

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR ADOPTION READINESS ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR A COMMUNITY-BASED SYSTEM OF CARE

Purpose

This assessment is designed to guide States, Territories and Tribes (STTs) in building a coordinated and integrated system of care to assist families and children and youth before and after they obtain permanency. The assessment highlights components needed for the development of an adaptive and coordinated system of resources, communication, civic engagement, and advocacy for the development of a meaningful permanency support and preservation program. STTs can use the assessment to assess their current system and determine where they can enhance their continuum of care through increased community engagement/partnership. The assessment consists of six components: Vision and Governance, Theory of Change and Ecosystem, The Importance of a Backbone Organization, Leveraging Community Assets, Parents as Civic Entrepreneurs, and Evaluation.

Introduction

Collaboration is certainly not new to child welfare systems and communities providing post-permanency services. Since the enactment of the Adoptions and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997, public and private leaders have been creating partnerships around post-permanency activities, developing meaningful collaborations, and coordinating professional service arrays to support the record number of children in adoption and guardianship arrangements. Continuums of care are being built with a number of resource and referral coordination systems, newly specialized permanency competencies for professionals, educational and support services to parents and youth, and enhanced and intensive therapeutic approaches.

While a number of state, regional, and county child welfare systems are building continuums of ongoing adoption support, there has not been a consistent pathway that best assesses a community's readiness or assets for developing a robust ecosystem of post-permanency activities. Much has been written about best practices needs for post-permanency supports and services, but little has been developed about how to build a comprehensive, evolving, and cohesive community-based, post-permanency system.



The National Resource Center for Adoption (NRCA) Readiness Assessment Tool provides a framework for public child welfare systems to build an ecosystem of post-permanency services. The significant increase of children in finalized adoptive placements as well as guardianships necessitates a multi-system approach of utilizing government, professional, and community assets. The tool provides an outline for a framework that ensures organizational and parent engagement components are leveraged collectively to allow for enhanced and sustained service arrays and supports for adoptive families. The tool should be supported by an action plan with meaningful discussion and dialogue that ultimately helps communities customize their own solutions. States, Tribes and Territories (STTs) can utilize the tool to assess their community-based system of care and identify components that they can add/reframe to further enhance their existing service array.

This tool was developed with insight and background from interviews held in November 2013 with public and private adoptions leaders from the following 11 states: Alabama, Connecticut, Florida, Iowa, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, and Vermont. The tool includes two components:



An assessment that highlights components needed for the development of an adaptive and coordinated system of resources, communication, civic engagement and advocacy for a meaningful preservation program. STTs can complete the assessment to determine where they can enhance their system of care through increased community engagement/partnership.

A document that provides an overview of the need for a systems approach in providing post- permanency services as well as more in-depth information on the components that are highlighted in the assessment. The document is broken into sections based on the components described in the assessment. STTs can refer to this document to obtain examples or additional information that will help them to implement that particular component within their system of care.

STTs should review the six components on the tool to answer “yes” or “no” next to each factor. After reviewing all of the factors under a component, the STT should assess whether they believe the overall component has been met. If it has been met, mark “yes” for completed. If not, then the STT should assess whether they believe the STT is currently working toward meeting this component and is on track. The tool should help a STT to assess their overall progress in effectively using the community to create a robust post adoption program

For an electronic copy of the NRCA Assessment to Determine Form go to: <http://www.nrcadoption.org/raversion1/>

A. Vision and Governance

The public-private partnership has identified and appointed a diverse group of individuals who have agreed to be members of the Steering Committee that helps to lead, coordinate, develop, and integrate post-permanency supports and activities in a designated community.

Evidence	Y	N
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals have been identified and appointed to serve on the “Steering Committee.” 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The committee includes, at a minimum, the following representatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Adoptive parents and guardians (including those who recently adopted) ✓ Service providers, particularly mental health and children’s services ✓ A representative of the public child welfare agency that oversees adoption ✓ Current providers involved in foster care and pre-adoptive and placement support ✓ A representative of the judiciary overseeing juvenile issues ✓ A university-based researcher skilled in adoptions competencies ✓ A faith-based representative ✓ A business leader ✓ Advocates who are media savvy ✓ Tribal representative 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Steering Committee has developed a “charter” that describes core values, a vision, and a mission statement that are/will be incorporated throughout the community-based system of care design and network of services and supports. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Steering Committee has clearly identified its geographic area for purposes of community-engagement for its post-permanency system. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Steering Committee has established a set meeting schedule. 		

Completed: Yes No **OR** **In progress and on-track:** Yes No



B. Theory of Change and Ecosystem

The State or County child welfare agency has been authorized to institutionalize a public-private partnership for purposes of building a broad ecosystem of post-permanency policies, activities, services, and supports. The partnership will be supported by a “Steering Committee” as the venue for planning and developing the “theory of change” in a post-permanency system.

Evidence	Y	N
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The child welfare agency has evidence authorizing it to enter into a private-public partnership for post-permanency planning and activities. Evidence can be demonstrated by legislation, executive order, or proclamation. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The partnership’s governing venue will consist of a Steering Committee. At a minimum, the following roles will be established. Steering Committee Roles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agrees to be identified as the community planning and advocacy group for the post-permanency system in partnership with the local child welfare agency. Agrees to engage with willing providers, advocates, businesses, and philanthropists around post-permanency supports. Provides oversight of developed sub-committees—including defined approval of changes and allocation of funding/resources. Public Child Welfare Roles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes the Steering Committee as the community-based planning and advocacy body for planning and coordinating strategies for activities. Agrees to communicate to adoptive parents/guardians on the activities and services that the Steering Committee is overseeing. Assists in joint media awareness and advocacy activities on the promotion of pre- and post-permanency activities. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Steering Committee will be co-chaired by a designated leader of the child welfare agency and a leader from the private or community sector. The State’s designee for post-permanency activities will be a key participant. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The public child welfare agency has assigned staff to stay current with state and federal requirements and to keep the Steering Committee and state updated on these policy initiatives. 		

