1
The Context of Child Welfare.....	1.2
From Values to Action.....	1.4
The Three Phases of <i>FFK</i>	1.6
The Role of the Foundation.....	1.9
Summary.....	1.12
CHAPTER 2: ACCOMPLISHMENTS.....	2.1
Impact on Permanency.....	2.1
Characteristics of Children Leaving Care.....	2.4
Time in Care.....	2.9
Permanent Families.....	2.11
Summary.....	2.12
CHAPTER 3: PRACTICES SUPPORTING ACCOMPLISHMENTS.....	3.1
Use of Data.....	3.1
Expansion of the Circle of Stakeholders.....	3.5
Changes in the Organization and Delivery of Services.....	3.13
Summary.....	3.17
CHAPTER 4: CREATING AND SUSTAINING SYSTEM CHANGE.....	4.1
Long Lasting Systems Change.....	4.1
Systemic Changes in Child Welfare.....	4.2
The Ingredients for Systems Change.....	4.3
Summary.....	4.7

Exhibits

	Page
Exhibit 2.1	Children Adopted or in Guardianships..... 2.2
Exhibit 2.2	Permanency Rate 2.3
Exhibit 2.3	Rate of Children Exiting Care, by Exit Reason..... 2.4
Exhibit 2.4	Annual Permanency Rates, by Race..... 2.5
Exhibit 2.5	Permanency Rates, by Age 2.6
Exhibit 2.6	Percentage of Adopted Children Who Received Adoption Subsidies..... 2.7
Exhibit 2.7	Percentage of Children in Care Who Had More Than Two Placements..... 2.8
Exhibit 2.8	Time in Care Before TPR..... 2.10
Exhibit 2.9	Time from TPR to Finalized Adoption..... 2.11
Exhibit 2.10	Percentage of Finalized Adoptions or Guardianships, by Type of Relationship..... 2.12
Exhibit 3.1	Use of Data by the <i>FFK</i> Sites 3.5
Exhibit 3.2	Expanded Circle of Stakeholders 3.6
Exhibit 3.3	Organizational and Service Changes..... 3.17
Exhibit 4.1	Examples of Fiscal Sustainability 4.2

Appendices

- Appendix A. Legislative Environment
- Appendix B. Community Visioning Grantees
- Appendix C. Summary of Stakeholder Groups
- Appendix D. Summary of Visioning Activities
- Appendix E. Descriptions of the *FFK* Implementation Sites
- Appendix F. Transition Grantees
- Appendix G. *Families for Kids* Publications
- Appendix H. List of Summer Law Fellows
- Appendix I. Kellogg Advanced Law Fellows in Child Welfare Law and Policy
- Appendix J. Site-Specific Data Tables
- Appendix K. Key Indicators Report

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FOREWORD

This document is the final cluster evaluation report on the *Families for Kids* initiative, funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. It describes the history of the initiative, the implementation activities that were carried out by the sites, and the prospects for sustaining the changes that were achieved.

The initiative was carried out by grantees in 11 States. The grantees represented the full spectrum of child welfare programs and practices in this country. They included seven statewide agencies, two county agencies, a nine-county collaborative, and a major city. Grantees included public and private agencies, and in three sites, private agencies and public child welfare agencies were co-grantees.

The first chapter of the report summarizes the background of the initiative, including the problems it addressed and the values and actions supporting its development. The second chapter reviews the accomplishments of the initiative as a whole. The third chapter examines the major themes that emerged during implementation in the varied settings. The final chapter discusses the components that support change in complex public service delivery systems such as child welfare.

A reference volume has also been prepared, which compiles original copies of instruments and other specific tools that were developed or used by the sites.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1993, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation began the *Families for Kids (FFK)* initiative to find permanent homes for children who were in the custody of public child welfare agencies and could not return to their biological families. The *FFK* initiative had two objectives: eliminate the current backlog of children waiting for permanent families and remove systemic barriers to permanency in the child welfare system so that children would not wait unduly for permanent families.

The initiative included clear objectives, specific standards that grantees were expected to meet, and an emphasis on inclusion of all stakeholders in the process. Sites were encouraged to implement locally devised ways of overcoming their barriers to timely permanency for children.

The Foundation awarded visioning grants to 19 sites, implementation grants to 11 of those sites (Pima County, Arizona; Kansas; Massachusetts; Kent County, Michigan; Mississippi; Montana; New York City, New York; North Carolina; Northeast Ohio; South Carolina; and Washington), and transition grants to 8 of the implementation sites.

IMPLEMENTATION ACHIEVEMENTS

Although the *FFK* sites operated in diverse conditions and undertook unique, individual efforts to improve practice, three common, successful practices emerged:

- Sites began using data more effectively as a tool for line workers, administrators, evaluators, and policy-makers;
- Sites increased recruitment and collaboration efforts to include more diverse voices in the process of shaping child welfare policy and practice; and
- Sites challenged long-established ways of conducting permanency work by redefining how they approached permanency planning, adding new resources, and creating effective public-private partnerships.

RESULTS

The *FFK* implementation sites reported many significant and positive results:

- **More children were adopted.** Between 1993 and 1999 adoptions or guardianships were legally finalized for about 60,000 children in the 11 implementation sites. During this period the annual number of children entering into finalized adoptions and guardianships tripled, from 3,800 children to more than 11,000.
- **Children in the child welfare system had more stability in their environments.** Permanency rates, reflecting the number of children exiting foster care to permanent families per 1,000 children in foster care, increased for African American, Native American, Asian American and Caucasian children. Permanency rates increased for every age group of children younger than 18.

- **The different phases of the adoption process were shortened.** The percentage of children who were in care for more than 3 years before the legal rights of their parents were terminated decreased. This reflects a reduction in the time children wait in substitute care before becoming legally free for adoption. In addition, the percentage of children who were adopted within a year after their parents' rights were terminated increased.
- **Practices were replicated and adopted.** With the completion of the *FFK* initiative, various components of each site's practices or innovations were institutionalized at the local level or in additional communities. Perhaps the most common and the most noticeable achievement was the continued use of data for program management and review.

CHAPTER 1 BACKGROUND

This chapter discusses the origins of the Foundation's decision to launch a new initiative designed to improve permanency for children and describes the phases of the Foundation's strategy in carrying out the initiative. To facilitate understanding of the initiative, the chapter also includes an overview of the major components of the child welfare system.

ORIGINS OF *FFK*

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation was founded in 1930 “for the application of knowledge to the problems of people” (Kellogg Foundation, 1993). One of the principal interests of the Foundation from its inception has been to improve the welfare of children. In the early 1990's Foundation staff engaged in extensive in-house analysis and consultation with a variety of national experts regarding the conditions of children. This process led to the recognition of serious problems with child welfare operations across the country. It also led to an understanding that these problems presented an opportunity to translate the values of the Foundation into action.

The Permanency Issue

A large and growing number of children are in substitute care. On any given day, about 560,000 children reside in foster care in the United States. Children of racial and ethnic minority groups are disproportionately represented in these numbers. All these children need permanent families.

Typically, children who reside with foster families or in group homes and institutions have been removed from their homes for their safety and protection due to the inability of their parents to care for them. Most of these children only need temporary care while their parents improve their parenting abilities or bring stability to their own lives. However, a substantial number of these children are unable to return home and need other permanent family arrangements. Some of the children who are waiting for a “forever family” have already been legally separated from their parents by a court action that terminated their parents' rights. Other children have little chance of reuniting with their families but have not yet gone through the legal process involved in the termination of parental rights (TPR), and are even further from having a permanent family. For some children, parental rights are never terminated even though the children cannot return home. Still other children choose not to be adopted; however, they still need permanent homes. For these children, guardianship or some other form of legally sanctioned permanency is an alternative to adoption.

Although some children are adopted promptly from the child welfare system, the majority of children wait several years for a permanent family. Unfortunately, the best interests of children are not met when children remain in substitute care for several years, whatever the reason. While a few years may not seem like a long time to adults, a child's sense of time is very different—a year is an eternity. Seen through the eyes of a waiting child, the system clearly fails.

The goal of permanency is a fundamental theme in child welfare practice that is rooted in the recognition in the late 1970s and early 1980s that children were “drifting” in foster care.

Children were staying for long periods in what was intended to be a short-term placement without established goals and plans either to return to their families or to find new families for the children. As child welfare refocused itself on the goals of children who had been removed from their families and placed in foster care, it set the objective of achieving a permanent family for each child—either the family of origin or a new adoptive family.

The *Families for Kids* initiative focused on children in substitute care for whom reunification with their parents was not possible. Permanency for *FFK* meant either finding an adoptive family or a family who would assume legal guardianship of the child.

THE CONTEXT OF CHILD WELFARE

In choosing to focus on finding homes for children, the Foundation explicitly decided to fund grantees that would make fundamental changes to the child welfare system as a whole, rather than piecemeal practice changes. The Foundation recognized that practice of child welfare lies within a complex system composed of both child welfare social service agencies and the courts that handle child and family matters. Both are guided by, and constrained by, Federal and State legislation. A brief overview of these two parts of the child welfare system—the child welfare agencies and the courts—is provided below to describe the environment in which *FFK* was implemented. The legislative environment in which the child welfare agencies and courts operate is summarized in Appendix A.

Child Welfare Agencies

In recent years, child welfare agencies have placed greater emphasis on issues of permanency (i.e., adoption and guardianship). In part, this focus has been achieved through new legislative guidelines that compress the time frames in which decisions regarding permanency must be made. Consequently, many agencies have reconsidered the way that child welfare services are organized.

Typically, child welfare departments have been organized to include intake units; investigation and assessment units; on-going service units, which managed cases of children at home with their parents; foster care units; foster parent recruitment and support units; and permanency units that handled adoption cases once a case goal changed to adoption or parental rights were terminated. Foster care and adoption have traditionally been the responsibility of separate units. Furthermore, recruitment of foster parents has usually been separated from recruitment of adoptive parents.

Often, many public and private workers are involved in various stages of a case, with each worker focusing on limited objectives. An organization of service delivery that is based on moving a child from one discrete status to another has led to uncoordinated and fragmented services to children and families. Many child welfare agencies, including the *FFK* grantees, found that this fragmented structure is a barrier to timely permanence for many children.

The role of families has changed in most child welfare agencies. Traditionally, birth families were seen as the subject of investigations, assessments, and preventive services. Once children were removed from their home, birth families became the targets of service interventions to overcome problems that inhibited reunification with their children. Foster, adoptive, and extended kinship families were rarely involved in such agency deliberations or decisions.

Recently, more and more agencies are beginning to involve families at all stages in a child welfare case. This has occurred partly as a result of the increased importance that alternatives to reunification have gained and partly because of the emphasis on more frequent reviews and earlier permanency decisions.

Child welfare agencies are under pressure because of new and tighter time constraints to make decisions and reduce the time children spend in substitute care. Resources that may be insufficient to meet these responsibilities exacerbate these pressures. In response, many child welfare agencies are rethinking their service delivery roles and ways of organizing services

The Courts

Federal and State laws require the involvement of the judiciary in all stages of child welfare service delivery. Recent legislation—coupled with the increasing number of children who have been brought into the system and the seriousness of their problems—has contributed to added demands on the courts. The legislative mandates related to the management of child welfare cases in juvenile or family courts have also imposed a set of conditions not found in other judicial settings. For example, while most other forms of judicial activity make discrete, time-limited decisions, juvenile and family courts are involved in a series of determinations over an extended period in which each decision is contingent upon earlier ones. In addition, the sheer number of participants involved in the process—including children, siblings, parents (biological, foster, and adoptive), kin, social workers, special child advocates, counselors, teachers, ministers, friends, attorneys, and court personnel—makes decision-making unusually complex and time-consuming. Judges must also consider the responsibilities of the public social service agency for the safety, well being, and best interests of the child. In many States, this already-complex structure is further complicated by the need to involve different courts at various points in the process. In some States, the juvenile or family court handles all child welfare activities as long as the child is in foster care, but when parental rights must be terminated or adoption finalized, jurisdiction is transferred to a probate court. This contributes to delayed permanency while the case is transferred and docketed, and another judge becomes familiar with the details of the case.

The unique characteristics of juvenile and family courts combined with the requirements for additional and more frequent hearings are factors that lead to difficulties in reaching timely permanency. Regardless of the efficiencies that might be gained in helping social service agencies establish permanency, without changes in the court process there is high potential for extending a child's stay in foster care and delaying his or her chances for a permanent family.

From the time that a case begins at the initial protective hearing, through adjudicatory and dispositional hearings, various review hearings, hearings related to the termination of parental rights, and finalization hearings, it is not unusual for more than 10 court appearances to be required before a child has achieved permanency with a family. Added to the time required by this minimum set of hearings, several other factors may contribute to delays and continuances. These include difficulties in assuring the presence of family participants, inadequate preparation of social service materials for hearings, lack of coordination with social service agencies and other service providers to schedule hearings and appearances of relevant parties, inadequate preparation or unavailability of counsel, overloaded court calendars, judicial

rotation, and an insufficient number of judges to hear the volume of cases. Reform of the courts requires that these issues be addressed to overcome these obstacles. In its role and function to help children reach permanency, a court is confronted with reexamining its rules and management. The Supreme Courts of the States are instrumental in establishing court procedures that will expedite the timely processing of cases. Court rules that help to reduce continuances and judicial rotation, require training in child welfare law, and specify the duties and responsibilities of court officials would help to expedite cases. Courts must also improve case flow management through the development of better information systems, enhanced internal case management techniques, improved external coordination with social service agencies, and greater diligence to the issue of timely permanence.

In addition, courts are faced with the issue of personnel resources. In many instances, additional personnel are needed to carry out the responsibilities of the courts pertaining to children. These may include more judges, attorneys, clerks, or case management staff and other support personnel.

The mutual and interdependent functions of social services and the courts have not always been fully acknowledged in child welfare practice. Before reform of the child welfare system can be realized, the critical and exclusive importance of the courts in determining whether or when a child will have a permanent family must be addressed.

Most of the *FFK* grantees, which were all public or private social service agencies, initially did not fully involve the courts in planning and conducting the initiative. As the initiative developed, the importance of the courts as the entity that ultimately decides whether or not timely permanence for children will be achieved became clear. As this recognition grew, the *FFK* staff in each site made specific efforts to include in *FFK* activities the courts and attorneys who represent children, parents, and agencies.

FROM VALUES TO ACTION

The Foundation's planning experience clarified several values inherent in the establishment of the Foundation. The most fundamental part of this belief system was that every child deserves to grow up in—and have a lifelong connection with—a stable, loving family. Mr. Kellogg's motto, "We know better than we do," suggested that the knowledge needed to overcome most problems is usually available, but more effort needs to be applied in implementing that knowledge. There was an unspoken extension of this adage that problems are best solved by the people who are most affected by them, rather than by outside "experts" imposing a "solution."

These values were shared by Foundation staff and were buttressed by staff experiences as adoptive or foster parents. The Foundation's board resolved to act upon these values and concerns about children who were waiting for permanent families. Thus, after consultation with many experts on the status of child welfare practices in the United States, the Foundation launched *Families for Kids (FFK)* in 1993.

In undertaking the *FFK* initiative, the Foundation also employed what was then an emerging strategy for grantmaking that has since become standard practice for many philanthropic organizations. Rather than responding to requests to fund worthy causes that had some relationship to the general areas of Foundation interest, with *FFK* the Foundation used grantmaking strategically to achieve social change. The initiative included a clearly defined goal, clear objectives, and specific standards that grantees were expected to meet. In addition, grantees were encouraged to include all stakeholders in the decision-making process. They were given the freedom and support to implement locally devised solutions to local barriers that inhibited timely permanency for children. The Foundation was careful *not* to impose programmatic solutions on the participating grantees.

Goal and Objectives of *FFK*

The Foundation staff realized that fundamental systemic reform of child welfare would be necessary if *FFK* were to result in a sustained reduction in the number of children waiting for families. Consequently, the goal of *FFK* was to assure that a permanent family connection was established in a timely manner for all children who could not return to their birth parents. To achieve this goal, the Foundation specified two independent yet interrelated objectives for the initiative:

- Elimination of the current backlog of children who were waiting for permanent families; and
- Removal of systemic barriers to permanency within the child welfare system so that additional children did not wait unduly for permanent families.

Practice Standards

Foundation staff articulated specific practice standards that, if met, were expected to help the sites accomplish the goal and objectives of the *FFK* initiative. These standards were carried into the implementation phase and became benchmarks for organizing and staging interventions in the social service and judicial systems and for measuring progress in system change. Originally referred to as outcomes, these standards were:

- **Family Support.** Any family, including foster and adoptive families, in contact with the child welfare system will have available services that promote their ability to solve and/or cope with their problems of everyday family living toward assuring permanency for their children.
- **Coordinated Assessment.** A coordinated, single assessment process that includes family members will be used to evaluate a family's needs for all levels of service.
- **Consistent Casework.** A family and child will be provided one caseworker or casework team throughout the implementation of the permanency plan.
- **Timely Permanence.** All children will achieve permanency within 1 year of coming into contact with the child welfare system.

- **Stable Placement.** A child placed in foster care will be assured of a single, stable foster placement within his or her own community until a permanency outcome is achieved.
- **Backlog Reduction.** The backlog of children in substitute care who are waiting for permanency will be reduced.

The heuristic importance of the standards was summed up by one of the site project directors who said that the standards “forced us to pay attention to children—to look at the system through the eyes of a child.”

Although each of the sites was expected to develop interventions related to the six standards, they were also encouraged to develop strategies that were based on the unique needs and opportunities that were identified in each site. As a “practice bundle,” the standards established the practice cornerstones for a reformed system of providing services to children and families. They also served as consistent reference points for the sites to direct and assess their efforts in reforming their child welfare systems. More importantly, the standards provided a guide for developing a future child welfare system from the perspective of the children who were in the system.

