



## OVERVIEW

The National Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation (QIC-AG) is a five-year project working with eight sites that will implement evidence-based interventions or develop and test promising practices which if proven effective can be replicated or adapted in other child welfare jurisdictions. Effective interventions are expected to achieve long-term, stable permanence in adoptive and guardianship homes for waiting children as well as children and families after adoption or guardianship has been finalized.

## SITE OVERVIEW

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is a state-run child welfare organization with responsibility for ensuring child safety, family permanence, and child well-being for the children placed in the State's custody. In 1991, Illinois initiated a statewide Adoption Support and Preservation program that is embedded in the Illinois Family Preservation Act. Services are provided through contracts with private agencies in each region of the State. DCFS is partnering with several existing Adoption Support and Preservation providers and other supporting organizations in Cook County and in specific counties within the Central Region of the state to implement the selected intervention for the QIC-AG project.

## PROJECT GOAL

The Illinois QIC-AG project will test a strengths-based intervention that is delivered in the home to children and their adoptive parents or guardians. The intervention is designed to help children and their caregivers understand and regulate their reactions to stressors. The overall goal is to understand if the intervention will help adoptive parents and guardians become better prepared to meet both the emerging and future needs of the children in their care by offering this support at a time when a child's needs are not overwhelming his or her family.

## PERMANENCY CONTINUUM INTERVAL: **SELECTIVE**

Illinois will implement a trauma-focused intervention in the Selective Interval of the QIC-AG Permanency Continuum Framework. The Selective Interval includes prevention interventions that focus on outreach to families with risk factors for post-permanency discontinuity. Previous research in Illinois found the risk of permanency discontinuity for children in adoptive and guardianship homes was not only most likely to occur when children enter their teen years (i.e., average 13 years old) but also that the risk of discontinuity increases as children age. Based on this research, the Illinois QIC-AG initiative will focus on the child's current age as the primary risk factor.

## TARGET POPULATION

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The Illinois QIC-AG project is implementing a trauma-focused intervention targeting families with youth who are currently in or about to begin their teenage years. The youth must have an active adoption/guardianship subsidy and live with their adoptive parent or guardian in Cook County or selected counties within the Central region. The intervention will also be offered to youth older than 10 years who have been adopted either internationally or domestically.

## INTERVENTION

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Illinois will implement the Trauma Affect Regulation: Guide for Education and Therapy (TARGET) program. TARGET uses a strengths-based, psychoeducational approach to educate youth about the effects of trauma and to provide therapy for youth affected by trauma and exposure to adverse childhood experiences. TARGET teaches participants about the range of impacts of trauma on cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and relational processes. In addition, TARGET describes how the brain's stress (alarm) system can become stuck in survival mode, thus causing difficulties with other brain systems such as thinking and memory. TARGET teaches a set of skills, called the Freedom Steps, to help participants learn new ways of understanding their stressors and regulating their reactions and responses to stressors.

Existing evidence supports the effectiveness of TARGET; the intervention has been used with juveniles in detention facilities (Ford & Hawke, 2012), and with delinquent girls diagnosed with either full or partial posttraumatic stress

disorder (Ford, Steinberg, Hawke, Levine, & Zhang, 2012). Recently, TARGET was adapted by the Illinois Permanency Innovations Initiative project for use with a child welfare population (results not yet available). Although TARGET has been shown to be successful in improving youth's ability to self-regulate their emotions and behaviors, the intervention has not yet been tested with a post-permanency population of adoptive and guardianship families.

## PROGRAM EVALUATION AND EXPECTED RESULTS

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DCFS will use a randomized controlled trial to test if children in the target population who receive TARGET will have better outcomes than similar children who receive services as usual. The expected long-term outcomes include increased post-permanency stability, improved behavioral health for children, and enhanced child and family well-being.

## SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

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Short-term outcomes, unique to this site include the following:

- » reduced child behavioral issues;
- » reduced school-based problem behaviors;
- » increased level of caregiver commitment;
- » reduced caregiver strain.



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## MORE INFORMATION

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For more information about the QIC-AG visit [www.qic-ag.org](http://www.qic-ag.org) and

- » search our Intervention and Program Catalog
- » download information about the Permanency Continuum Framework
- » explore details about the eight Partner Sites

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