Completed: Yes No *OR* *In progress and on-track:* Yes No

C. The Importance of a Backbone Organization

The Steering Committee’s system of care work will be supported and implemented by a Backbone Organization that will lead efforts in coordinating, planning strategies, tracking tasks, funding/fiduciary, and communicating activities and developments.

Evidence	Y	N
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Backbone Organization has been identified. It will either be the local child welfare agency or a private entity that acts a “backbone” through contract with the local child welfare agency. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Steering Committee and Backbone Organization have delineated roles and responsibilities including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Administrative tasks of the Steering Committee. ✓ Maintenance of mission critical documents and information (e.g., minutes) ✓ Coordinating role for purposes of activities and communication on post-adoption supports. ✓ What are their specific products/outcomes? 		



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Backbone Organization will act as a fiscal agent on funding opportunities for both public and private dollars. 		
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Completed: Yes No OR In progress and on-track: Yes No

D. Leveraging Community Assets

The Steering Committee has developed and identified “community-led” activities and service arrays that are available at no cost or nominal fees to adoptive parents/guardians.

Evidence	Y	N
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-sponsored activities for parents: Community organizations are recruited to sponsor and support activities for parents such as adoption parties, parent’s “night outs,” National Adoption day activities, space for meetings and groups, etc. Various entities for outreach may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Service clubs (e.g. Kiwanis, Rotary, etc.) ✓ Faith-based organizations, particularly those with strong social justice outreach activities and auxiliaries ✓ Local libraries ✓ Local universities and colleges ✓ Hospitals and healthcare systems 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate partnerships: Partnerships are engaged with corporations, foundations, volunteer, and sponsorship opportunities that benefit the post-permanency support system. Various entities for corporate partnerships may include the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Chambers of Commerce ✓ Small businesses ✓ Corporations with community relations contacts ✓ Local financial institutions ✓ Community foundations/local family foundations ✓ United Way ✓ 211 systems/community referral systems 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Steering Committee develops an “asset map” that includes the community-led activities. 		

Completed: Yes No OR In progress and on-track: Yes No

E. Parents as Civic Entrepreneurs

The Steering Committee ensures that adoptive parents/guardians are engaged as civic entrepreneurs for purposes of designing policy, generating solutions, providing peer and training support, and leveraging community relationships and assets. Parents have a legitimate voice in the child welfare system, being able to provide feedback and guidance on policies and programs that directly address adoption/guardianship issues.

Evidence	Y	N
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Listening Tours and Focus Groups</u>: Public and private leaders actively solicit opportunities to have unfiltered conversations and dialogue with adoptive parents/guardians. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Planning Venue</u>: The Steering Committee has created a venue specifically for adoptive parents/guardians who have a legitimate voice in the child welfare system, being able to provide feedback and guidance on policies and programs that directly address adoption issues. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Parents as Connectors</u>: Individuals who are willing to assist adoptive parents/guardians in navigating the system of supports. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Parents as Mavens</u>: System utilizes parent mentors: Individuals who are assigned to guide designated families beginning at placement and provide support through and after the finalization process. 		



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resource Development: The committee has developed resources that would support the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Paid staff for ongoing coordination, tracking, and development of professional and community-based supports ✓ Stipends/travel for leaders of parents groups ✓ Conference participations 		
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Completed: Yes No OR In progress and on-track: Yes No

F. Evaluation

The Steering Committee has developed a “logic model” that maps inputs, activities, outputs, and short-term and long-term outcomes that are measurable over time. The Committee ensures monitoring and evaluation of outputs and outcomes including assessing impact through Return on Investment analysis.

Evidence	Y	N
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-term outcomes: The Committee develops a plan for short-term outcomes that looks to enhance the following within a 24 month period: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Referral and information coordination are increased ✓ Improved parenting skills (e.g., coping skills) ✓ Enhanced parent support and engagement (e.g., sense of belonging, forming connections, support groups are functional) ✓ Improved parent education and knowledge (e.g., behaviors of youth, developmental stages) ✓ Increase in professionalism in serving adoptive families ✓ Enhanced communication among parents ✓ Enhanced communication and information “brokerage” of professional services ✓ Increase in corporate and civic organizations providing support to adoptive families and youth ✓ Increased adoption competencies of professionals 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long-term outcomes: The Committee develops a plan for long-term outcomes that looks to impact the following over a five year period: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increase in adoptions and/or guardianships ✓ Prevention of adoption dissolutions/Increased family stability ✓ Prevention of guardianship dissolutions/Increased family stability ✓ Increase in school stability and educational attainment of children ✓ Awareness events and support activities are “institutionalized” on a regular schedule ✓ Improved quality of life for adoptive/guardianship families and youth (e.g., less behavioral problems, less familial stress, greater emotional security of youth) 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outputs: The following are examples to be tracked: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ # of parent support groups and attendance ✓ # of parent liaisons and mentors matched with new adoptive parents/guardians ✓ # and types of trainings available to adoptive parents/guardians ✓ # of professionals and organizations by type as identified to be a post-permanency resources ✓ #, type, and attendance of community activities ✓ Call and referral volume to any referral line ✓ SEO analysis of local website ✓ Community relations contacts with businesses and civic organizations 		