Including Diverse Stakeholders

While the *FFK* design avoided prescribing particular methods or program models for the sites to implement, it included a requirement that everyone who had a stake in improving child welfare services also had a voice in the initiative. In particular, the initiative was built on the recognition that children of color were over-represented in almost every child welfare system, and this over-representation was greatest among children who were waiting for permanent families. Acting on the underlying value that the most effective solutions to problems are likely to be provided by those who are most affected, the Foundation staff consistently reinforced the need to involve children and families of color, and organizations that specialized in serving them, in all *FFK* activities and decisions.

THE THREE PHASES OF *FFK*

The Foundation instituted a three-phased strategic approach to the initiative that included the awarding of visioning grants to 19 sites, the awarding of implementation grants to 11 of those sites, and ending with the awarding of transition grants to 8 of the implementation sites.¹ The three phases are described below.

Visioning Phase

The first step in launching the *FFK* initiative was the broad dissemination of a brochure entitled *Families for Kids: A Grant Program to Change Adoption Systems* that described the initiative to an extensive list of public and private child welfare agencies across the country. This brochure requested interested groups to submit concept papers describing briefly how they might go about permanently reducing the backlog of children waiting for adoptive homes or

¹ The three sites that did not receive a transition grant each had sufficient carryover resources to sustain the initiative activities for an additional year.

other types of permanent families. More than 200 concept papers were submitted and reviewed in response to this initial request.

Beginning in March 1993, the Foundation awarded 12–18 month planning grants of \$100,000 each to 19 sites in 15 States (Appendix B). The purpose of the planning grants was to conduct a community visioning process that would establish a comprehensive picture of the issues involved in addressing the needs of children waiting for permanent families. The visioning process was integral to developing a future-oriented change process based on locally shared principles and values. This process differed from the conventional problem-solving approach to address immediate, short-term problems. It also emphasized participatory collaboration rather than top-down compliance.

The 19 sites were expected to obtain input from a broad range of stakeholders who had an interest in the dual objectives of providing permanent families for children waiting for families and eliminating systemic barriers to timely permanence within the child welfare system. More than 14,000 participants were engaged in the visioning process, including a diverse mix of traditional and non-traditional stakeholders in the child welfare system. (Appendix C)

The Foundation's emphasis on including both traditional and non-traditional stakeholders necessitated building communication bridges between groups that had often been at odds. Traditional stakeholders included public child welfare administrators, social workers, judges and other court personnel, legislators, and private agency personnel. Non-traditional

As one participant noted during the visioning activities, "Who would have thought that a household name that I see on my breakfast table each morning would give our State a lot of money to fix its child welfare system?"

stakeholders included foster and adoptive parents; foster and adopted children; birth parents whose children had been removed or whose parental rights had been terminated; representatives from religious, business, and academic communities; and advocates for racial and ethnic minority children in the public child welfare system. Most of the non-traditional stakeholders had never been involved in child welfare planning activities.

Visioning methodologies included public forums, large-scale surveys, focus groups, conference presentations, and individual interviews with key informants. Most of the sites employed multiple visioning methods (Walter R. McDonald & Associates, Inc., 1996; see also Appendix D). During the community visioning process, it became clear that the name recognition associated with the Kellogg brand of products contributed to the willingness of many non-traditional stakeholders to become involved in public discussions of their

problems with child welfare.

As a result of the visioning format and level of participation, sites generated a broad list of issues that affected timely permanency for children in the community. Each site developed a proposal to the Foundation of activities that were intended to achieve the twin objectives of the initiative and reflect the local interests, concerns, and recommendations expressed during the visioning process.

Implementation Phase

The second phase in the *FFK* initiative was implementation. The Foundation awarded 3-year implementation grants in January 1995 to fund the proposed activities in nine sites: Pima County, Arizona; Kansas; Massachusetts; Kent County, Michigan; Mississippi; Montana; Ohio; South Carolina; and Washington. Two sites, North Carolina and New York City, were added to the cluster of *FFK* implementation sites in November 1995 and January 1996, respectively. The Foundation staff used the following criteria in selecting the implementation sites: (1) the proposals embraced the *FFK* practice standards, (2) nontraditional stakeholders, including people of color, were actively involved in the initiative, and (3) the proposal represented the consensus of the community.

Each site that received an implementation grant is described briefly in Appendix E. The 11 *FFK* sites included seven States (Kansas, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Washington); a large city (New York); two counties (Pima County, Arizona, and Kent County, Michigan); and a nine-county regional collaborative in Northeast Ohio. Implementation grants averaged three million dollars. Sites spent their grant monies differently depending upon their implementation plans. Most sites were able to extend the spend-down period of implementation grant resources beyond 3 years. Also, some sites were able to obtain matching or contributing resources from other public and private sources.

The selected sites represented considerable diversity in size, geographic location, type of public human service structure, role of private agencies, judicial organization, and characteristics of children and families served. *FFK* grantees included private non-profit service agencies, public child welfare agencies, a community foundation, and public-private-tribal partnerships. Although the Foundation did not deliberately attempt to select a sample of sites that would be representative of child welfare systems in the United States, the variations among the sites in fact presented a fair reflection of the characteristics of child welfare systems nationally.

Transition Phase

As the participating sites neared the completion of the implementation phase, it became clear that most needed additional assistance and time if the systemic changes they had initiated were to be sustained as an integral part of the child welfare system. The transition phase of the project began in February 1998 with the award of grants to four *FFK* sites. Grants were awarded to four other sites in January 1999. The eight sites (Appendix F) received \$100,000 each to continue selected activities that were begun in the implementation phase. Two sites, New York and North Carolina, were not considered for transition grants because the awards of their initial implementation grants were later than the other sites. One site, Pima County, Arizona, opted to not apply for a transition grant although its *FFK* activities continued in the transition phase by using resources remaining from the *FFK* implementation grants and other sources.

In the interest of focusing on the adoption needs of children of color, in 1998, the Foundation awarded a grant to the Howard University School of Social Work to establish the National Center on Permanency for African American Children. The Center focuses on providing technical assistance, training, and research services to public and private agencies throughout

the United States that are seeking to improve their services to African American children and families.

THE ROLE OF THE FOUNDATION

Through its program officers and management team, the Foundation played an active role in the initiative beginning with its early conceptualization. The primary role of the Foundation was in establishing a strong value premise for the initiative. The name of the initiative, *Families for Kids*, set a value tone that served as a guideline for the Foundation's various roles.

The specific role that the Foundation staff played varied according to the stage of the initiative's development as well as the progress in each of the sites. At times, they played the roles of convener, catalyst, or coordinator. At other times, the Foundation staff acted as facilitator, information disseminator, and technical assistance provider. The Foundation carried out its various roles at the national level, the initiative cluster level, and at the site level.

In all three arenas—national, initiative cluster, and site-specific—the Foundation staff championed a vision-driven change effort. They shaped the direction of project activities and contributed to the national policy dialogue regarding new directions for adoption services.

National Arena

The Foundation's interest in "getting the story out" was constant, and served to increase awareness and knowledge about adoptions in general and *FFK* in particular. At the national level, the Foundation served as a catalyst in rethinking Federal policy options by holding a National Policy Summit in which key policy-makers and policy-shapers from State and national levels participated. First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton gave the keynote address at this Summit conference. Foundation and site representatives also provided information and testimony to both Houses of Congress, the Executive branch, and key Congressional leaders concerning the development of the President's Adoption 2002 Initiative and other legislation being considered by Congressional committees. In addition, two policy summits were held that brought together national leaders for the purpose of developing strategies to meet the adoption needs of African American, Native American, and Latino children and families.

The Foundation also exerted national influence through strategic uses of multiple communications media. The national communications strategy involving press releases, briefing papers, policy messages, and television spots was designed and carried out by the Communications Consortium Media Center, under contract to the Foundation. The Foundation developed other materials that were distributed nationally through a contract with Spann Publications Consulting (Appendix G).

The values and objectives of *FFK* were translated into business terms through a grant to the National Adoption Center (NAC) to encourage employers to modify their personnel benefits programs. The intent of this grant was to inform human resources professionals in large organizations about the needs of adoptive families and to encourage their employees to become adoptive parents by providing at least the same benefits that an employee who had a newborn child would receive. Many employers modified their policies to provide the equivalent of maternity leave to new adoptive parents, and several began subsidizing their employees' costs of adopting. Although the *FFK* grant has ended, the NAC continues to

receive several requests for assistance each month from employers who want to revise their personnel benefits to encourage adoption.

The *FFK* Cluster

For the cluster of initiative grantees, the Foundation convened several networking meetings, conferences targeted to individual topics, and meetings focused on special concerns. During the community visioning phase, the overall approach and underlying values of the initiative were emphasized in three visioning network meetings that the Foundation convened with the 19 recipients of the planning grants.

In addition to the national policy summits, the Foundation convened five networking meetings for grantees during the implementation phase. The project directors, local evaluators, and four or five other stakeholders from each site typically participated in each networking meeting. They shared ideas with each other and received information about factors that might affect the initiative at the national and local levels. In addition to the networking meetings, two meetings were held in which the local site evaluators and cluster evaluators came together to share lessons learned and to reassess progress and future evaluation directions. Also, the Foundation convened a meeting for judges to examine various ways to overcome judicial barriers to permanency.

Specific Sites

The Foundation furthered the goal and objectives of each site initiative in several ways. Having a national foundation with the reputation and name recognition of Kellogg was significant in providing instant credibility and visibility to projects at the local level. The Foundation also provided the sites with specific support and technical assistance directly and through consultants in each of the five components of the initiative:

- **Communication.** The Foundation contracted with the Communications Consortium Media Center to assist the sites in developing and implementing their communication plans as well as planning the national level communications efforts for the initiative as a whole. Most of the communication efforts in the sites involved general public awareness targeted toward general audiences and specific campaigns to recruit potential adoptive families for waiting children.
- **Family Advocacy.** The family advocacy component of the initiative was a continuation of the involvement of non-traditional stakeholders that began in the visioning process. These stakeholders were considered both as an important source of different perspectives in changing policies and practices and as new constituencies building a broader base of support for change. The Foundation issued a grant to the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), a national organization composed largely of adoptive and foster parents, to help the sites develop mechanisms for encouraging the involvement and contributions of these non-traditional stakeholders.
- **Public Policy Reform.** The importance of setting operational and practice-implementing policies in public and private agencies was viewed as critical to the initiative. The Foundation also asked NACAC to assist the sites in reviewing policy-

related issues that could pose barriers to reaching the goal and objectives of the initiative.

- **Legal Reform.** As the initiative evolved, it became clearer to all of the participants that timely permanency could not occur for most children unless courts changed the way they operated. The Children’s Law Clinic of the University of Michigan School of Law received a grant from the Foundation to assist the sites in reforming judicial practice.

The grant enabled the Children’s Law Clinic to change legal education so that new lawyers would have better knowledge of child welfare law, particularly related to permanency issues. This was primarily accomplished through a series of 1 week courses in child welfare law (and related issues such as child development) offered during the summer to law students from the sites. Two students representing each site participated in the classes, which were followed by internships in the sites at agencies or offices involved in child welfare law. The basic intent of the course was to encourage qualified law students to pursue careers in child welfare law. It had the added benefit of increasing demand for adding child welfare law courses to the curriculum in a number of sites. See Appendix H for a list of the child welfare law students who participated in this program.

The Senior Child Welfare Law Fellows program was another facet of the Children’s Law Clinic grant. In this program, a judge or senior attorney who practiced child welfare law in some capacity in one of the sites took a sabbatical to spend a semester in residence at the Children’s Law Clinic. During their semester in residence, Senior Fellows conducted legal research on topics related to achieving permanency for children. They also taught some classes and served as mentors to students interested in the field. Four Fellows (Appendix I) participated in this program before it ended because of difficulties in recruiting candidates who could be freed from their responsibilities for an entire semester.

Children’s Law Clinic staff also assisted the sites by providing information on legal issues that affected permanency for children in general as well as issues that were specific to the individual site. In several sites, Clinic staff helped local law schools to develop a similar Children’s Law Clinic to assist judges and attorneys involved in child welfare cases in the State.

- **Evaluation.** The Foundation also recognized that providing the participants in the initiative with information about their progress in achieving its objectives, so that mid-course corrections could be made as necessary, was a critical component of system change. To that end, each site was required to involve a local evaluator in the initiative to collect and analyze information about the site’s progress.

Local evaluators were also expected to provide consistent data that would permit the evaluation of the effects of the initiative as a whole—a “cluster” of grantees focused on achieving the same goal and objectives. To carry out the cluster evaluation activities of the initiative, the Foundation contracted with Walter R. McDonald & Associates,

Inc. (WRMA). WRMA worked with the sites and their local evaluators to develop a set of key indicator data and other reporting information that would reflect the sites' progress and actions in moving children toward permanence. Also, WRMA provided technical assistance as requested on specific issues of concern to the sites.

SUMMARY

FFK was a large multi-year initiative. It was a major undertaking in terms of the number of sites funded, the number of supporting technical assistance contracts and grants, the number of activities that the Foundation conducted to help sites meet their objectives, and the number of children who were reached.

In most large initiatives, there is a tendency for participants to drift from the central common objective. Indeed, during the first stage of the implementation phase, the grantees expressed some confusion about the focus of the initiative since the stakeholders had brought to light such a wide range of issues. With some effort, the focus was resharpener and the main objectives adopted by all sites. The three main objectives were as follows:

- Increase the number of children who are placed in permanent families;
- Significantly reduce the backlog of waiting children; and
- Change the child welfare system so that children entering substitute care did not wait for long periods for a permanent family.

The next chapter examines the accomplishments of the sites in terms of these objectives.

CHAPTER 2 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The *Families For Kids* initiative has affected waiting children in all 11 sites. In addition, *FFK* has played a major role in shifting thinking about permanency for children on a national level. *FFK* was—and is—a large-scale effort to improve the lives of children who come into the care of the child welfare system. The evidence that it has achieved this fundamental purpose is powerful.

The data presented in this chapter focus on documenting the extent to which the 11 sites, collectively as a cluster, have improved permanency outcomes for children of all races, ages, and special needs; reduced time in care; and increased the number children adopted by families with which they had existing relationships. Data are presented for the initiative as a whole over a 3-year period.¹ Individual site data used for each exhibit are reported in Appendix J.

IMPACT ON PERMANENCY

The most fundamental question regarding the effects of *FFK* must be, “Did it affect permanency for children?” This question is examined in several ways:

- The total number of children whose guardianships or adoptions were finalized during the year;
- The permanency rates for children in care; and
- The exit rates for children in care.

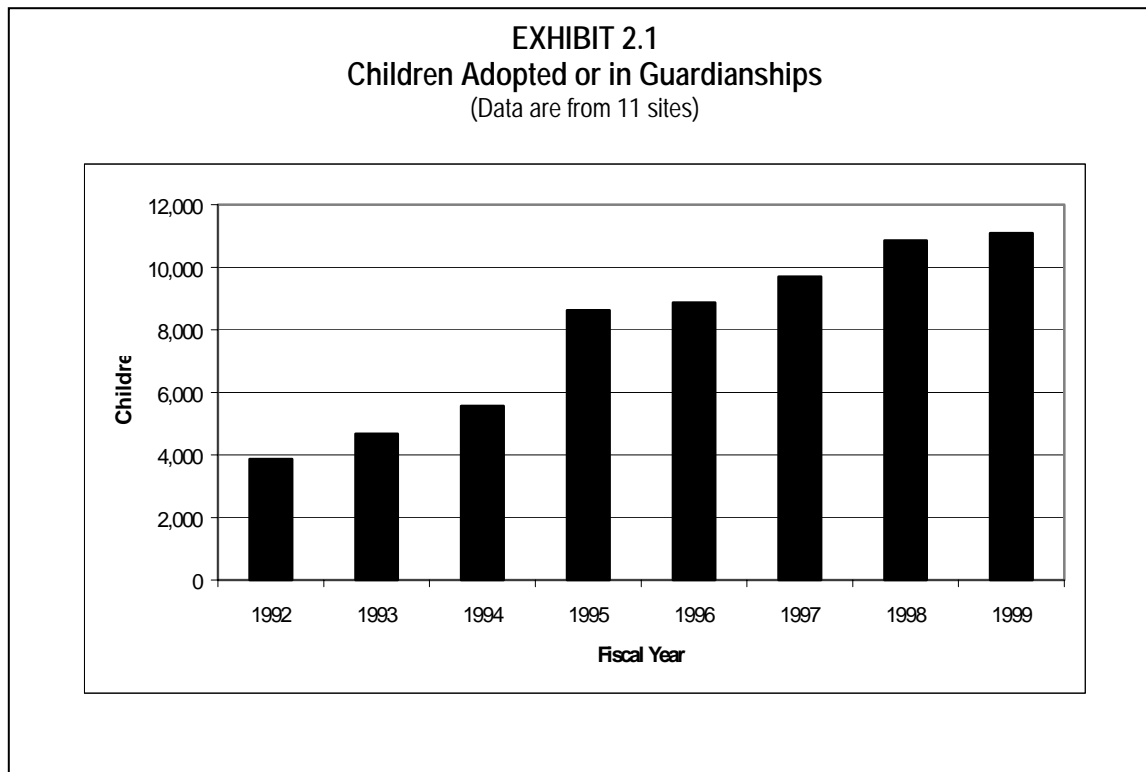
Finalized Adoptions and Guardianships

The number of children who had adoptions or guardianships legally finalized during the year almost tripled between 1992 and 1999. In 1992, the year before the visioning period for *FFK* began, the 11 sites that received implementation grants reported that about 3,800 children achieved permanency through adoption or guardianship. By 1995 more than 8,600 children had adoptions or guardianships finalized during the year. By the end of 1999, this number had risen to more than 11,000 children.

Between 1993 and 1999 adoptions or guardianships were legally finalized for about 60,000 children in the 11 implementation sites. During this period the annual number tripled, from 3,800 children to more than 11,000 children.

¹ The participating sites varied in their capability to provide WRMA with Key Indicators data to assess outcomes. Five sites were able to provide consistent data for 16 consecutive quarters (4 years), and 5 sites were able to provide data only for 12 consecutive quarters (3 years). One site provided data in 6-month blocks for a 3-year period. In some instances, the data from the sites cover different periods. For analysis purposes, we have included data for the most recent 3-year period from each site, grouped and reported as “Year 1, Year 2, and Year 3” for the cluster as a whole. The number of sites included is reported for each graph. These results represent the initiative as a whole, not each specific site. Not all sites had results in the same direction as the cluster as a whole. Four sites provided some data on cohorts of children who entered care or whose parental rights were terminated in the same year. While these data cannot represent the cluster as a whole, they have been used to inform or expand the discussion in some instances.

Adoptions or guardianships were finalized for about 60,000 children over the course of the initiative. (Exhibit 2.1)



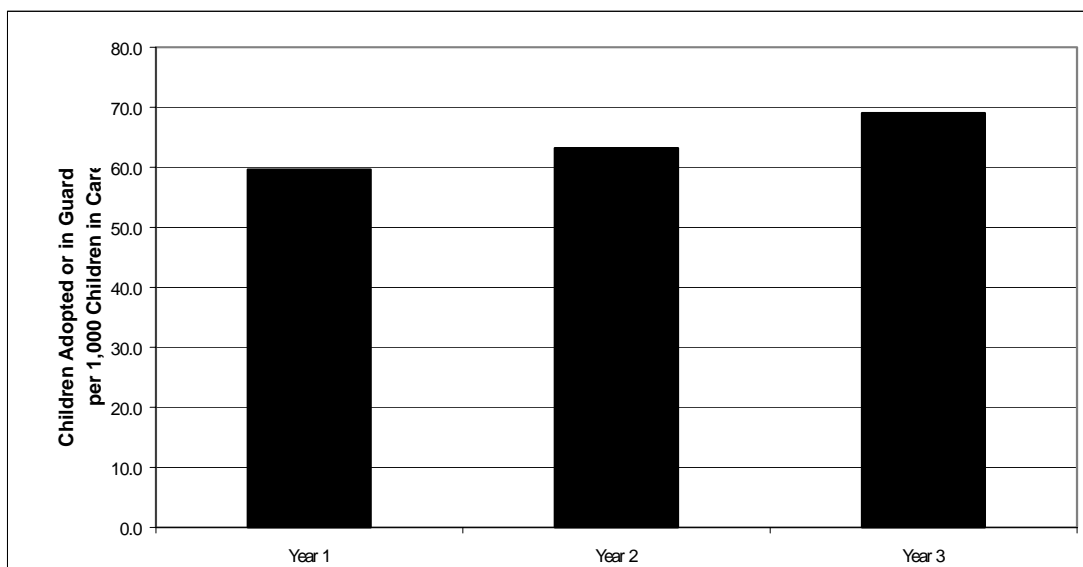
The permanency rate increased about 17 percent over the 3 years of the evaluation. That is, the permanency rate for the third year was 69.0 finalized adoptions and guardianships per 1,000 children in substitute care.

Permanency Rates

If these increases in permanency merely reflected growth in the child welfare system, the rate of children whose adoptions or guardianships were finalized per 1,000 children in substitute care (i.e., permanency rate) would not change substantially. In order to examine this possibility, the permanency rates were computed for each of the 3 core years (Exhibit 2.2). In the first year of implementation, the permanency rate was 59.6 children per 1,000 children in care. By the second year, this had increased to 63.2 children per 1,000 and to 69.0 children per 1,000 in the third year. Such a steady increase indicates that the increases in permanency for children in substitute care reflect real improvements rather than just growth in the system.²

² The comparable national rate was 31.4 children per 1,000 in care for the period between October 1998 and March 1999. This rate was computed using the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data, for this period. Full year national data are not available, since the data for the previous 6-month period have been removed from public domain and data that are more recent have not yet been released. That is, the best estimate of a national permanency rate is less than half the rate achieved by the *FFK* sites.

EXHIBIT 2.2
Permanency Rate
(Data are from 10 sites)

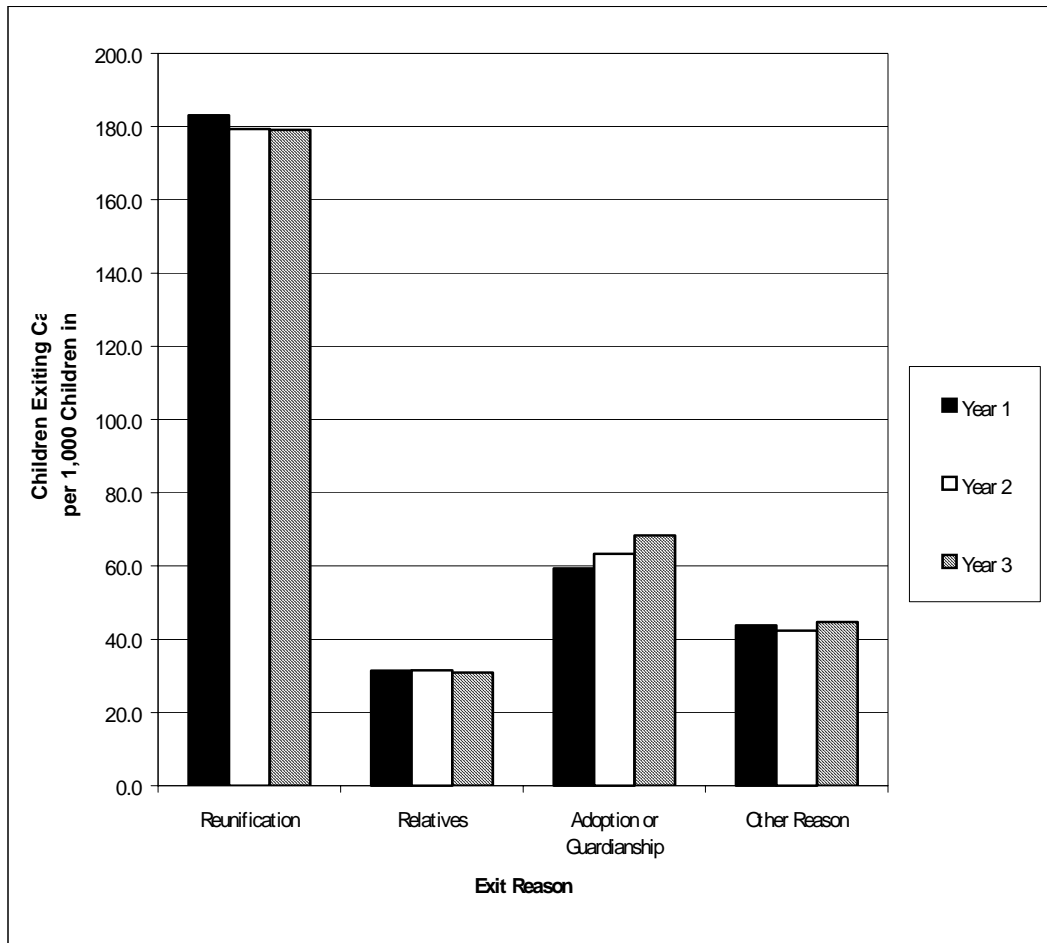


Reasons for Leaving Care

In the last two decades, child welfare systems have concentrated on preserving families by preventing placement of children in substitute care whenever possible and, failing that, by reunifying children who were removed and their parents. For some children in care, the emphasis on reunification often contributed to their lingering in care until they aged out of the system.

The *FFK* initiative focused more on the permanency needs of the child than on the needs of the family. With that shift in emphasis came changes in the ways children exited from substitute care. Over the 3 years for which data are available, the rate of children leaving care who were adopted or had guardianships finalized increased steadily. During the same period, the rate of children who were reunified with their parents or other relatives declined by 4 children per 1,000 in care, while the rate of children who were emancipated or left for other reasons remained stable (Exhibit 2.3).

EXHIBIT 2.3
Rate of Children Exiting Care, by Exit Reason
 (Data are from 9 sites)



CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN LEAVING CARE

When the participating sites examined their populations of children who were waiting for a permanent family, they found that a disproportionate number were minority children, especially African Americans. Additionally, most of the children were school age and had one or more “special needs”—such as medical problems, emotional disturbance, mental retardation, or membership in a sibling group that needed to remain together. It was common for these children to have had more than two different placements since they had been removed from their family.

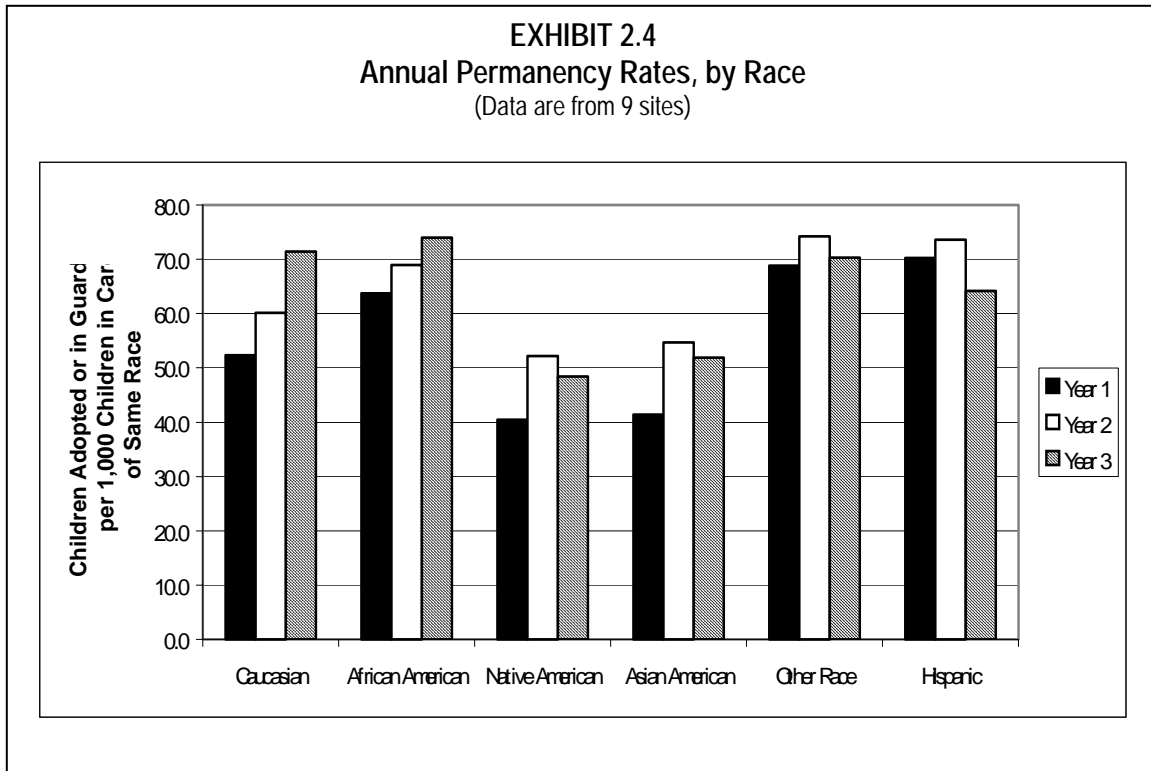
Race and Ethnicity

As the *FFK* initiative evolved, it focused increasingly on issues of permanency for children of color. Early in the initiative, it was shown that the percentage of African American and Native American children who had been in substitute care more than 1 year was about four times their percentages in the child population. The percentage of Latino children in care more than

Permanency rates increased for Caucasian, African American, Native American, and Asian American children between the first and third year, but decreased for Hispanic children.

a year was about one-and-a-half times their percentage of the child population (Walter R. McDonald & Associates, Inc., 1996). For all three groups, the longer children waited for permanency the greater their over-representation became.

All of the sites concentrated considerable effort on achieving permanency for children of color. These efforts were successful, with the permanency rates increasing each of the 3 years for African American children. The permanency rates for Native American, Asian American children and Hispanic children increased between the first and second years but declined in the third year. Except for Hispanic children³ however, the permanency rates increased between the first and third years for all racial groups (Exhibit 2.4).



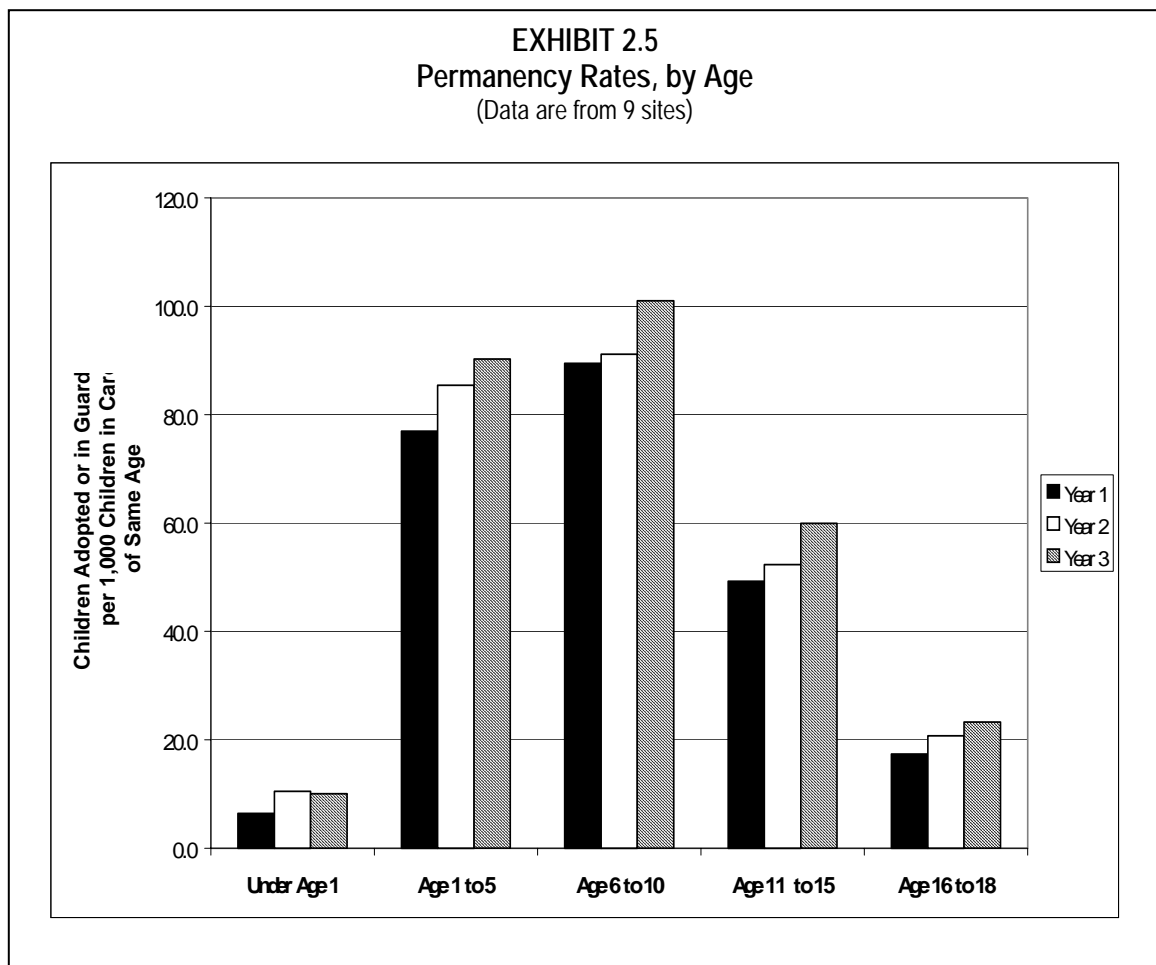
³ The term “Caucasian” refers mostly to non-Hispanic children, since the data systems of most of the sites recorded “Hispanic” as a racial category, although the cluster evaluation collected data on race and ethnicity separately.

Age

It is axiomatic among child welfare professionals that adoptive placements can be found more easily for younger children than for older children. Two additional factors came to light as a result of *FFK* efforts. First, “younger” and “older” are relative terms, with children age 6 or older being over-represented in the population of “older” waiting children (Walter R. McDonald & Associates, Inc., 1998). Second, many “younger” children wait so long in foster care while reunification is attempted with their families that by the time adoption becomes their permanency plan, they are already “older” and more difficult to place with an adoptive family.

FFK permanency rates increased for every age group of children under 18.