Completed: Yes No OR In progress and on-track: Yes No



Building a Community-Based System of Care to Support Adoptive/Guardianship Families

Need for a Systems Approach

The NRCA Readiness Assessment Tool's emphasis on systems development and change is what sets the tool apart from scaling conventional post-permanency, service-delivery programs built on government dollars. Parsons (1997) identified three types of systems—bureaucratic, professional, and community—that are all intertwined in the social systems of a community. “Currently, the balance tilts toward a combination of the bureaucratic and professional, creating an institutional focus,” (Parsons, 1997, p. 9). Although government, as led by the authorized child welfare agency, must be a critical sponsor of such a system, the community's stakeholders must have a systematic plan to best support adoptive families within a systems approach. Given the unique and ever-growing dynamics of post-permanency activities, the tool focuses on shifting the balance toward a community-professional combination, grounded in the assets and desires of the community, and particularly by parents and youth themselves.

So why a new approach? Why not just scale services for post-permanency activities? Perhaps the biggest reason is due to the nature of current government funding structures. Unlike title IV-E foster care, title IV-E for adoption assistance does not have a corresponding program or administrative case management functions. According to the Congressional Research Service, nearly one-third of all title IV-E spending (state and federal) supports children in permanent adoption or guardianship placements. In FFY2011, more than 80% of the total spending for title IV-E adoption assistance (\$4.0 billion) and Title V-E kinship guardianship assistance (\$51 million) supported ongoing subsidies for eligible children (Stoltzfus, Child welfare: a detailed overview of program eligibility and funding for foster care, adoption assistance and kinship guardianship assistance under title IV-E of the social security act, 2012)). The subsidy amounts actually exceeded the maintenance portion of all foster care payments of over \$2.4 million.

States do have federal dollars in the form of Title IV-B dollars, specifically Promoting Safe and Stable Families to support adoptive families. The statute includes four service categories that correspond to families at various levels of need (Stoltzfus, The promoting safe and stable families program: reauthorization in the 109th Congress, 2007):

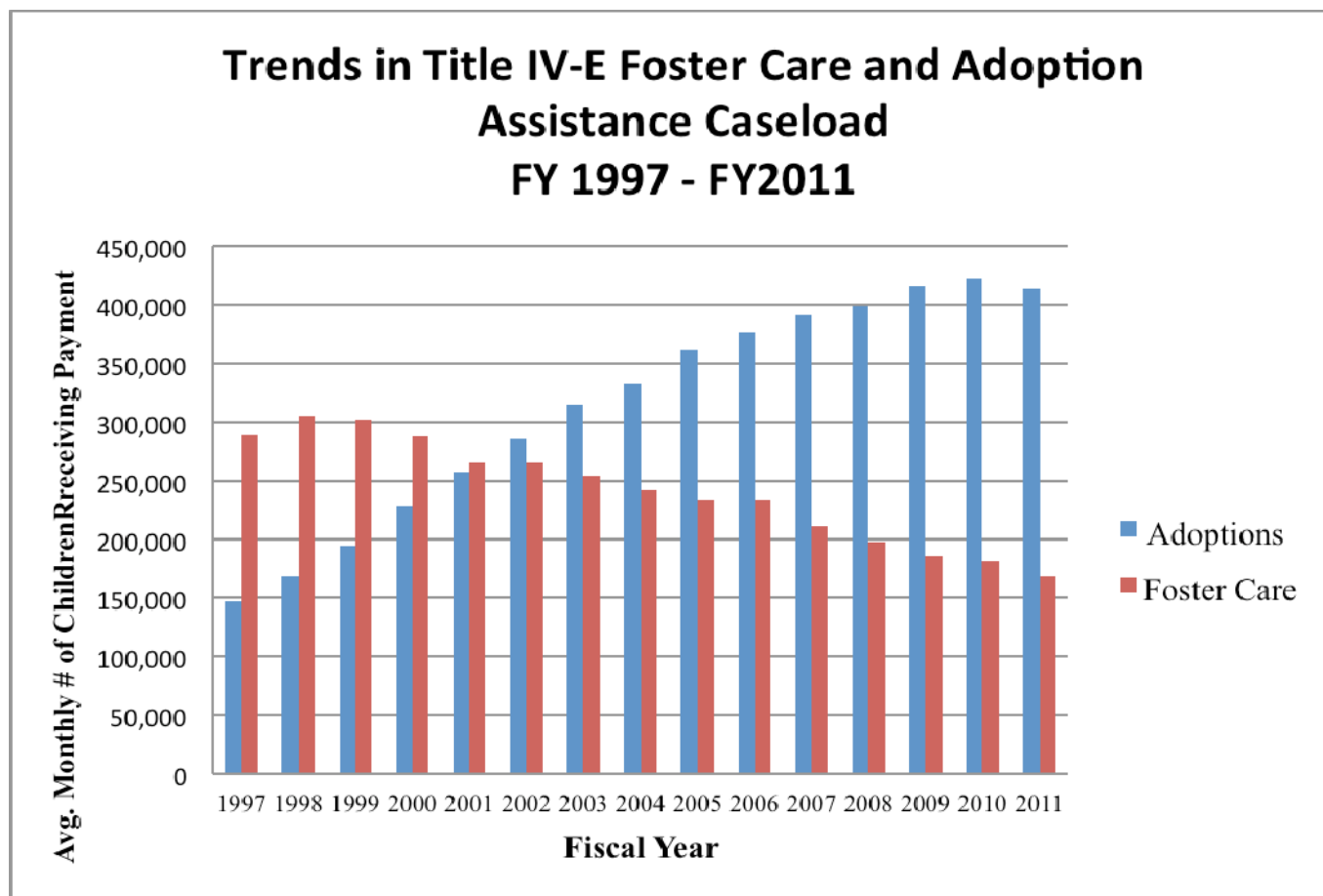
- Family Support Services are intended to help families provide safe and nurturing environments for their children.
- Family Preservation Services are targeted to families in crisis and include placement prevention services, post-reunification services, respite care, parenting skills training and infant safe haven programs.
- Time-Limited Family Reunification Services help families that are seeking to address the conditions that led to removal of a child.
- Adoption Promotion and Support Services help families that are preparing to adopt or that have adopted a child from foster care.