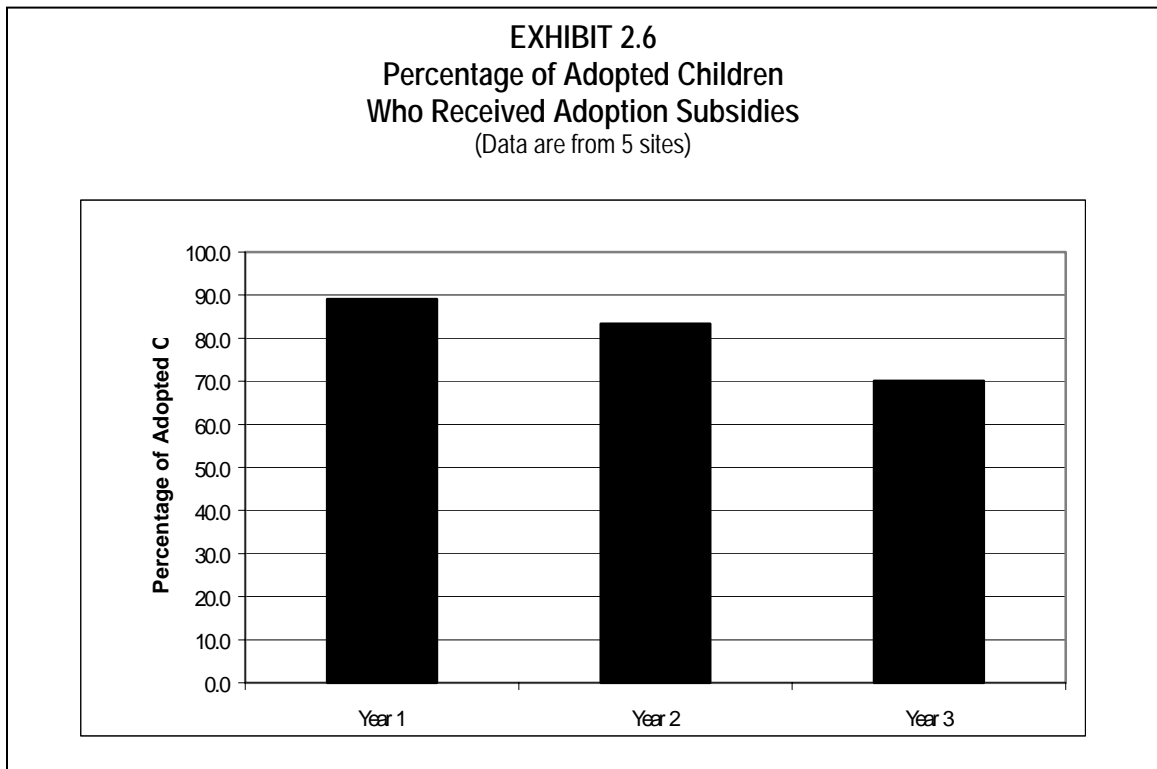
By focusing efforts on finding permanent homes for children who had been in substitute care more than a year, the sites found themselves working to achieve permanency for many “older” children. They were successful, in that over the three years the permanency rates increased for children in every age group, declining only slightly between the second and third year for children less than one year old (Exhibit 2.5).



Special Needs

When looking at the population of waiting children, every site found that many of the children who needed permanency had at least one special need. The child welfare agencies in the sites differed in the criteria they used to determine if a child had a special need. In some sites, being a member of a minority ethnic group or a sibling group was sufficient. Other sites only considered children who had a physical or mental handicapping condition as special needs children. For the purposes of the *FFK* cluster evaluation, sites were asked to report “special needs” children for whom the condition proved a barrier to adoption.

Over the 3 years of the initiative, the percentage of adopted children who received subsidies—the most consistently available indicator of special needs—decreased by almost 20 percent (Exhibit 2.6). These data suggest that as the *FFK* initiative progressed, the need for subsidies declined substantially. Whether this indicates that many special needs children were adopted and subsidies were no longer needed, or that special needs children were not being adopted and the percentage who needed subsidies declined, cannot be determined from the available data.



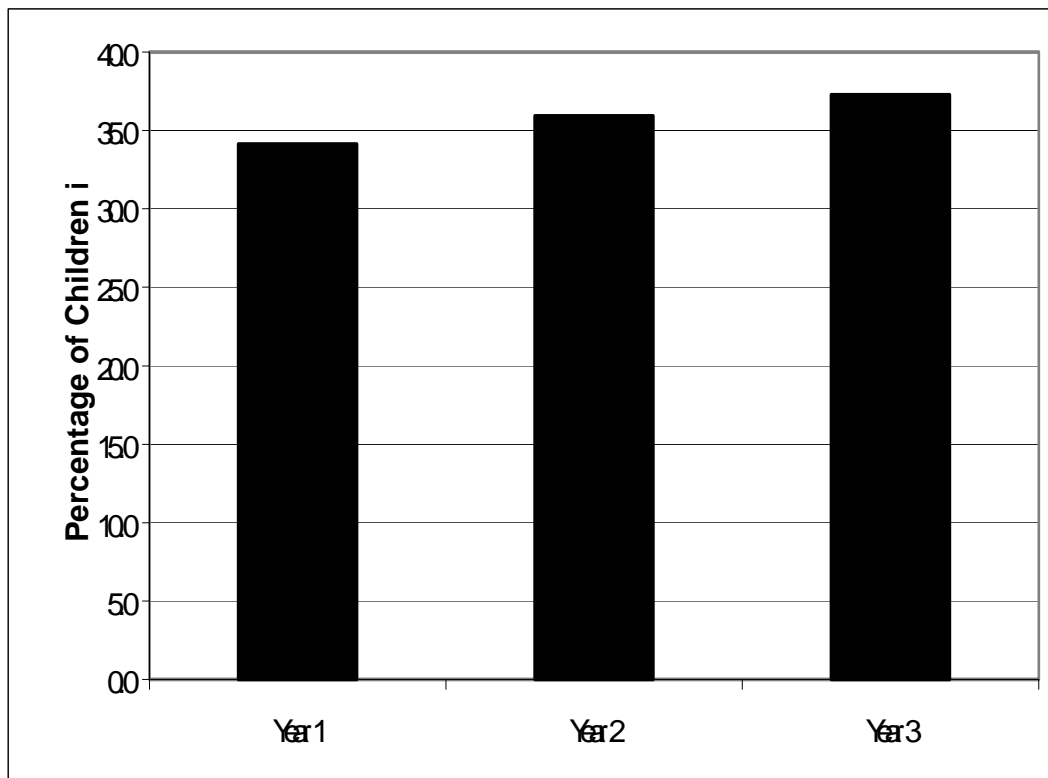
Number of Placement Changes

One of the original standards of practice included in the design of the initiative was that children should have no more than one placement between the time they were removed from their parents and the time they achieved permanency. Experience suggested that many children who were moved frequently learned to cope with the sense of loss and rejection by not allowing themselves to develop emotional attachments to any caretaker. The resulting “attachment disorders” made it progressively more difficult for these children to become an

integral part of a permanent family. The purpose of the standard promoting stable placement was to prevent attachment problems and reduce adoption disruptions.

The participating sites targeted this problem for special attention. They recognized that it was necessary for child welfare personnel to change the way they thought about placement. It was no longer acceptable for a child to have multiple placement changes while reunification, then adoption, was attempted. Under the rubric of concurrent planning, practice and agency culture changed to consider the initial placement as one that could become a permanent home for the child if reunification failed. The effects of this shift in attitude and practice are difficult to document. As the data in Exhibit 2.7 reflect, the percentage of children who had more than two placements—the initial emergency shelter placement plus one other—actually increased about three percent over the 3 years of the initiative. Most sites initially focused their efforts on finding permanent homes for the backlog of children who had been in substitute care for at least a year and had multiple placements already. As children in the backlog were placed, the ones remaining in need of a permanent family were often the most difficult to place and already had many different placements, thus the percentage of children with more placements increased.

EXHIBIT 2.7
Percentage of Children in Care
Who Had More Than Two Placements
(Data are from 9 sites)



TIME IN CARE

A fundamental problem that *FFK* was designed to overcome is that children spend too long in substitute care before being adopted. One of the practice standards underpinning the initiative indicated that no child should spend more than 1 year in substitute care before achieving permanence. For the purposes of the cluster evaluation, the group of children who were in care for more than 1 year was viewed as the backlog of waiting children.

Backlog Reduction

Reducing the backlog evolved as an addition to the practice standards, since it could be measured more easily than most of the other practice standards, and was an issue that every site needed to address. During the visioning process, each site identified a site-specific backlog of children who, for various reasons, had been in substitute care for a lengthy period and did not seem to be making progress toward permanency. (Walter R. McDonald & Associates, Inc., 1998) Since the conditions in each site were different, the characteristics of children they identified as comprising the backlog also differed.

While individual sites made some progress in reducing the number of children in the backlog, as locally defined, for the cluster as a whole neither the number or percentage of children in the backlog of children in care more than 1 year changed over the 3 years of the evaluation. The percentage of children in substitute care who had been in care for more than 1 year was 68.3 percent in both Year 1 and Year 3. It dipped slightly to 67.4 percent in Year 2.

This finding of stability over the 3 years has an important ramification for future permanency initiatives. One possible interpretation of this finding is that the child welfare foster care system is made up of two groups of children. Some children enter substitute care and are returned relatively quickly, certainly within a year. Approximately one-third of the children in care in the *FFK* sites returned home in less than a year. Other children enter foster care and remain for longer periods, for whatever reason. As the time in care lengthens, the complexity of the case increases, as does the involvement of the court and other professionals. These children will take longer to exit from the system. Indeed, current Federal law requires that for every child who has spent 15 out of the last 22 months in substitute care, a decision must be made as to whether the child shall remain in care and parental rights be terminated or whether the child shall be returned home. The backlog marker of 1 year in care may have been too

short to see any reduction in the proportion of children who were in the backlog. In short, while reducing the number of children in care more than a year was a good goal for initiative development purposes, practically speaking it may have been unrealistic.

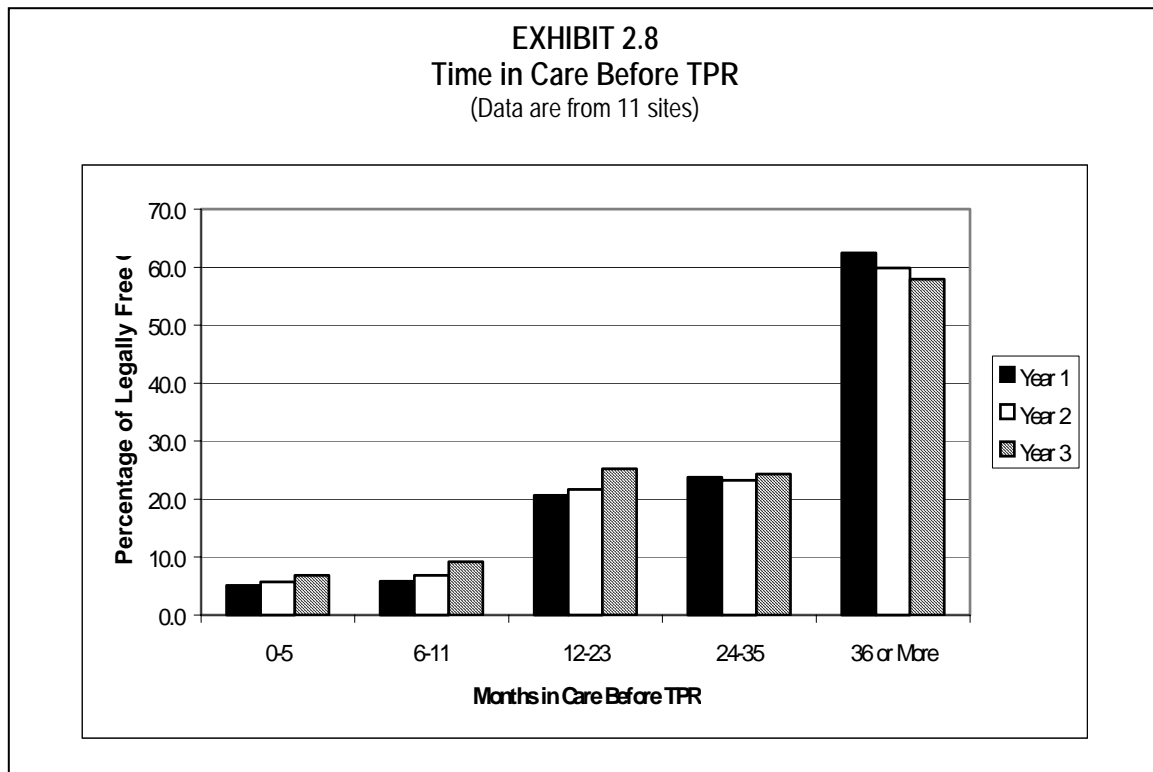
The time children spend in substitute care before being adopted must be considered in two large blocks. The first of these is the time between removal and termination of parental rights (TPR), a necessary step for adoption—although not necessary for guardianship. The second block is the time legally free children remain in substitute care before their adoption is finalized in court.

Time to TPR

The time between removal and TPR could only be assessed for children who were legally free during the *FFK* implementation

The percentage of children who were in care for 3 years or more before the legal rights of their parents were terminated decreased. This reflects a reduction in the time children wait in substitute care before becoming legally free for adoption.

period. As the sites explored the barriers to timely permanency that were evident in their systems, most found that children often waited in substitute care for long periods before the process of terminating parental rights was initiated, let alone completed. As barriers to TPR were removed, the percentage of legally free children who were in care for less than 2 years before their parental rights were terminated steadily increased. The percentage of children in care for 3 years or more declined, while the children in care 2-3 years remained stable (Exhibit 2.8).

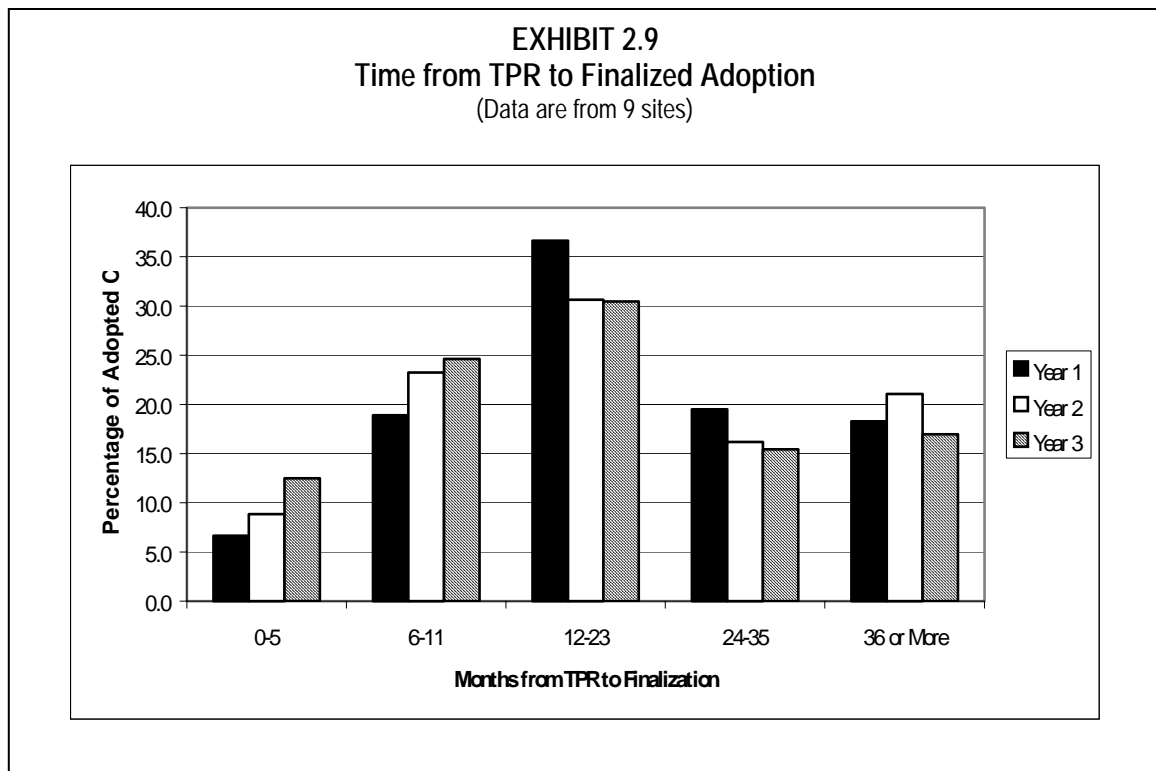


Time From TPR to Finalization

Children often remain in substitute care for long periods after they became legally free while waiting for a permanent family to be found and for the adoption to be finalized. In either case, the children are considered to be in substitute care until the adoption is legally finalized. Consequently, children in the FFK sites often remained in substitute care for long periods after they became legally free. In many cases, the children were placed with the family who would become their permanent family and, since they were safe and secure, there did not seem to be a pressing need to pursue the legal action required to finalize adoption. Other children who were not with their planned permanent family were subject to the process—sometimes lengthy—of being matched with a family who could provide appropriate permanent care. For most of these children, finding a matching family involved recruiting, training, home studying, and licensing of new families who might be interested in adopting him or her.

The percentage of children who were adopted within 1 year after their parental rights were terminated increased.

As the *FFK* sites removed the barriers to more timely finalization of adoptions, the percentage of children who waited less than a year after TPR before their adoptions were finalized steadily increased, while the percentage who waited more than 1 year declined (Exhibit 2.9). These data may suggest that the *FFK* sites successfully concentrated effort on overcoming barriers that inhibit permanency after TPR. They may also reflect *FFK* efforts to achieve adoption for those children who had been waiting a long time. That is, the data may indicate that the sites initially targeted children who had been in care the longest, thus they achieved permanence for the population they targeted.



Five sites were able to provide cohort data that allowed assessment of the total time children were in care before achieving permanency. Of the three sites that provided data on the cohorts of children entering care,⁴ the percentage of children who left substitute care within 1 year increased in one site and decreased in the other two. Two sites provided data on the cohorts of children whose parental rights were terminated,⁵ and the percentage of children who exited care within a year decreased in one and increased in the other.

PERMANENT FAMILIES

The *FFK* sites addressed the issue of finding permanent families in numerous ways. They expanded recruitment efforts to involve families who might not otherwise become available resources for waiting children. They encouraged relatives and foster parents—families who

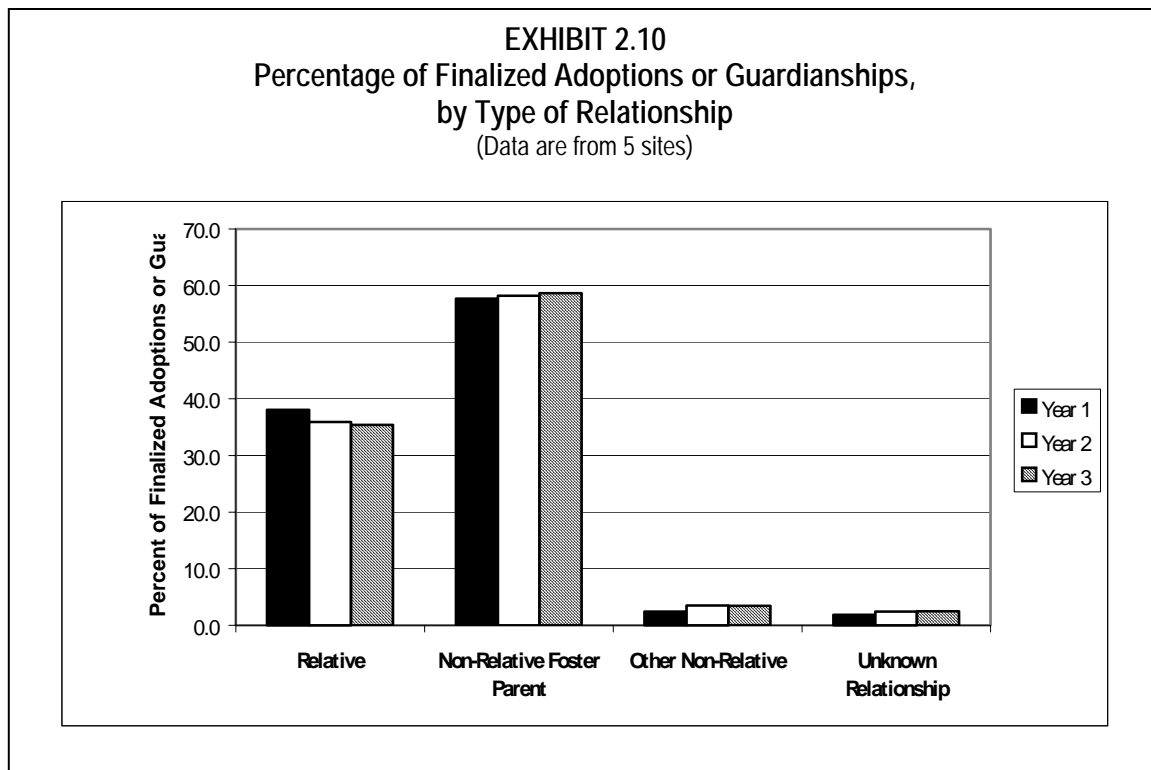
⁴ These sites were Montana, North Carolina, and South Carolina. If more sites had been able to provide entry cohort data, it would have been possible to develop a more informed picture of how the length of time in care may vary for children who entered care at different times.

⁵ These sites were Kansas and South Carolina.

already had a relationship with the child involved—to become adoption or guardianship resources.

Relationship of Adoptive and Guardianship Parents to Their Children

In keeping with the *FFK* initiative’s intent to reduce the trauma suffered by children when they are moved from one home to the next, the *FFK* sites viewed extended family members and existing foster parents as potential adoptive or guardianship families. The results of the *FFK* sites’ efforts in this regard are mixed. Overall, the percentage of children whose adoptive or guardianship parents were relatives declined three percent over the 3 years of the initiative. The percentage of children whose permanent families were foster parents, other non-relatives, or of an unknown relationship each increased one percent (Exhibit 2.10).



Foster parents and relatives consistently were the largest sources of permanent families for waiting children. Fundamentally, the proportion of permanent parents who were either relatives of or foster parents to their children did not change during the implementation period. This reflects the concentration of effort on retaining children with relatives or foster parents with whom a relationship had been established.

SUMMARY

Programmatic success can sometimes be measured quantitatively. Some indications that *FFK* made a difference are summarized below.

- The number of children whose adoptions or guardianships were finalized during the year tripled from about 3,800 in 1992, the year before the initiative began, to over 11,000 in 1999, which was the last year for most of the sites. During the

implementation phase, the number increased from 8,624 to 11,087, a 29 percent increase.

- The rate of children achieving permanency per 1,000 children in care increased from 59.6 per 1,000 children in the first data year to 69.0 per 1,000 in the third year.
- For most groups of children, the permanency rate increased. During the three data years it increased for African American children from 63.7 per 1,000 children in care to 74.0 per 1,000 children in care. For Asian American children, the rate increased from 41.4 to 51.9 per 1,000 children in care, and for Native American children the rate increased from 40.5 to 48.4 children per 1,000 in care. For Caucasian children, the rate increased also from 52.3 to 71.4 children per 1,000 children in care.
- For all age groups the permanency rates increased. For children less than 1 year of age, the rate increased from 6.4 to 10.1 children per 1,000 in care. For children aged 1-5, the rate increased from 76.9 to 90.2 children per 1,000, and for 6-10 year old children the rate increased from 89.5 to 101.0 per 1,000 children in care. The permanency rates also increased for adolescents, with the rate for 11-15 year old children increasing from 49.3 to 59.9 per 1,000 children in care, and for 16-18 year olds the rate increased from 17.4 to 23.3 children per 1,000 in care.
- The percentage of children for whom parental rights were terminated within 2 years increased from 31.5 to 41.3 percent over the three data years.
- During the 3 years the percentage of children whose adoptions were finalized within 1 year of TPR increased from 25.6 to 37.1 percent.

In the next chapter qualitative support of indications of achievement is examined.

CHAPTER 3 PRACTICES SUPPORTING ACOMPLISHMENTS

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss how the sites achieved the permanency outcomes for children that were presented in the previous chapter. This discussion focuses on the major themes that contributed to their accomplishments.

The sites implemented locally defined interventions within the context of the overall vision and value orientation of the Foundation. Sites embraced diverse strategies at different stages of their grants and even employed different approaches in different geographic areas. Sites also varied in the extent to which they were already engaged in change efforts and the readiness of the public agency charged with child welfare responsibilities to embrace change.

Despite diversity among the sites in their approaches and the conditions under which change efforts were initiated, the activities that enabled the cluster of sites to accomplish increased permanency for children can be divided into three major categories: use of data in decision-making and provision of services, expansion of the circle of stakeholders in permanency work, and changes in the organization and delivery of services. These categories are discussed in detail below.

USE OF DATA

The demands on the child welfare system, both in magnitude and complexity, have never been greater. Accurate and reliable information about children and families is essential for all persons involved in the child welfare system, from case level to program and policy levels. Child welfare workers, supervisors, managers, court support staff, and judges all need detailed, reliable information about individual children and families involved in cases under their supervision. Court and child welfare administrators need sound information related to the performance of their agencies in order to provide effective direction. Policy makers depend upon information that has been developed from the case level to formulate system-wide policies that respond to real demands and needs. For a system that is criticized for having too much paperwork, there is too little information that is useful for effective decision-making.

At the outset of the *FFK* initiative, useful data in the *FFK* sites either were not collected or not made available to those who could most benefit from it, as was typical of the child welfare system nationwide. Traditionally, the field of child welfare relied upon anecdotal accounts of cases or studies with a small number of sampled cases. The field has become increasingly aware of the need for more systematic data collection and relevant information development. This growth in awareness was evident in all of the sites.

One of the most consistent and striking themes to emerge from the evaluation of the initiative is that quantitative data about children and families became a useful tool related to the practice of child welfare. In most *FFK* sites, quantitative data have become central to the activities of those who practice in the child welfare arena, from line workers and administrators to evaluators and policy-makers. In some instances, data became an ingrained aspect of the “language” of practice by all participants in the child welfare system.

The convergence of four factors seems to have stimulated the increased use of data in the sites.

- **The cluster evaluation methodology called for the collection of data about children and their case characteristics.** Sites were asked to complete quarterly, two-part Key Indicators Reports (see Appendix K) that provided demographic and case data for all children in care for more than 24 hours during the reporting period. Part A contained aggregate information about three groups of children in care: all children in substitute care, children in care for at least 1 year, and children toward whom site specific interventions were most directly focused. Part B of the Key Indicators Reports included information only for children who had an adoption or guardianship finalized during the reporting period.

The process of collecting and reporting Key Indicator Data was difficult but revealing for most sites. In order to complete the reports, sites recognized that the data available to them from the States or local service areas were inadequate and incomplete. Many sites were required to develop new or updated information management systems. The process of trying to respond to the data collection requirements of the initiative provided sites with the recognition that the quality of their data was not sufficient—for either the Foundation or themselves. This recognition served as a springboard for substantial improvements. Nevertheless, the sites remained inconsistent in their ability to provide case level data for cluster evaluation purposes.

- **Backlog reduction actions contributed to improved data retrieval and usage.** In attempting to meet the Foundation’s objective of eliminating the current backlog of children waiting for permanency, all sites undertook what commonly became known as backlog reduction actions. The first step in this process for each site was identifying individual children who were part of the site-defined backlog population. While this may seem to be a relatively easy task, historically this capability has not been evident in the child welfare field. All sites found that identifying specific children in the backlog required more effort and time than originally anticipated. Often, the development of a list of children in the backlog entailed manual case reviews as well as retrieving information from State information systems or county databases.

In retrieving data from the State information systems, the sites frequently encountered data that were outdated, inaccurate, or simply missing. Often resources were limited or not available at the State level to perform the necessary tasks promptly, requiring time-consuming negotiations between the State and the site.

“Tracking the Progress of Children”

In South Carolina, data became an integral part of the child welfare system. An adoption tracking system was developed that was used in their backlog reduction efforts. A report was designed that followed the progress of adoption cases as they moved through the various stages. The report was shared with the counties and the State Department of Social Services. Data were collected to produce studies of county foster care activities, time spent in out-of-home care, and sibling placements. Data were also used in public education to emphasize the number and characteristics of children who were “stuck” in the system.

- **Federal directives and resources helped to motivate the sites toward improving data collection and usage.** The increased attention and resources given by the Federal government to improved Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information Systems buttressed the importance of data collection needs of the initiative. All sites had either completed or were in the process of completing improvements in their automated systems. In some instances, the change to new systems resulted in identifying additional problems, such as invalid data, data inconsistencies, and missing data. For these sites, the period of transition from a legacy system to a new system had the unintended effect of delaying their data reporting capabilities. Some sites used the implementation of new information systems to reinforce policy changes. For example, one site removed long-term foster care from the available codes for permanency planning options to indicate that long-term foster care is “a service, not a permanent home,” in the words of the *FFK* Director.

“Data-based Decision Making”

In Washington, data generated by the local evaluators were used effectively in all aspects of the initiative. There was an emphasis on using data in setting performance expectations and in aiding management and practice decisions. In developing their database on legally free children, the site was able to identify several barriers that inhibited or prevented permanency. The Division of Children and Family Services subsequently established a commission to deal with these issues. Both the African American and Native American initiatives in Washington included evaluation components that were geared toward collecting new information pertinent to the needs of their populations.

The Court Improvement Projects (CIP) that were funded by the Federal Government and conducted in the States uniformly identified improved data collection and case tracking in the court system as a priority. While there was less initiative-wide progress made in improved court information systems, it appears that the need for better information systems in the courts has been elevated to a higher level of importance through the CIP assessments. Court information systems varied widely in the sites. While some courts continued to rely on manual systems, courts in several sites either had developed or were in the process of developing automated court information tracking systems. The CIP also gave the courts and social service agencies an opportunity to converse about the information needs of each system and the need for common and shared information between them.

- **The local *FFK* evaluators played a critical role in improving data systems.** The local evaluators were instrumental in working within the State to produce more accurate reports and in building databases that were of use in identifying and tracking the progress of children. In the most positive examples, the local evaluators were seen by the public and private agencies as “helpers more than evaluators,” as stated by a line social worker. The practice interests expressed through the local evaluators helped the State-level information system managers to understand that the reports that they generated were not going to be put on a shelf and forgotten. Those sites that had the

most success in improving their data were those in which the local evaluator had a good knowledge of State information systems and the ability to work with State personnel in generating the necessary reports. Some sites even provided resources to the States to enable them to produce the data reports.

The quality and use of data were improved in many of the sites. Based on data generated about children in the backlog, some sites developed adoption-tracking tools that were used by individual workers to track the movement of children in their caseload toward permanency, and by supervisors to monitor workers' progress with clients and to plan for staff consultation and development. One *FFK* project director noted, "the major achievement of the initiative is the progress of the data system and its use by the field staff."

"Integrating Data into Daily Practice"

Evaluation was a critical component of FFK in Pima County, Arizona. The local evaluator played a pivotal role in securing data from the State for the operation of the initiative. Data were used as a focus for the policy, management, and supervisory directions of the initiative. Data were also used to facilitate collaborative permanency efforts in cross-functional assessment teams among public and private agency services, community representatives, and families. As the initiative matured, data on the progress of individual children and caseloads were presented regularly in various agency venues. Eventually, data became an expected part of all discussions and decision-making. The experiences at the service delivery level were deemed so successful that the State made changes in how data would be made available to other counties.

State and regional staff used aggregate data to make resource decisions. Data were also used in developing State and court policies. For example, after analyzing its data, one State changed its policy regarding the often-excessive or inappropriate use of long-term foster care as a permanency status. In another site, the analysis of data regarding children who were waiting for TPR in one county revealed that there was insufficient court time allocated to TPR hearings, creating multiple delays and continuances. The Chief District Court Judge then allocated more time for TPR hearings and, as a consequence, the number of children who were waiting for TPR was reduced by 50 percent.

Data were used to build public support in several sites and, in one site, were used in a benefit/cost analysis that was persuasive in gaining the support of the Governor for increased funding from the State. One of the county directors of a child welfare agency said, "never before have we been able to show concretely that what we are doing actually saves the State money and is worth the investment of more resources."

In another site, the data that were used internally by the child welfare system to improve permanency for children was subsequently taken to the State level to garner support for expansion of the *FFK* concept to the entire State. A county child welfare administrator who said, "You achieve what you measure," summed up the significance of using data at all levels of permanency work for children.

The increased use of data in the sites to make decisions and provide services in the social service and courts arenas was helpful in moving individual children toward permanency. It was also helpful in improving the systems' capabilities to address permanency issues. Exhibit 3.1 summarizes some examples of the use of data by the sites.

Exhibit 3.1
Use of Data by the *FFK* Sites

Pima County, Arizona	Cross-functional team used data to track children in the backlog.
Kansas	Information from the Adoption Tracking System was used for management purposes. A state map showing the number of children waiting for adoption in each county was used as a communications and recruitment tool.
Massachusetts	A list of names of children waiting for adoption was developed and printed on a large portable “wall” that became a very useful communication tool.
Kent County, Michigan	Data from the existing juvenile court and county child welfare agency were used intensively to examine the impact of the new service model being implemented. A new analytical database was developed.
Mississippi	An attempt was made to profile the waiting children in many parts of the State, but the State child welfare information system could not adequately support this effort. However, the State has subsequently made advances in its information capacity.
Montana	Statistics on Native Children in Care over a 3-year period (1996-1999) were developed for the first time.
New York City, New York	The ACS Adoption Stages Summary Report was used as a management tool.
North Carolina	A brief report showing the cost-effectiveness of <i>FFK</i> implementation was used persuasively in extending interest in <i>FFK</i> . A number of reports showing the progress of each of the counties were used as management tools.
Ohio	Reports from calls to the 800 Number were analyzed to improve recruitment processes.
South Carolina	DSS reports summarizing the status of children waiting for TPR and adoption were used as management tools.
Washington	Graphs showing how the system looks through the eyes of a waiting child were used for public information and communications purposes.

The changes in the sites’ use of data transformed their approaches to permanency. Perhaps nothing observed during the evaluation changed the way that practice was conducted more than the increased use of data. For those who have experienced the benefits of using data, it will be difficult to return to practices that do not have data as an indispensable aspect. In most sites, it is likely that the use of data in improving permanency will continue far beyond the end of the *FFK* initiative.

EXPANSION OF THE CIRCLE OF STAKEHOLDERS

For many years, child welfare services have been planned and delivered by the same cadre of professionals, with little involvement of families, children, or representatives of interested community groups and organizations outside of the narrow scope of traditional agencies. The *FFK* initiative, beginning with the visioning phase, made substantial inroads in changing the profile of persons involved in permanency.

The involvement of new participants in permanency services and programs was expected to result in a more responsive and accountable system. Furthermore, it was believed that expanding the circle of stakeholders would help build an environment in which durable change would occur. It was toward these ends that the sites sought to expand the circle of those who had a stake in the child welfare system.

The visioning phase that was required by the Foundation established an unambiguous Foundation priority for greater inclusion in the process of shaping child welfare. More than 14,000 people spoke about their concerns and wishes for the child welfare system. The ideas and suggestions of many of these participants had never before been heard. This was especially true for children who were either currently in the system or had been a foster child or adopted. Exhibit 3.2 summarizes some of the examples of expanded circles of stakeholders.