Based upon the above authorization, states are required to comply with a 25% match and provide for no less than 20% of funds to be applied to each category. In the Adoption Promotion and Support Services category, there is no requirement as to the minimum or share that must be spent on post-adoption activities. In 2010, states were provided just over \$341 million in PSSF funds compared to nearly \$4.6 million in title IV-E payments for foster care.

In 2005, the share of funds available from PSSF for Adoption Promotion and Support Services was 19 percent, or \$70 million (Casey Family Programs, 2011). Essentially, federal dollars available for post-adoption support has been, at the most anytime, 1.0% of the federal share of title IV-E foster care dollars and adoption subsidy support. Solely relying on federal dollars from title IV-E or IV-B for post-adoption supports will not suffice considering the current funding requirements.



Another contributing factor to a new approach is the extraordinary volume increase of children in subsidy arrangements. FFY2002 was a critical year as it was the first year that the nation's title IV-E monthly number of children receiving adoption assistance surpassed the number of children receiving foster care payments. Since then, the gap between adoption assistance and foster care has only widened. Since 2008, the number of children in adoption assistance has been more than double than those in foster care. The following chart illustrates the growing gap:



Source: Table prepared by the Congressional Research Service based on title IV-E expenditure claims as submitted by states and compiled annually by HHS, ACF, OLAB, September, 2012.

A common theme among all states that participated in the focus groups was the small number of paid staff dedicated to providing specific post-permanency services or supports, even in those states with dedicated contracts for post-adoption supports. One of the states that participated in the focus groups had a healthy subsidy amount and more children in adoption assistance than foster care; however, the state's adoptions administrator was the only paid professional who provides any type of navigation or services support to parents. In this state, support groups for parents were mainly offered through the foster adoptive association, and resource development was principally provided at the time of placement.

In North Dakota, a Post Adoption Service Task Force was created that developed a mission statement and guiding principles for such services in the state. Focus group members agreed that a perception of a lack of post-adoption services is a threat to recruitment. The Task Force recommended the concept of a North Dakota Post Adoption Center; with the target population of families who have adopted children with special needs from the state's foster care system. The primary goal of the program would be to provide triage for adoptive families in crisis and post adoption support services to families who have adopted children with special needs. Ideally the Center would be administered through a licensed child-placing agency with experience in special needs adoption to facilitate the following:

- Information and referral through a toll-free phone number, web site and published materials
- Publish materials (cooperatively with the Department) regarding adoption process, and adoption supports in North Dakota.
- Facilitate support groups for adoptive parents and adopted youth (cooperatively with local foster adopt recruitment/ retention coalitions).
- Advanced training on special needs adoption for families.
- Training of mental health providers on special needs adoption.
- Crisis intervention, primarily through phone contact with families.
- Referral for on-going case management services, therapeutic services, mental health services (in-home and residential care) and respite care.
- Facilitating a mentorship program for adoptive parents.

All the services noted above would be provided to families' state wide, primarily through phone and other electronic means, for an estimated cost of less than \$100,000 during the first year.

Stephen Goldsmith, a former chair of the Corporation for National Community Services (CNCS) notes in his book, *The Power of Social Innovation: How Civic Entrepreneurs Ignite Community Network for Good* – that we clearly need new methods to provide support for families and communities on social challenges. NRCA cautions against dedicated funding for post-permanency services that is overly prescriptive unless it is integrated with mental health and educational systems and leverages other multiple levels of funding for children and youth. When funds are spent just to deliver services, their impact is limited to the people who receive those services. However, when funds are also devoted to systems change, their impact can extend beyond a single service, thereby impacting the well-being of youth and stability of adoptive families on a long-term basis. Significant benefits and supports can be created without government controlling both the decision-making, coordinating, and funding of supports. As the focus group participants clearly noted, there is not one size that fits all when developing post-permanency systems that support families.

The current dynamics of federal funding compounded with the growing numbers of children in subsidized assistance agreements, makes a new approach not only ideal but also a necessity. This system development must be based on “systems change”—a shift in the way that a community makes decisions about policies, programs, and the allocation of its resources—and, ultimately, in the way it delivers services to its citizens. To undertake systems change, a community must build collaborative bridges among multiple agencies, community members, and other stakeholders (Foster-Fishman, Van Egeren, & Yang, 2005).

Top-down service delivery models must be supported with bottom-up civic and parent engagement. Adoptive parents and guardians in particular have unique gifts to share, not just for their children, but also for the broader community. The best and most creative post-permanency programs are aware of these assets and provide opportunities for them to be leveraged. Making creative connections and building innovative relationships is the heart and soul for any community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

As Goldsmith (2010) noted, “Transformative social progress today is held back more by precedent and existing structures and processes than by resource limitations or a lack of the public’s interest” (p. 3) This system approach recognizes components that interact with one another to function as a whole (Foster-Fishman, Van Egeren, & Yang, 2005).