Exhibit 3.2
Expanded Circle of Stakeholders

Pima County, Arizona	Permanency teams included diverse membership.
Kansas	The KFFK Website is used for recruitment and public information.
Massachusetts	Massachusetts Coalition for Adoption, a grassroots advocacy network, helped to expand the stakeholder base. Massachusetts <i>FFK</i> collaboration with the State Department of Education helped to overcome educational issues of foster and adoptive children when they change schools as a result of placement changes.
Kent County, Michigan	A community-based agency was used to deliver new services to achieve permanency within the network of family members.
Mississippi	The Fortune 500 Churches program helped reach the African American community through the churches.
Montana	The Project Management Committee included members from State and private agencies, all 7 reservations, advocacy groups, and courts, who had equal decision making power regarding use of MTTFFK project resources and policy.
New York City, New York	The Annual Adoption Fair and the NYC Family Album were used to recruit adoptive families.
North Carolina	The association of youth, SaySo, had a role in communicating the voice of children in substitute care.
Ohio	Ohio used market research techniques to identify families most likely to foster and/or adopt waiting children, especially children of color.
South Carolina	A newsletter about adoption and foster care by adopted and foster children was developed and had wide distribution. The SCFFK art and poetry show was taken around the State to raise public awareness of adoption issues.
Washington	A Partnership Commitment signed by the State, Washington Children's Home Society, and Casey Family Services was a new foundation for collaboration.

For this discussion, expansion of the circle of stakeholders refers to sites' inclusion of individuals, groups, and organizations that had not previously been involved in change efforts. In effect, the sites built a constituency that supported changes to the child welfare system to increase permanency for children. Three aspects of the sites' efforts to expand the circle of stakeholders—focus on children of color, targeted recruitment and collaboration—are discussed below.

Children of Color

In many respects, the focus of the sites on achieving permanence for children of color pervaded every aspect of their activities. This occurred because children of color, especially African American children, were over represented in every site's population of children who needed permanent homes. While all efforts to expand the circle of stakeholders affected children of color, the special recruitment and collaborative efforts focused on this group bear singling out.

“Building African American Constituencies”

From the outset of the initiative, the Mississippi FFK devoted considerable effort in building relationships with African American constituencies. Working primarily with faith-based organizations and churches, the FFK conducted extensive outreach activities to expand awareness of the need for adoption of African American children. It also developed a structure to involve churches in recruiting prospective adoptive families and providing support services and advocacy to adoptive families. Originally funded by the FFK, the churches have agreed to take over the continued financial support of these efforts. The active involvement of primarily African American churches in these endeavors signaled a new milestone in the State in tapping into an historically under-used resource and demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach. More children were adopted in the last year of the grant than in any previous year.

Several sites developed recruitment campaigns aimed toward African American, Native American, or Hispanic audiences. Children from these populations are disproportionately represented in the foster care population. Special efforts were made to include minority media outlets and, in one site, develop written materials in Spanish. Some sites attempted to recruit families for children of color as part of their regular, if targeted, recruitment strategy.

Some of the other sites increased the attention given to the recruitment for children of color through agreements with predominately African American organizations--both social service agencies and faith based groups. These organizations targeted their membership for recruitment information, provided recruitment services, and qualified families for adoption.

The involvement of African American organizations as a strategy in improving the recruitment of families for African American children proved to be more complex than the sites originally anticipated. Some organizations had little experience in the public adoption field or in

adoption recruitment. In addition, there were historical barriers that were not easily overcome and required more time and attention than was given during the grant period of the initiative.

It is possible that continued efforts to confront these barriers and enhance the organizational capabilities of these organizations will yield greater benefits in the future. Still, as evidenced by the data, recruitment efforts targeted at African American children may have contributed to an increased rate of adoption for African American children in the cluster.

The sites had an uneven track record in their attempts and successes in reaching out and involving minority constituency groups and organizations whose children were over-represented in the adoption population. All sites sought to include these groups in their work. Some sites were successful and involving minority representation became a cornerstone of their initiative. For those sites that enjoyed success in gaining minority involvement, the key appears to have been their willingness to forge meaningful, cooperative partnerships in decision-making. Still other sites were less successful in addressing this issue. They allowed for

input primarily through contractual arrangements to deliver specified services. This approach was not sufficient for building successful working relationships with minority organizations. In order to achieve the desired level of participation by minority organizations, it is necessary to develop long-term relationships that are founded on a true sharing of power and authority.

“Marketing Research Techniques Used to Identify and Recruit Families”

Early in the initiative, the Northeast Ohio FFK conducted market research to identify the types of families who were most likely to become foster and/or adoptive families. Demographic data were analyzed on a geo-coded basis to identify areas in which likely recruits lived. Then, recruitment efforts were focused on those targeted areas. There was a specific outreach to the African American community using the “Black Pages,” a listing of African American-owned businesses. This outreach was further supported by an effort by the African American media to help educate the community about the children who were in foster care and in need of permanent families. It is not clear whether this marketing research was able to generate new potential permanent families or simply saturated the existing market of those who were already predisposed to foster and/or adopt.

Recruitment

The adoption system depends upon identifying appropriate family resources for children who are in foster care and need permanent families. While it was not always clear how many new families were needed, all sites engaged in a communication strategy to reach new audiences. Some sites developed extensive, statewide, general public awareness multimedia campaigns, while other initiatives focused their communication efforts on specific audiences, including targeted recruitment. These campaigns were carried out through print, radio, and television media. Sites also used the traditional methods of reaching potential adoptive parents by holding adoption fairs, creating photo listings, preparing children’s life books, and creating toll-free hotlines. In some sites, businesses participated by financially supporting and distributing handouts. Press kits, brochures, newsletters, and videos were used in some sites. A few sites developed Internet web sites as part of their recruitment and general public awareness efforts.

Several sites targeted their recruitment activities toward matching families with specific children or toward families who were serving as foster parents and were willing to adopt. Some sites contracted with professional advertising firms to develop recruitment

efforts that were marketed toward those who had either adopted in the past or had served as foster parents.

Anecdotal evidence supports the finding reported in the previous chapter that most of the increases in adoptions resulted from increases in the number of foster families who decided to seek adoption rather than large increases in “new” applicants who were unaffiliated with the child welfare system. This reflected an explicit understanding, often based on a review of adoption and recruitment data, that foster parents are a primary source of potential adoptive parents. Recruitment strategies were built upon this understanding. Foster parents, whether or not they elect to adopt, are also part of the same child welfare system as parents whose primary interest is adoption. However, because most new adoptive applicants came from the pool of foster parents, the positive short-term result of increased adoptions had the unintended consequence of depleting the pool of foster parents. In several sites, the public child welfare agencies expressed concern that increased adoptions placed greater pressure on the agencies to find foster parents.

Several sites used the voices of foster and adopted children in innovative approaches to communicate the need for adoption. Teams of teens who were current or former foster children or adoptees presented their real life experiences to various audiences. Their presentations provided both advocacy and public education functions, and were helpful in addressing questions that persons might have about children who are seeking permanency. Having children express their own experiences and needs in their own words was an especially powerful and effective way of personalizing what is all too often non-personal. It enabled participants to see the child welfare system “through the eyes of the child.”

There is little doubt that public awareness of adoption was raised through the general recruitment efforts. However, its value in recruiting new adoptive families was not demonstrated in the cluster. Targeted recruitment, which focused on recruiting a family for a specific child, appeared to have a greater impact on enlarging the pool of adoption applicants. The recognition of the utility of targeted recruitment grew among the sites as the initiative progressed. By the end of the initiative, it was widely understood that targeted recruitment was a preferred approach.

“Collaboration Leads to New Service Opportunities”

In Massachusetts, a new school and community support project was piloted in six schools with joint sponsorship by the FFK initiative, the Department of Social Services, and the Department of Education. The school-based program provided support to foster and adopted children to help overcome educational problems that occur when children move from one school system to another when their placements change and to provide emotional support during the placement process. The program also raised the awareness and competence of teachers regarding the unique needs of foster and adopted children and how they might affect learning. The program provided additional supports for these children so that their educational and family environments would be more stable. The program has been expanded to 19 school districts and is now fully funded by the Department of Education.

Collaboration

From the time that a child is referred to foster care through the time that he or she is reunified with the family or parental rights are terminated and adoption or guardianship is approved, there are many actions that have to be taken by various agencies of the State or their contractors. An important ingredient in helping the child reach permanency soon after being placed in foster care is the ability of the child welfare agencies, courts, and other social service providers to communicate and work together cooperatively. Too often in the past, misunderstanding and miscommunication among these various entities has made it difficult for them to achieve their ultimate goal of safe and permanent homes for children.

The most widespread increase in collaboration across all sites was among public social service agencies and the judiciary, and between those entities and private sector organizations. For this discussion, collaboration means the interaction of entities in formal or informal arrangements for the purposes of improving mutually satisfying organizational working relationships that are focused on the goal and objectives of the initiative. Such arrangements may be short or long term and limited or general in their scope of shared activity.

Collaborative arrangements included mental health and substance abuse agencies, family service agencies, private foster care or adoption agencies, advocacy organizations, universities, faith communities, and Tribal governments. Several of these arrangements involved newly forged relationships between public agencies and the agencies that focused on the needs of minority clients.

The collaborative working relationships that were developed during the initiative were an extension of the spirit of inclusiveness that was evidenced during the visioning phase and a

“Sharing Resources as a Means to Encourage Collaboration”

In Montana, an historical lack of communications between the State and the 12 Native American Tribes on the 7 reservations had resulted in inadequate collaboration between these governmental entities on matters facing the Native American children and families. One of the primary concerns of the initiative was to forge new links between the State and the Tribes. Permanency Specialist positions for each Tribe and each of the State’s five regions were funded by the initiative. Representatives from each of the Tribes were also included on the Advisory Board in a decision-making capacity. A more equal playing field was established between the State and the Tribes with the added resources and a venue for meaningful participation. The significance of this new relationship has yet to be fully realized. However, the words of one of the Native American representatives attest to the importance of the new collaborative relationship, “In my 18 years of service, I have never seen all seven Tribes represented at the table. Not only at the table, but with a voice that expressed their concerns and needs with significance to their individual children and Tribe.”

reflection of the proposals that were submitted to the Foundation. Most of the grant recipients developed formal partnerships between a private provider agency and a public child welfare agency. In some instances, the ability of the private sector to “bring money to the table” created a different balance of power. Typically, the private sector has been in a position of seeking funding from the public sector through contracts, and rarely has it been in the posture of an equal partner. As one of the private sector executives who participated in a collaborative arrangement stated, “The award of the (FFK) grant to us really helped us with the State. We were seen as having some prestige and money to offer them.”

While collaboration has been a long-recognized need in child welfare, it has not been easy to actually implement. Clearly, the FFK initiative facilitated increased collaboration. Referring to the importance of collaboration, an administrator in a State agency said, “My sense is that more people are believers now than before FFK started, but essentially the initiative reinforced rather than changed value sets.”

Evidence of new intra- and inter-agency collaborative relationships was found at all levels of operation, from statewide ventures to local agency-level operations, from upper management to the line worker level, from new structural organizational mechanisms to new procedural mechanisms, and from policy to case level.

The purpose of these different types of collaborations was to facilitate cross-system problem solving at a systems level. This was accomplished by establishing collaborative mechanisms that fostered the sense of ownership and responsibility across a greater range of individual and organizational participants. Many of these groups and organizations had never been involved in developing permanency interventions. These collaborative efforts added new avenues for getting the tasks accomplished. Often, if one party was restricted from doing something

because of policy, resource issues, or some other barrier, another party was able to take the lead. The finger pointing and shifting of responsibility that too often defines child welfare work was significantly reduced through collaborative relationships.

- **Backlog reduction efforts that all *FFK* sites undertook helped to stimulate a greater understanding and motivation to create new alliances.** In order to move children more quickly out of foster care and into permanent family arrangements, the collaborative work of public and private social service agencies, and the courts was increased significantly. Often the partnerships that were formed as part of the backlog reduction efforts of the sites were expanded to include other types of efforts to improve permanency for children. The backlog reduction objective of the initiative was instrumental in offering a reason for groups to form new collaboratives. It gave agencies a specific, programmatic focus for collaboration rather than just being a vague principle without a context for its application.
- **The concurrent involvement of the sites in the Federally supported Court Improvement Project helped to set the stage for improvements in the courts' working relationships with the relevant service agencies.** In many sites, the courts established both formal and informal mechanisms for collaborating with child welfare agencies and other social service agencies. The courts in several sites added case management personnel to oversee court operations and case flow, as well as coordinating exchanges with service agencies. In addition, several courts developed internal systems that broadened the inclusion of non-court personnel, such as families and community representatives in its activities. All sites made substantial progress in establishing court/agency collaborations.
- **Collaboration frequently meant that resources such as power, money, or staff had to be diverted or shared in new ways.** In some instances, the local *FFK* contracted with potential collaborators, improving the “buy in” of those agencies or groups. In fact, the collaborative arrangements that appeared to be most successful were those that involved resource sharing or reallocation with new partners. For example, in one site, two private agencies had competed for years to be the premier adoption agency. When the *FFK* grant was awarded to one agency, the other one was unwilling to participate. The *FFK* grantee reached out to involve the other agency by contracting with them to manage all recruitment activities for the site. When this happened, the second agency became an active supporter of the initiative and the number of adoptions increased substantially.
- **Some sites established State or local level interagency working groups that were initiated either by the courts or the social service agencies.** One site undertook the task of improving its child welfare system by developing a Permanency Coordinating Council that was composed of juvenile court judges, the directors of the major social service agencies, and community representatives. Another site formed a statewide Permanency Oversight Committee that included judges, State legislators, the Attorney General's office, non-profit agencies, and the State social service agency. The *FFK* initiative in one site convened a Project Management Team that served as a

“neutral” location for bringing the State public social service agency together with Tribal governments to promote collaborative efforts aimed at permanency.

- **Several sites sought to involve existing family advocacy groups in their activities, and a few sites took an active role in forming advocacy organizations.** For nearly all sites, this was not only a new type of population to engage in shared work, but also required overcoming years of barriers between the professional and non-professional communities. There were a couple of instances in which the participation of advocacy groups was helpful to contributing to improving permanency. However, their real value may not be realized for some time.

The area in which non-traditional, non-professional individuals were most involved was in the visioning stage. However, only a few sites translated this interest into involvement in policy or management oversight roles, or in advisory capacities. The limited numbers who were involved were mainly members of existing foster care or adoption organizations.

Generally, the sites were more successful in working with existing advocacy groups than in enlarging the membership base of these groups or forming new ones. Organizing new advocacy organizations is often a slow process that is characterized with many starts and stops. It is not clear that the sites are committed to continuing their efforts to organize new advocacy groups or that they have the organizational capability to do so.

- **The inclusion of new members in case reviews not only heightened the sense of urgency in finding permanent arrangements for children but it also provided new resources in finding solutions.** Importantly, the broader representation in reviews also contributed to reducing the time it takes to make decisions to seek TPR, to find suitable adoptive placements, and to arrive at finalization of adoption. Sometimes the simple act of collaboration between parties led to improved procedures. For example, in one site, lawyers and social workers jointly examined what kind of case information was needed to proceed expeditiously with the filing of TPR cases. As one lawyer said, “Getting on the same page was the key.” It greatly reduced the number of TPR packets that were sent back to the workers for more information, thus reducing the time from removal to the time of TPR. In the past, these decisions have been fragmented, disjointed, and slow. Sites found that by expanding the membership of case review and planning teams, many of these obstacles were overcome.

While increased collaboration was one of the highlights of the initiative, it did not happen without difficulty. As one of the *FFK* participants noted at a networking meeting, “Collaboration is easy to say, but hard to do.” Years of separation between new-found partners had bred distrust and suspicion that had to be overcome in order to arrive at mutually satisfying working relationships between the parties.

Simply put, collaboration did not happen without diligence to purpose and devotion of time. For example, seemingly uncomplicated issues such as turnover in leadership would mean new starts in developing supportive collaborations. It also took time to clarify roles of the

participating agents, roles that over time had become rigid and exclusionary. The executive of a private sector agency, which was an *FFK* grantee, summed up the ideal collaborative outlook by saying, “I don’t care who gets credit as long as we do what needs to be done.”

The work of the *FFK* sites did not solve all the problems that flow from a lack of collaboration but it facilitated a major step in the right direction. Importantly, it was demonstrated that increased collaboration could lead to improvements in the permanency outcomes for children. In essence, collaboration helped to overcome the bureaucratic inertia that often accompanies an attitude described by one worker as, “It can’t be done.”

CHANGES IN THE ORGANIZATION AND DELIVERY OF SERVICES

Many stakeholders have long recognized the need for change, and for them, the visioning process reinforced their beliefs. For other stakeholders, the visioning process resulted in a new sense of urgency for changing the way child welfare services are organized. For all participants, the visioning process brought a new impetus to the imperative for change that had not existed previously.

A basic and consistent message that both traditional and non-traditional stakeholders expressed was that the long-established ways of working with children in foster care needed to change. The message about changes in the way that services are organized and delivered underscored nearly all of the recommendations that came out of the visioning process. The added resources of the *FFK* grants encouraged this imperative to take shape.

Doing the Work Differently

The increased focus on permanency that was achieved in the sites was not gained by simply doing more of the same work but by doing the work differently. This is not to say that the changes were radical departures from what was done previously; they were not. However, the changes were new and different for the affected organizations and, in many situations, represented a re-engineering of services. The changes were sufficient to bring a renewed energy and focus to the tasks of achieving permanency for children.

No two sites changed the organization and delivery of services in the same way. Changes in the service delivery system ranged from changing staffing patterns by creating new positions or altering the composition of service delivery units, to

“Reorganizing the Structure of Services to Focus on Permanency”

In North Carolina, several counties undertook a process of reexamining their service delivery structures. As a result of this reexamination, organizational structures were changed to a focus on permanency (an outcome for children) rather than on the functions of foster care and adoption (an outcome for the agency). None of the changes were identical but were tailored to the particular community and organizational needs that were defined in each county. However, in most instances, the foster care and adoption units were blended together. While there was some initial resistance by many of the social workers to the changes, over time the changes led to a renewed emphasis on thinking about permanency as the primary objective of services. The often-seen agency dilemma of temporary care versus permanent care, and the competing demands for resources and rewards that accompanies such a division was submerged into a larger and more important concern about permanency for children. Generally, the counties that restructured their services realized greater permanency outcomes than counties that did not reorganize.

reorganizing service units, to starting different service functions, to changing the organizational roles of the public and private agencies in all aspects of the social service system. The variation in changes reflected the Foundation's philosophy of encouraging local discretion. The common thread that ran throughout the changes, regardless of their scope, was their purpose of increasing the focus on permanency.

Redefining Permanency

Most *FFK* sites found that their most effective strategy for improving permanency services was to redefine permanency as beginning when a child initially enters out-of-home care, as opposed to waiting until reunification has failed. As basic as this notion may seem, it proved to be a significant shift in thinking about permanency and how services were delivered. Family group decision-making, guardianship as a permanency alternative, and concurrent planning or dual case planning were among the practices that were employed in the sites that reflected this rethinking.

In addition to conceptualizing alternative permanency concerns as beginning with the placement of a child in out-of-home care, these practices have other shared features. For example, they all have the active involvement of families in decision-making as cornerstones of their approaches, and all consider options in addition to adoption as viable permanency outcomes. In some cultures, such as many of the Native American Tribes that participated in the initiative, terminating the rights of parents is a concept that is so inconceivable there is no way to express it in the native language. Guardianship rather than adoption may have a special attraction as a way of keeping the child within the extended family under such circumstances. Guardianship provides a way for children to remain within the larger context of an extended family and retain family ties; however, it usually provides fewer financial supports for families than either adoption or foster care. A few of the sites received Federal waivers to use Title IV-E funds for subsidized guardianships, which lessened the disincentives for families to become guardians.

In addition to redefining permanency, such practices as guardianship, family group decision making, and concurrent planning share other characteristics. That is, they generally run counter to services that are planned and delivered based on a professional model that does not encourage family involvement. Because they encompass a range of permanency options, they also typically involve different service units within a service agency. As a consequence, delivering these services often involves confronting professional and organizational resistance. While several of the sites successfully used one or more of these service options at some point during the initiative, the degree to which they became fully accepted models of service is not clear.

Adding New Resources

In many sites, additional resources enabled sites to change their method of delivering services. There were several instances in which new personnel or financial resources were infused. Even the acceptance of an *FFK* grant represented a new resource to the sites. However, the intent was not to continue doing what had been done but only with greater resources. Rather, the infusion of new resources was aimed at creating different ways of dealing with the permanency needs of the children. All sites tried different ways of configuring services and organizing their delivery.

Many of the sites changed their staffing patterns by creating new positions and new service units within the public child welfare agencies and the county. These new positions, which were mostly funded through *FFK* monies, were charged with focusing on the permanency needs of children and marshalling resources to expedite permanency. For example, several sites funded permanency planning specialist positions, or positions with similar responsibilities, for this purpose. In two sites, retired judges were brought out of retirement temporarily to hear TPR cases in order to help reduce the backlog of cases waiting for court hearings. In another site, additional law clerks were hired to prepare TPR cases.

The addition of new positions directly related to permanency helped to raise the visibility and credibility of permanency as an organizational priority, both internally and in collaboration with other agencies. In several sites, the funding of these positions now has been incorporated into the agency's regular budget line.

Related to the creation of new permanency planning specialist positions, the child welfare agencies in several sites also established new permanency planning units within their organizations to review the progress of cases. In addition to increasing the number and frequency of case reviews, the composition of these units was often expanded to include new members both from within the agency and, more importantly, from the outside as well. For example, family members, foster parents, representatives from the private sector agencies that were contracted to provide adoption services, guardians ad litem, and community representatives were often included in these deliberations. The addition of new members seemed to help refocus the purpose of these reviews from what often had become pro forma to a more active and aggressive focus on seeking permanency solutions.

Redefining Public-Private Partnerships

Most of the changes in service organization and delivery were modest, but some were more extensive. Although adoption and foster care had always involved both public and private social service agencies, typically bureaucratic barriers had defined their roles. The public agency had the money, the legal responsibilities, and the waiting children. The private agencies had the families, the capacity to match children and families and to supervise placements, and the need for contractual resources. The often-contentious relationship between the public and private social service agencies was viewed more as a necessary evil than as a partnership. Issues of control dominated most discussions.

“Streamlining the Courts’ Jurisdiction and Adding Staff Resources”

*In New York City, significant problems in expediting adoptions resulted from the need to move cases from the judicial jurisdiction of one borough or county to another at various points in the adoption process, depending upon the residence of the child, the biological parents, or the adoptive parents. An existing but rarely used law (Chapter 588) allowed petitions for adoption to be filed in the same court that was considering the termination of parental rights. A new law (Chapter 531), passed during the implementation period, required adoptions that were readied prior to termination of parental rights to be filed in the county where the termination or surrender was to take place. The laws were instrumental in helping to reduce the time between the important legal events of TPR and adoption. Implementing them was made possible through *FFK* funding, which created an Adoption Expediting Unit to complete the adoption process while children were still in foster care. As additional staff resources to an understaffed system, the Expeditors helped to guide foster parents through the labyrinth of paperwork that is necessary to achieve TPR.*

In several *FFK* sites, the organizational relationships between the public and private sectors were fundamentally restructured to eliminate this divisiveness, a source of barriers to permanence. One State administrator credited *FFK* principles with being the “intellectual backdrop” that stimulated a widespread change effort.

“Changes in the Service Roles of the Public and Private Sectors”

The most apparent and dramatic change in the way that child welfare services were organized and delivered was in Kansas. Beginning in 1996, the responsibility for the delivery and management of child welfare services shifted from the State to private agencies through performance-based contracts with costs allocated on a case rate basis. Except for child protection, all services including family preservation, foster care, and adoption were contracted out to private agencies. These agencies either delivered services directly or through subcontracts with other private agencies. Concerns about the former system were expressed before FFK. However, the initiative played a role in encouraging the State to consider changes that would promote increased attention to the permanency needs of children. Although the implementation period has shown the need to make adjustments in the new public/private partnership, clearly the balance of power and influence between the two sectors has changed substantially.

The extent to which changes in the roles and relationships of public and private child welfare agencies reflect a fundamental shift in child welfare is the subject of considerable debate. Some believe that most services were being delivered by the private sector before the changeover, and that expanding the role of private agencies will not necessarily mean a change in the way that services will be provided to children and families. Others believe there will be improvements because financial incentives to achieve targeted results in permanency have been built into the contracts with the private providers, with penalties attached if they are not met. Whatever the ultimate judgment is about the effectiveness of changing the service delivery structure, there is no doubt that it has been a sweeping attempt to change the organization and delivery of services.

Another example of fundamental change was found in the court system of a county-based *FFK* site. Because of her involvement on the steering committee of the local *FFK* and participation in Foundation meetings, a judge was motivated to apply for and receive a Model Court grant from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. The Model Court accelerates the court calendar and focuses staff efforts on making dependency decisions expeditiously. The court is

based on a one-judge one-family concept and endeavors to include families and other relevant parties in the process. The Model Court has attracted new judicial and legislative support and is in the process of expanding to coverage statewide.

The following exhibit presents some of the examples of organizational changes that each of the sites undertook.

Exhibit 3.3 Organizational and Service Changes

Pima County, Arizona	Cross-Functional teams were used for assessment. A Permanency Planning Specialist position was added to the public agency staff to ensure that all children were on track to achieve permanency.
Kansas	Privatization of entire child welfare system took place during <i>FFK</i> implementation.
Kent County, Michigan	Family and Community Compact utilized Family Group Conferencing.
Massachusetts	Family Consultation Team and Permanency Mediation Services were used widely to promote timely permanence.
Montana	Permanent Family Care Agreement, a legal alternative form of permanency, can be used if subsidized guardianship is not possible. A mandatory 12-hour cultural competency training program was required for State and Tribal social workers. The BIA created a position of a Permanency Planning Specialist to coordinate efforts among the 7 reservations in Montana, and Permanency Specialist positions were created in each Tribe as well as each State region.
North Carolina	The Title IV-E waiver has allowed for the use of subsidized guardianship as an alternative form of permanency. Edgecombe County, and several other counties, reorganized all child welfare services into casework teams. Day One Conferences are used in one judicial district as a way to improve timely permanence.
South Carolina	The Bench/Bar Committee and the SC Children's Law Office increased court resources and collaboration between social workers and lawyers.
Washington	The concurrent planning and prognostic staffing program, originally developed in Washington, improved timely permanence.

SUMMARY

This chapter has discussed three major themes that were identified in the sites' efforts to make changes for children: use of data, expansion of the circle of stakeholders in permanency work, and changes in the organization and delivery of services. Several observations may be drawn from this discussion.

In spite of numerous barriers, **it is possible to improve permanency outcomes for children in foster care.** Changes require some added financial resources and realignment of existing resources so that the organizational focus is directed to issues of permanency. It is important to have a practice-based person responsible for overseeing the progress of cases.

Transforming data into information assists in the change process. It is important that information is available to be used at all levels of practice and that decisions regarding individual cases, as well as caseloads, be based on reliable data. It is equally important that there be a person assigned the responsibility for assuring that data are generated, collected, analyzed, and made available to the system participants.

Improving permanency for children requires expanding the stakeholder base. It is important for the public child welfare agency to become more inclusive, opening processes to other public and private child serving organizations and to groups and individuals who have not been part of the system previously. The public child welfare agency has responsibility and authority entrusted to it; therefore, system change must have the commitment of its leaders.

CHAPTER 4 CREATING AND SUSTAINING SYSTEM CHANGE

The previous chapters of this report have documented the history of the *Families for Kids* initiative, summarized its accomplishments to date, and reviewed the major ways through which those accomplishments were achieved. This chapter considers these accomplishments from a lens of whether the changes in the child welfare system that have resulted to date from *FFK* are likely to endure.

LONG LASTING SYSTEMS CHANGE

From the very beginning, the Foundation designed, promoted, fostered, and supported *FFK* as an attempt to make fundamental, lasting changes in the way child welfare systems operate. The principles of achieving such change were not clearly identified for the sites, but some guidance was given. For example, the sites were expected to find funding to continue their operations or to continue the programmatic and policy changes that they supported. But perhaps because they had not had to find matches at an earlier stage, most sites had difficulties and needed the sustainability grants to transition from Foundation funding to other funding. Significant new funding has been achieved in three sites. Exhibit 4.1 summarizes the fiscal status of the implementation sites.

While funding allowed some of the organizational entities to continue, there was other tangible evidence of sustaining the ideas and vision of *FFK*:

- In all sites there have been legislative changes related to adoption. While in many cases this has been driven by the need to bring State law into conformance with Federal law, the drafting and passage of new legislation gave the *FFK* site experts a vehicle for sustained change. For example, in Michigan, local agencies are urged to use family group conferencing throughout the State.
- In several sites, programs that were started under *FFK* are being implemented elsewhere in the State. For example, in Arizona, Pima County's *FFK* approach is being implemented in Maricopa County and in a four-county region in Northern Arizona. The new regions are starting with a local visioning process and will develop their own strategies.
- In some sites, there has been rewriting of policy and practice manuals for the workers. This intensive activity has been undertaken where it has been recognized that existing manuals are not reflective of current values and visions.
- A number of sites achieved increased State funding for child welfare workers through the budget process.
- In sites where education in child welfare law was introduced into the universities, these centers or courses will continue.
- Some of the advisory and working groups have remained intact as on-going influences in their States.

Exhibit 4.1
Examples of Fiscal Sustainability

Pima County, Arizona	Arizona's Children Association (ACA) is committed to raising \$500,000 to keep Pima County <i>FFK</i> going for 5 years. They have \$250,000 for 3 years in hand. Additionally, State and local foundation funding is enabling the expansion of <i>FFK</i> to Maricopa County (Phoenix) and a 4-county rural region in the northern part of the State with plans to go statewide in the future. The model court is being expanded statewide with State court funding.
Kansas	Towards the end of the <i>FFK</i> funding cycle, the site received a Federal grant to promote adoption opportunities. It is likely that additional grant funding will be sought.
Massachusetts	The site was successful in getting funds from the State as a Legislative line item in the State budget, of \$648,000 per year for 3 years, with an additional \$200,000 per year from the Juvenile and Probate Family Courts and DSS for Permanency Mediation Services. After 3 years, the expectation is that the organization will become self-sustaining.
Kent County, Michigan	Kent County has funding from local foundations, from the Michigan Family Independence Agency and from a Federal grant, totaling \$1.25 million, to continue and expand the Family Compact Program.
Mississippi	Funding from the Mississippi Department of Human Services is guaranteed for 3 years. Other funding support is provided by Wendy's, the Episcopal Church and the General Missionary Baptist Convention.
Montana	The 1999 budget appropriated funding for five State permanency planning specialist positions, one position for each of the five regions. More recently, State funding was appropriated for permanency planning specialists in each of the seven reservations.
North Carolina	The principles of <i>FFK</i> are being replicated in additional counties funded by the State, and in part by the Duke Endowment. The State has allocated \$1.6 million to 20 <i>FFK</i> counties and intends to ultimately replicate <i>FFK</i> principles in all 100 counties.
New York City, New York	It is likely that the adoption hotline and a modified version of the family album will be funded under the agency budget.
Ohio	The association of county child welfare directors has become the umbrella for <i>FFK</i> , in conjunction with the Mandel Center for Non-Profit Organizations. Future funding is uncertain.
South Carolina	The State and the United Way are continuing to fund programs to increase permanency options for children in foster care.
Washington	The partnership will be sustained. Funding from foundations, the State department, the courts, and local non-profits has been successfully raised. Over \$500,000 has been raised for on-going permanency activities.

SYSTEMIC CHANGE IN CHILD WELFARE

The history of child welfare is replete with examples of good ideas that have improved practice, helped clean up an existing problem area, had some demonstrable impact, and made the transition from "innovative" to "traditional service." Usually, however, after the initial

excitement over the new service strategy wore off and new problems arose (e.g., the crack cocaine epidemic), the gains in improved outcomes eroded, and the child welfare system reverted to business as usual. For example, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, numerous child welfare agencies implemented an intensive family preservation program. Most of these agencies reduced placements for two or three years then found the number of children in placement gradually creeping upward. This did not occur because family preservation was ineffective or bad practice, but rather because the practice change was implemented without building the supporting infrastructure needed to keep practice in step with other changes that were taking place.

Systemic change that reaches into all areas of the system under discussion is usually characterized by four attributes. As defined by Hsia and Beyer, these characteristics are as follows:¹

- Systems change is pervasive and involves multiple organizations.
- Systems change follows changes in beliefs and leads to altered behaviors.
- Systems change is far reaching.
- Systems change, if properly maintained, is long lasting.

As seen in the earlier chapters, each of the first three characteristics have been an objective of *FFK* from conceptualization, through visioning, and culminating in implementation. In this chapter, we examine the key ingredients that the sites used to create and maintain this change process. We examine the indications of long lasting change in the *FFK* sites.

THE INGREDIENTS FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

The four key ingredients are committed leadership, successful coordination and collaboration among individuals and groups, usable information, and recognition of the social-cultural environment.

Committed Leadership

The initiatives in all sites were directed by enthusiastic and energetic Program Directors, many of whom became very influential in their settings during their tenures. They were visible communicators for change, rarely missing an opportunity to push for permanency for waiting

“An open system, whether social or biological, in a changing environment either changes or perishes. In such a case the only avenue to survival is change.... If a complex social organization is to survive critical changes in its environment, it can do so only by changing its structure and behavior.”
Mervyn Cadwallader in
The Cybernetic Analysis
of Change in Complex
Social Organizations,
1959.

¹ Hsia, H.M. and Beyer, M. (2000). System change through the state challenge activities: Approaches and procedures. In *OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, (March).

children. However, all of them depended upon agency, political, or public leadership to help keep *FFK* highly visible and a priority. In most sites, strong leaders emerged from the public social service agency as well as the courts.

The national networking meetings proved to be vital to building this leadership. Perhaps most critically, the public child welfare agency director needed to be not only “on board” in terms of the initiative’s goals, but also actively supportive. At least three State Social Services Directors, who were initially neutral about *FFK*, “got the message” while attending one of the national networking meetings. They, along with their staffs, went back home and transformed the way their agencies operated.

Judicial leadership was also essential for an effective initiative, and the networking meetings proved to be critical in building this support as well. In two sites, Juvenile Court judges who attended a networking meeting realized the role of the court in inhibiting timely permanency and became major forces for changing the judicial system in their States. Perhaps even more importantly, these judges became catalysts for judicial change far beyond their own jurisdictions. They became major forces for transforming the way their peers thought and acted regarding timely permanency, especially in an *FFK* networking meeting devoted to the judiciary.

Reflecting on the successful leaders, it is clear that leadership must be visible; must be a promoter of the message to many audiences; must be able to help bridge the difficult rivers that need to be crossed as one develops a multi-agency, public-private initiative; and must be in place for a continuous period of time. Sites that had changes in leadership had to spend significant time in regrouping and redefining roles and objectives. Even the somewhat discontinuous program leadership at the Foundation was an observable barrier to smooth and incremental development and sustaining of the effort.

Successful Coordination and Collaboration

FFK clearly widened the circle of participants in achieving permanent families for children. From the 14,000 participants in the visioning process, to the alliances of public and private agencies that were built, and the acknowledgement of the role of foster parents, adoptive parents, and children in helping to shape the future directions of adoption, each site recognized that multi-agency, multi-team work was necessary to improve the progress of finding adoptive homes for children.