Systems change takes place in multiple dimensions that are inter-connected; change in one supports change in all the others. Supporting an evolving and organic ecosystem of post-permanency activities must move include more than simply advocating for more government-funded services. Systems change may involve the following:

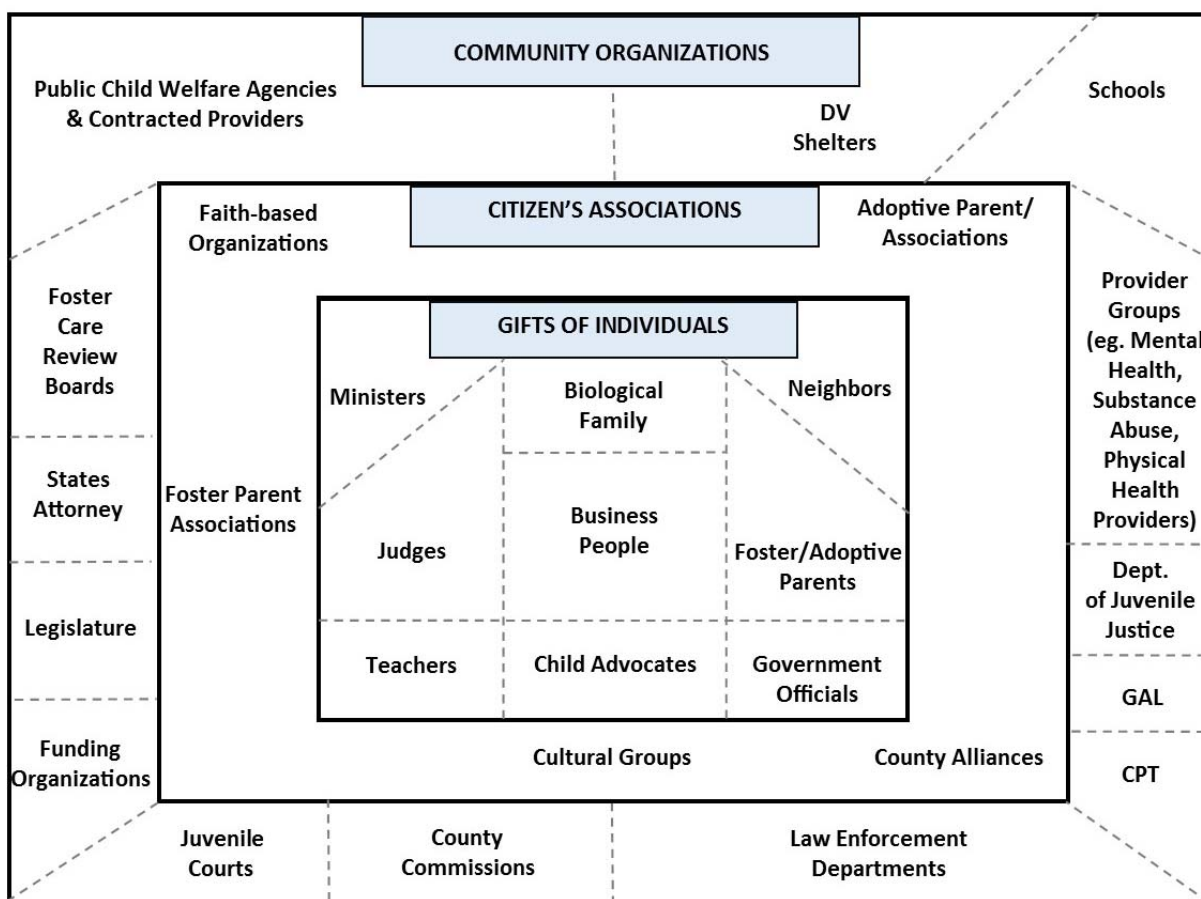
- Shifting system components and/or their sequence.
- Shifting interactions between system components.
- Altering the “whole A” through shifts in underlying choices.
- Shifting the manner in which the system provides feedback to itself.



The development of this systems approach must be appropriately balanced among government, professional, and community components. As with most social services, greater emphasis on community development and parent engagement strategies is imperative in leveraging both formal and informal supports. These approaches must be resourced in a planned manner. Adoptive parents and guardians cannot be simply viewed as traditional consumers of services and supports. Rather, they should be seen as parents who must be engaged as leaders, identified as community connectors, and empowered to design creative solutions. Adoptive parents should be viewed as “civic entrepreneurs”—those who can shift the power dynamic and make real change possible on an individual and community level (Goldsmith, 2010). System development for post-permanency services must be seen through an asset-based community development approach—focusing first on the gifts of individual adoptive parents/guardians, followed by inclusion of informal associations, and finally coordination with formal institutions. Ultimately, such processes must be nurtured in a network approach that implements activities into impactful outcomes for children and families.

The following post-adoption ecosystem has been adapted by the Asset Based Community Development Institute (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT DIAGRAM



Vision and Governance

It will be essential that “champions” in both government and the community lead an institutionalized effort on a common agenda for a post-permanency system. Although most post-permanency systems evolved organically over time, none would have developed without a strong public and private partnership and a key champion within the child welfare agency. Critical to any partnership is entrusting the child welfare agency to directly recognize and support the partnership as a venue that coordinates, plans, and monitors the development of post-permanency activities.

In Tennessee, state leaders recognized the need for post-adoption components in large part due to the *Brian A. v. Hattaway* lawsuit. The settlement ultimately required post-adoption components in a consent decree. The Tennessee Department of Children’s Services developed a network to cover the entire state with support of two lead agencies in the private sector. Today, the state has a robust system of a centralized intake system supported by resource centers and support groups that meet monthly. Evidenced-based practices in trauma are integrated with family-based services as well as traditional community mental health. Information is shared through lending libraries and resources on web links along with a preparation curriculum for adoptions.

Adoptive parents cannot be simply viewed as traditional consumers of services and supports. Rather, parents must be engaged as leaders, identified as community connectors, and empowered to design creative solutions.

Tennessee also instituted a multi-disciplinary advisory committee in the early stages, which assisted in providing direction and momentum. The early members of the committee included the CEO of a behavioral health hospital, an adoptive parent, a child psychiatrist, a Department of Children Services representative, a minister, and a lawyer. For the first two years, the advisory committee played a role in their ongoing direction and assessment. Once lead agencies came aboard, the committee was no longer necessary.

A similar approach to utilizing an advisory committee occurred in Alabama which has a post-adoption program called Alabama Pre/Post Adoptions Connections (APAC) delivered by Children’s Aid Society. Prompted by ASFA, the Alabama State Department of Human Resources made a decision to develop a post-adoption services program and established an Adoption Advisory Committee of 15 members with representatives from county and state Department of Human Resources, Mental Health/Mental Retardation, Education, and adoptive parents. The Committee was charged to identify needs of adoption families and the best service delivery structure. Ultimately, the recommendation was made to form APAC and a contract commenced with Children’s Aid Society in 2001.

NRCA recognizes that such relationship-building advisory committees are essential components of creating sustainable change. Observations of privatization and community-based efforts in child welfare have focused on the importance of establishing an institutionalized venue for purposes of building trust, solving operational issues as they develop, and sustaining ongoing frameworks for problem solving and developing service arrays. Process is essential to building capacity and creating the framework of regular interaction to develop and strengthen relationships of those supporting adoptive parents.

NRCA recommends that a public-private partnership be supported by a steering committee that is officially entrusted by government for ongoing post-permanency activities. Government, through its child welfare agency, can ensure its participation through legislative intent or from an executive order by the Governor.

A recognized public-private committee structure is the Child Welfare Advisory Committee (CWAC) in Illinois that was established by executive order by the Governor in 1989. Although entirely provider driven, CWAC has a number of working sub-committees that effectively work with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services on a number of policy, practice, and contracting activities for the provision of most child welfare services. Now in existence for nearly 25 years, CWAC is an institutionalized process that has sustained over various administrations and effectively utilized the talents and buy-in of the private sector in improving child welfare practice.



Considering the number of children in subsidized assistance agreements, NRCA supports a similar advisory process for a post-permanency system to be entrusted by government. Unlike CWAC, which has no multi-sector representation, a post-permanency steering committee should include representatives from various communities—adoptive parents, business, faith-based, mental health, schools, etc.—that can garner not only good advice but leverage non-traditional resources.

It's essential to not have the steering committee be a passive advisory group. As the committee supports the evolving nature of a growing post-permanency system, it must not be viewed as simply “ad hoc” or temporary. Rather, the committee planning process should sustain itself over time regardless of the state's changing public sector management. Dialogue and discussion must be meaningful around policy development, system coordination, and budgeting. Ultimately, the steering committee is a critical component to ensure accountability while the community-building orientation promotes a sense of partnership between professionals and parents.

Theory of Change and Ecosystem

Building a systems approach for post-permanency supports must recognize the complexity of interactions and dynamics of families. Government no longer has direct oversight for children in post-permanency placements and dedicated funding for services and programs is limited. Family and child rearing obligations challenge parents in creating and nurturing social supports. Even in child welfare county-based systems, many post-permanency activities must be coordinated on a statewide basis, thereby presenting the challenge of communication, engagement, and delivery across broad geography. All of these dynamics are compounded by the growing number of children in subsidized arrangements.

FSG, a social impact consulting firm, described the following characteristics of a complex system:

- Are not predictable in detail
- Achieve order without central control
- Evolve naturally through emergence
- Have embedded systems
- Operate through co-evolution (FSG Social Impact Consultants, 2013)

The development of a theory of change can be a helpful in sorting out the plethora of activities in a multi-sector post-permanency system. At its most basic, a theory of change explains how a group of activities and interactions set the stage for producing long-range results (Andrea A. Anderson). A theory of change helps jumpstart the planning around strategies for interventions, partnerships, and resource allocation into a new ecosystem. At its core, it must also be aspirational.

APAC in Alabama has developed the following Theory of Change: *Providing support, information, and resources can empower adoptive families to successfully respond to adoption-related challenges and build stronger bonds within adoptive families.*

Perhaps the most significant benefit of a theory of change statement is its perspective in generating important questions. As Margaret Wheatley, the famous anthropologist said, “We live in a complex world, we often don't know what is going, and we won't be able to understand its complexity unless we spend more time now knowing...Curiosity is what we need” as cited by FSG (2013).

A theory of change component should be augmented by a logic model process to guide the new ecosystem. The ambiguity of a post-permanency complex system can be mitigated with the linear and predictive nature of a logic model. Developing a logic model results in effective delivery of supports and offers greater learning opportunities, better documentation of outcomes, and shared knowledge about what works and why. The logic model is a beneficial evaluation tool that facilitates effective program planning, implementation, and evaluation (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004).