Widening the circle of stakeholders had several levels of implementation. Perhaps the communication activities, e.g. newsletters, videos, public service announcements, adoption fairs, while not extraordinarily successful in finding specific parents for specific children, did the most to extend the concept of adoption into the public consciousness. The Foundation-sponsored newspaper insert was also an example of reaching a large number of people to make them aware of the issues.

At another level, grantee partnerships between the public child welfare agency and a private non-profit adoption agency tested the concepts of collaboration both in terms of grant administration and in terms of achieving outcomes. The natural power balance in favor of the public agency, however, did make this a difficult alliance.

At a third level, the establishment of Advisory Groups and Councils at which spokespeople of different groups and organizations could work together to identify needs, to suggest new programs, to discuss changes in policy, to plan events, to allocate resources, and to share news were useful because they brought new ideas to the table. Also, through working together, such groups built future working relationships. The formation and practice of these groups were critical building blocks for sustainability.

Increased collaboration had many positive results in improving permanency for children over the grant period. It seems likely that it also may have a longer lasting impact as well. The extent to which the collaborative efforts will be successful in the future will depend on whether or not the participants continue to perceive these efforts as valuable for children and for their own interests. It will require that the organizational structures that have been established continue to serve in some form as viable vehicles for all the partners to achieve their respective organizational objectives.

Expansion of the circle of stakeholders involved in permanency work spanned many different forms and represented a significant portion of the sites' efforts. It was often difficult and cumbersome. Involving new partners in the enterprise of permanency required overcoming years of separation that often were accompanied by distrust and uncertainty by all parties. It was necessary to reevaluate roles and functions. While there remains much to be done, the steps that have been taken are important. The extent to which the philosophy and message of *FFK* have influenced public child welfare agencies to open their structures and processes to entities that had never been involved is strong testament to the success of the initiative.

Partnerships in some sites will continue with additional funding secured through other foundations and publicly appropriated monies. In several other sites, the collaborative structures have been well received and will continue within regular budgets as an established way of doing permanency work. Not only has increased collaboration been one of the most successful areas, it is also an area of work that will most likely endure beyond the end of the initiative. As long as there are benefits perceived by all the participants, the shifting of power that an expanded stakeholder base represents will likely remain as a guiding principle of permanency services.

Usable Information

At the beginning of the *FFK* initiative, all 11 sites had little useful information about children waiting for permanent families. For a host of reasons, child welfare administrators—and, with a single exception, judicial administrators—in every site did not have accurate and up-to-date information about waiting children, despite unending paperwork, stacks of printouts, and voluminous reports filled with data about children and families. In most sites it was not even clear who the children were that needed permanent homes, let alone their progress (or lack of it) toward finding permanency. Because both social service and judicial personnel perceived as inadequate the available data about children, they were not used. Because the data were not used, little effort was expended to maintain them accurately and produce meaningful reports that could help system participants find permanent homes for waiting children.

As the initiative progressed, however, *FFK* Directors, judges, social service managers, and caseworkers began asking for information about children who needed permanent families. When questions about these children were asked, answers were generated. The resulting information was used to document and celebrate the successes of the initiative. This created demand for more detailed and timely information by participants in the child welfare system at all levels. When the initiative began, “data” was a word that was rarely used in any of the sites. Now it is rare to have a conversation about permanency that does not include a knowledgeable, informed discussion of data regarding the children for whom permanent families are being found. In every site, data that had been inadequate have become useful—essential—information. The word “data” has become part of the lexicon of child welfare.

“Information must actively be sought from everywhere, from places and sources people never thought to look before. And then it must circulate freely so that many people can interpret it. The intent of this new information is to keep the system off-balance, alert to how it might need to change.” Margaret Wheatley in Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World, 1999.

This shift in reference point from anecdote to quantitative measurement has been achieved because of specific people and other trends in developing data capacity.

- The requirement that each site have a local evaluator over the life time of the initiative resulted in a consistent audience of at least one person who was interested in data. In many instances the evaluators had to collect, format, and present the data that the projects were interested in. In all instances, the evaluators helped to assess the quality of the existing data.
- At the same time that *FFK* projects were being implemented, State child welfare agencies throughout the country were developing new and better information systems. In many sites, these developments came too late to help the *FFK* managers, but the atmosphere of interest in data was already building, thus supportive of this aspect of *FFK*.
- The personal computer revolution was certainly helpful to *FFK*. Automated information was more accessible to the project sites. Several sites took advantage of increased accessibility to automation and developed programs or applications that furthered their efforts.

Recognition of the Social-Cultural Environment

In every *FFK* site, the culture of child welfare changed in the direction of greater integration of adoption with other programs of child welfare. Traditionally, adoption has been seen as something to try if a child seems adoptable and does not appear to be going home. In other words, adoption is the next to last active step that the child welfare agency will do for a child. The last step is to provide “independent living services.”

For several reasons, there was a shift from such linear thinking to more parallel thinking. Some of the reasons originated within *FFK* program design; other reasons originated from the larger field of child welfare.

- The wide circle of committed participants in *FFK* activities led to new ideas and queries about the definition of permanency and how it could be achieved. For example, in communities that thought adoption by relatives would be disrespectful of kin, there were debates as to advantages from a child's point of view of adoption versus long term foster care or guardianship.
- Concurrent planning, a strategy in which a second goal is established for every child in case the first goal cannot be achieved, had already been used in some agencies and so was available as a technique to promote faster adoptions.
- Family group conferencing, the strategy of involving family members in decisions related to permanency options for children, was not invented by *FFK*, but was compatible with the philosophy of involving parents, children, and kin in discussing adoption. Thus, this program strategy was integrated into *FFK* work by many sites.
- The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) was passed during the implementation phase of *FFK*. This ground breaking legislation established for the child welfare field new timelines for achieving permanency for children in foster care. The message of *FFK* was singularly in tune with the most important legislation related to child welfare for nearly two decades. Following the passage of ASFA, President Clinton established the program of Adoption 2002, which provided bonuses to States that increased their annual numbers of adoptions. Not only were the *FFK* sites consulted during this process, but some of them also benefited because they were prepared to increase their rate of adoption of children in the foster care system. (Ironically the effort to reduce the backlog of waiting children resulted in some sites having reached new levels of adoptions before the implementation of the adoption incentives program, therefore, they did not benefit from the Federal bonus program.)

Many *FFK* child welfare staff report that now, when a child comes to the attention of the child welfare agency, workers, supervisors, agency managers, and judicial staff ask, "What will it take to assure this child has a permanent family, if reunification is not possible?" There is an attempt to place the child with a family who has agreed to adopt or become the guardians of the child if it is not possible to return the child to birth parents. There is an increased emphasis upon relying on families to help plan and assist in these decisions.

SUMMARY

The context in which child welfare operates has been altered, nationally as well as in the implementation sites. The child welfare systems that have been touched by the *Families for Kids* initiative are carrying the message forward that "for every child there is a family." Each of these communities may be able to adapt better to future changes, because the skills in using the tools of systems change—leadership, collaboration, and data, in conjunction with a recognition that change takes place within a socio-cultural environment—have been developed by so many people through the work of *Families for Kids*.

APPENDIX A LEGISLATIVE ENVIRONMENT

Federal and State laws shape the activities of child welfare agencies and courts in reaching permanence for children. Over the past 20 years, five major pieces of Federal legislation—and the State laws passed in response to them—have governed social service and court practice: the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (known primarily by its number, P.L. 96–272); the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA); the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA); the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act, modified by the Inter-Ethnic Placement Provisions (MEPA-IEP); and the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P.L. 105–89 or ASFA).

Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act. In the 1970s many advocates for children became alarmed at children who “drifted” for long periods in foster care after being removed from the custody of their parents. For many of these children, a permanent home would never be realized. Responding to this concern, in 1980 Congress passed P.L. 96–272, which provided fiscal incentives to State social service agencies to ensure that child welfare practice complied with specified standards. For almost two decades, foster care and adoption practices were carried out under the aegis of P.L. 96–272.

The intended effects of this legislation were to prevent unnecessary placements of children in foster care, to facilitate reunification as soon as possible when placement was necessary, and to ensure that children did not stay in the system without having their cases reviewed periodically by child welfare agencies and the judiciary. This Act created new and expanded roles for social services and the courts.

To be eligible for funding under the new Federal appropriation added as Title IV, Part E of the Social Security Act (IV–E), Federal payments for Foster Care and Adoption Assistance, States had to have a Federally approved plan for the following:

- making reasonable efforts to prevent the removal of children from their birth families;
- determining the appropriateness of, and necessity for, all foster care placements;
- recruiting foster and adoptive families who reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the children who need out-of-home care;
- providing services to facilitate the return of children in care to their parents, if possible;
- providing services to facilitate the freeing of children for adoption or legal guardianship if reunification is not appropriate;
- providing subsidies to help underwrite the cost of adopting “special needs” children who have physical, medical, or behavioral conditions;
- operating a Statewide information system to determine the status, demographic characteristics, location, and placement goal for every child in foster care; and

- establishing a case review system to ensure a thorough administrative or judicial review of the case of every child in foster care at least once every 6 months.

P.L. 96-272 also expanded the court's role in the monitoring and accountability of child welfare organizations regarding the timely achievement of permanence. Many provisions of the law directly affected the action of the courts including the following:

- requiring judicial determination of reasonable efforts to prevent removal;
- limiting the time between case reviews to 6 months or less;
- mandating that voluntary relinquishments be processed within 180 days of the child being placed in foster care;
- holding permanency hearings within 18 months of placement; and
- monitoring the implementation of procedural safeguards for parents.

Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) was first passed in 1977. As reauthorized in 1996, CAPTA addresses funding issues for States, local jurisdictions, and private non-profit agencies. It also includes provisions that establish conditions under which a State is not required to make reasonable efforts to reunify a child with his or her parents and conditions under which a State can expedite petitions for termination of parental rights.

The eligibility criteria for States to receive a Basic State Grant require that the State must have statutory provisions that establish new grounds for termination of parents' rights. Specifically, if a parent has been convicted of committing murder or voluntary manslaughter of another child, or having "aided or abetted, attempted, conspired, or solicited to commit such murder or voluntary manslaughter; or...to have committed a felony assault that results in the serious bodily injury to the surviving child or another child," a State must have "provisions, procedures, and mechanisms...that assure that the State does not require reunification" of the surviving child with the parents.

Indian Child Welfare Act. For years, when Native American children were removed from their homes because abuse or neglect had occurred, they were usually placed with a Caucasian family to be raised as non-Indians. The Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (ICWA, 25 U.S.C.A. §§ 1901-1963) was designed to inhibit this practice and protect the integrity of the tribes and the Indian heritage of the children. ICWA governs foster care placement, termination of parental rights, and pre-adoptive and adoptive placements. It gives Tribal courts exclusive jurisdiction over custody of Native American children who reside or are domiciled within the tribe's reservation, as well as any Indian child who is a ward of the Tribal court, regardless of residence. Tribal and State courts have concurrent jurisdiction over children who are Tribal members or eligible for membership but live outside the reservation.

If the parent(s) of the child, the child's Indian custodian, or the Tribe petitions the State court to do so, the case must be transferred to the Tribal court unless the State court finds "good cause" for retaining the case, either parent objects to the transfer, or the Tribal court declines to accept the transfer. For cases that remain with the State court, ICWA specifies priorities for the court to follow in placing the child. Preference must be given first to the child's extended family, then to members

of his or her Tribe, then to Indian families generally, and tribally licensed institutions, unless the Tribe adopts its own list which overrides these preferences ¹(Canby, 1988). The net effect of ICWA is that State or county child welfare agencies must determine if ICWA applies to any child who might be Native American, before placing the child in an adoptive or foster home or group care setting.

Multi-ethnic Placement Act-Inter-ethnic Placement Provisions. The Multi-ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) was enacted in 1994 and was amended by the Inter-ethnic Placement Provisions of the Small Business Job Protection Act (IEP) of 1996 (P.L. 104–188). As amended, MEPA-IEP was designed to overcome barriers to permanency by ensuring that adoption and foster care placements are not denied or delayed due to race, color, or national origin of the children or of foster or adoptive families. In general, MEPA-IEP prohibits racial and ethnic matching practices of States or public or private agencies that receive Federal funds either directly or through grants and contracts. Racial matching was a common practice before its passage. The child’s racial and ethnic background and the capacity of the family to meet the needs of a child of a specific background are factors that can be considered in individual placement decisions. These factors may be considered on a case-by-case basis but not as part of general practice. The provisions of MEPA-IEP do not apply to ICWA.

The purposes of MEPA-IEP are to improve permanency for children by eliminating discrimination in foster care and adoption placement decisions, increasing the number of children who are adopted, reducing the length of time that children wait to be adopted, and facilitating the recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive families. The State Title IV–B Child Welfare Services plans must reflect how their placement and recruitment plans meet the requirements of MEPA-IEP.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act. The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA, P.L. 105–89) was signed into law in 1997. ASFA is the most recent legislative attempt by the Federal Government to improve State and local efforts to minimize the time that a child stays in substitute care. The State legislatures in the States in which the FFK sites are located have passed legislation that brings their State statutes into compliance with ASFA, as have other States.

While supporting the basic reforms contained in P.L. 96–272, ASFA made the following fundamental changes designed to improve permanency:

- if a child has been in out-of-home care—other than kinship care—for 15 of the past 22 months, the State must file a petition to terminate parental rights or declare why a petition will not be filed;
- a permanency hearing must be held within 12 months after the child has entered foster care, rather than the 18 months required under P.L. 96–272;
- reasonable efforts to find a permanent placement outside the child’s family may be made concurrently with reunification efforts;
- reasonable efforts to find an alternative permanent home must be made if the case plan no longer involves reunification; and

¹ Canby, W. C., Jr. (1988). *American Indian law in a nutshell* (2nd ed.). St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Company.

- reunification efforts need not be made if the parent has subjected the child to “aggravated circumstances” as defined by State law, killed another of the parent’s children (murder or voluntary manslaughter), seriously injured the child or sibling through felony assault, or if parental rights to a child have been terminated involuntarily.

Together, P.L. 96–272, CAPTA, ICWA, MEPA-IEP, and ASFA form the legislative policy context in which child welfare agencies and courts practice. While it is too early to observe the long-term legislative effects in promoting permanency and reducing time in out-of-home care that are embodied in CAPTA and ASFA—both of which were supported by FFK participants at many levels—it is clear that the new policy environment supports timely permanence. It is unmistakable that the provisions of legislation have created new responsibilities for agencies and courts to improve their respective internal procedures and practices, and also to improve the ways in which they work together.

APPENDIX C

SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

STAKEHOLDERS GROUPS	AZ Pima	CO	DC	IN	KS	LA	MA	MI Calhn	MI K'zoo	MI Kent	MI Oakld	MI Way	MS	MT	NY	NC	OH	SC	WA	N	
Public Child Welfare	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	19
Foster Parents	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	19
Adoptive Parents	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	19
African-Americans	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	18
Foster Children	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	17
Birth Parents	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	17
Judges/Court Staff	X	X*	X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	17
Private Providers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	17
Elected Officials	X	X			X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	15
Religious Leaders	X	X	X		X	X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	15
Attorneys/CASA	X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X		14
Adoptive Children		X	X		X		X				X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	12
Educators	X			X	X	X	X			X		X		X		X		X	X		11
Health/Mental Health		X	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X		X		X	X	X	X		11
Community Groups			X		X	X	X			X			X	X	X	X		X	X		11
Advocates		X		X		X	X			X	X		X	X		X		X			10
Other Foundations	X	X	X	X	X					X					X	X		X	X		10

*Adams County only; Denver Juvenile Court did not participate.

APPENDIX C (continued)
SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

STAKEHOLDER GROUPS	AZ Pima	CO	DC	IN	KS	LA	MA	MI Calhn	MI K'zoo	MI Kent	MI Oak	MI Way	MS	MT	NY	NC	OH	SC	WA	N
Native Americans	X	X		X	X						X		X	X		X			X	9
Latino/Hispanic	X	X		X	X		X		X		X				X					8
Business Leaders	X	X		X	X					X				X		X		X		8
Media					X		X			X	X		X		X		X	X		7
Adult Adoptees		X		X	X	X						X			X			X		7
Criminal Justice	X			X						X		X		X	X			X		6
Extended Family							X				X		X					X	X	5
Children-at-Large									X		X							X		3
Civic Groups																X		X	X	3
Other Ethnic Groups		X									X									2
Domestic Violence													X					X		2
Substance Abuse													X					X		2
Labor Leaders					X															1
NUMBER of STAKEHOLDER GROUPS	15	20	13	17	22	15	17	7	8	19	18	13	19	17	18	20	14	26	17	30**
TOTAL STAKEHOLDERS	1000	400	NA	357	90	1288	1100	188	120	200	200	NA	483	275	3650	1035	281	2607	600	13874

**Total number of stakeholder groups involved by all 19 sites.

**APPENDIX D
SUMMARY OF VISIONING ACTIVITIES**

VISIONING ACTIVITIES	AZ Pima	CO	DC	IN	KS	LA	MA	MI Calhn	MI K'zoo	MI Kent	MI Oakld	MI Wayn	MS	MT	NY	NC	OH	SC	WA	N	
Focus Groups	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	17
Individual Interviews	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	16
Community Forums		X			X	X					X	X		X	X	X					8
Surveys			X	X		X				X			X		X		X	X			8
Town Meetings		X					X		X				X					X			5
Invited Group Retreat										X						X	X	X	X		5
Scheduled Meetings	X	X											X		X						4
Public Hearings						X									X						2
Media Campaign								X					X								2
Children's Conference																			X		1
Toll-Free Telephone																			X		1
TOTAL ACTIVITIES	3	5	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	2	3	6	1	6	4	4	7	3	11***	

***Total number of visioning activities identified by all 19 sites.