The development of a logic model ultimately gives stakeholders a road map describing the activities connecting the need for the planned program with the program’s desired results. Mapping a proposed program helps to visualize and understand how resources and activities can contribute to assisting adoptive/guardianship families. Essentially, a “logic model brings program concepts and dreams to life” (W.K. Kellogg Foundation, 2004).

Logic models and theory of change have their limitations. As is the case in social services, we cannot regularly assume predictability based on certain inputs. Similarly to the fact that children and youth respond differently to varying approaches, a logic model for post-permanency services must be flexible and evolve over time. Inputs and activities will clearly change, thereby influencing outcomes and ultimately the impact over time. As such, the logic model cannot be viewed as a program by itself but rather a guide for evolving the community-based system of post-permanency supports.

The Importance of a Backbone Organization

The challenges for any post-permanency model are related to limited funding, complex relationship building, broad geography, multiple stakeholders, and shifting logic models. Making sense out of these components is compounded when the steering committee members are engaged solely through a voluntary basis. Keeping everything and everyone on track necessitates the development of a “backbone” organization.

Research from the consulting field on the changing dynamics in the social sector has noted the importance of a backbone organization. In 2011, the social sector consulting firm—FSG—wrote an influential article in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* on collective impact strategies. FSG has influenced the field with its work in collective impact as strategies that move beyond the traditional collaborations of joint funding, private-public partnerships, and informal networks (Martin, Kania, Merchant, & Turner, 2012). The authors noted that social change and support on a larger scale requires broad cross-sector coordination and significant adaptive leadership.

Collective impact strategies involve a centralized infrastructure supported by a “backbone” organization where systems are robust but flexible and where data is relentlessly utilized in decision-making. Ultimately, partners in such a strategy improve the quality and efficiency of their work. Most importantly, beneficiaries are impacted and communities can demonstrate meaningful outcomes over time. Unfortunately, the field and funding of social services usually focuses on intervention strategies that are often narrowly focused and not integrated with other systems.

According to FSG the development of achieving any collective impact are due to five key conditions:

1. Common Agenda
2. Shared Measurement
3. Mutually Reinforcing Activities
4. Continuous Communication
5. Backbone Support

FSG defines backbone support as follows: “Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization(s) with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies” (Martin, Kania, Merchant, & Turner, 2012, p. 2).

FSG further developed the concept of a backbone organization that focus on the following sequential activities required to yield greater impact:

1. Guide Vision and Strategy
2. Support Aligned Activities
3. Establish Shared Measurement Practices
4. Build Public Will
5. Advance Policy
6. Mobilize Funding



In the 2013 focus groups that NRCA held with representatives from 11 states, participants clearly identified the nucleus of backbone organizations that were especially engaging on guiding strategy and supporting aligned activities.

A great example of a “backbone” resulting from a strong public-private partnership is in Connecticut. In 2003, one of the Department of Children and Families' state's Deputy Commissioner for child welfare was an initial champion for a community-based and coordinated approach. The state's Deputy Commissioner used an Employee Assistance Benefit model as the basis of a coordinating approach for post-permanency activities, thereby focusing on a single point of access from the healthcare industry. The result was the establishment of the Adoption Assistance Program (AAP) at the University of Connecticut Health Center, a \$1 billion comprehensive health system with over 5,000 employees. AAP, through contract, has been designated as a backbone organization for coordinating and engaging communities.

With only four case managers and three Social Work staff housed within the AAP at The Health Center statewide, AAP has leveraged opportunities while upholding the vision of a single point of entry and quick access. AAP provides support to 500 families a year, mainly around behavioral issues in the home and school. According to Allyson Powell, Assistant Program Director, “The single biggest reason for success is having a person on the phone with a 24 hour call back and 48 hour in the home for the service.”

AAP's integration with the state's largest academic health system has benefited families without additional cost to the state. Without charging, UConn's AAP provides consultation to therapists and has helped both parents and providers navigate the state's managed care system. Experience in managed care has been positive; many providers now accept state insurance and parents are paying less for treatment from an out of pocket perspective. AAP's connection with a health system has also assisted in recruiting providers for specialized services. And such expansion has also been supported by additional competency-based trainings. Through partnerships with the University of Maryland's Center for Adoption Support and Education, AAP has helped launch a post-master's certification program on adoptions competencies.

True to its evolution to meet the needs of families, AAP has been given flexibility by the state, particularly with greater focus on educational partnerships. While outpatient therapeutic services are leveraged with managed care, AAP has been able to focus more on case management within the home. This service is coupled with a dedicated website with numerous hyperlinks and a lending library including information on connecting with support groups of the state's Adoption Community Network. This “network” is a compilation of adoptive families, adoption professionals, therapists, educators and many other adoption champions working together with the vision of forming a collaborative partnership designed to support adoptive and relative caregiver parenting.

Another model for a backbone organization is the formation a lead agency. Formed in 2007, IowaKidsNet is a collaboration of six agencies that began doing post-adoption services in 2009. With five service areas in the state, IowaKidsNet manages the statewide referral line and provides advocacy and referrals with the state's managed care entity. For the last four years, this model has been successful in building public will by conducting collaboration meetings with numerous stakeholders in the Des Moines area as a way to ensure communication, attract new providers, and shared understanding. Activities have led to the creation of an Adoptions Champions Program, a group of “recruited volunteers” of adoptive parents who co-facilitate support groups and act as ambassadors. Today, about seven support groups are actively meeting in the Des Moines area.

Iowa is also a good example of the importance of a backbone organization effectively reaching out to a growing and dispersed population of adoptive parents. Beginning in 2009, IowaKidsNet had to creatively reach out to adoptive families, of which there are over 9,000 adoptive children in the state. By working through the foster parent associations first, IowaKidsNet leveraged outreach by focusing on professional fairs and conferences with school social workers, nurses, and psychiatrists. IowaKidsNet is now having conversations with other grass roots organizations about resource coordination, including those founded by adoptive parents who are supporting others through free clothes closets. It's also reevaluating the way it works with volunteers as it views working with youth



groups, college career groups, churches, schools, and teachers as an effective way to engage others and support adoptive/foster parents. Despite its management of a referral line and service delivery process, IowaKidsNet clearly regards itself as a bridge for parents to generate and create new community resources at no taxpayer cost.

Leveraging Community Assets

In the 2013 focus groups, NRCA held with 11 states, participants clearly saw the importance of leveraging public and private assets and acknowledged the art in learning how to effectively leverage these assets. Solving the adaptive problems of resource supports for the growing number of adoptive/guardianship families cannot be solely solved by technical solutions such as new money or programs. The focus groups NRCA held clearly demonstrated the need for strong executive leadership, meaningful private and public sector partnerships, broad engagement of parents and providers, and a commitment to shared measurement and continuous learning.

Components of a network approach in community discovery have been formulated by LaPiana Consulting. The firm has identified trends impacting the social sector (Campos, Gowdy, Hildebrand, & LaPiana, 2009). Leaders in post-adoption systems can accomplish the following per LaPiana Consulting:

- ✓ Expand their reach and deepen their impact through networks and coalitions of both organizations and individuals.
- ✓ Use network mapping tools to understand, strengthen and grow such networks on a continuous basis
- ✓ Think more systemically about the challenges they seek to address, and about possible approaches and partners.
- ✓ Organize the work as a collaborative, evolving process, rather than as something they can completely control internally.

Innovation is sometimes thought of as disruption and doing away with the old and obsolete. But Goldsmith (2010) formulates the concept of innovation as a “catalytic ingredient” (p. 27). Goldsmith (2010) has supported this theoretical framework as one that he describes as “discovering the missing ingredient” (p. 30). His framework for “discovering the missing ingredient” is constructed as follows:

- ✓ **Civic Discovery:** Survey the institutional assets in the community. Use mapping as an opportunity to build rapport with local leaders.
- ✓ **System Discovery:** Explore the relationships of stakeholders such as competition, diversity, and opportunity for success and innovation.
- ✓ **Personal Discovery:** Listen and look for new ideas and interventions.
- ✓ **Predictive Discovery:** Utilize models to discern solutions based on data.

One of the best examples of leadership of “discovering the missing ingredient” is the work done in Utah by Marty Shannon, the State Adoption Program Administrator. Starting in 2001, when she was part of a research project with Susan Culter Egbert, Ph.D. then with the University of Utah, School of Social Work Social Research Institute. Ms. Shannon began her discovery process in conjunction Doctor Egbert by wanting to know more about what adoptive families needed to be stable. Doctor Egbert’s research included sending surveys to all DCFS adoptive families. Ms. Shannon focused on the engagement of key stakeholders. She held town meetings for awareness and particularly engaged mental health providers on the dynamics of adoptive family issues that included the parents and siblings, trauma-informed care, and opportunities to access Medicaid.

Despite the vastness of the state, she went to every county and did her own “inventory assessment” with other research partners. As noted, parents and families “had no idea where to call or go” for various activities that could support post-adoption activities. Ultimately, a report was issued and customized for every county on the inventory. For the first time, dialogue was occurring around mental health, substance abuse, fetal alcohol syndrome, crisis support, and support groups among providers and parents.



Today, this new ecosystem is supported by specialized adoption “clusters” that are facilitated by parents who receive a modest stipend provide by the Utah Foster care Foundation. Parents can also engaged online, both in social media and webinars, with support by the backbone organization of The Adoption Exchange. Parent leaders are engaged and represented in all of the 41 school districts. The Adoption Exchange updates post-adoption resources and activities along with success stories. With over 6,000 children in adoption assistance program, Utah has been innovative in the creation of a meaningful and research-based discovery process. Essentially, Utah has found the missing ingredient by surveying, exploring, and listening to parents and those who supported them.

In Vermont, this discovery process was initiated primarily by families struggling to parent children with challenging behaviors who were running into navigation issues with county and state systems. Several of these families had adopted children from bordering states and sought help from Casey Family Services. Simultaneously, a group of families who had provided foster care through the Futures Program and went on to adopt the children were experiencing similar struggles. These families were clustered in the North East Kingdom, which is a very rural section of Vermont. The director of the Futures Program contacted the adoption specialist and together they developed two local support groups and a lending library. As adoption disruptions occurred with high-risk youth, no one knew the right approach or how to respond. Mental health services were not bundled in a manner that could support families and only the state’s mental health department could place children not in custody into residential facilities. Parents and state leaders began to understand the importance of “lifetime” adoption activities and “cross pollination” activities. As such, a membership-driven consortium was formed with the following mission statement:

“The Vermont Adoption Consortium recognizes that adoption is a lifelong process with rewards and challenges at different stages along the way. Therefore, we are committed to partnering with individuals, families and communities to further the knowledge and understanding of adoption and to ensure that all people whose lives have been touched by adoption have access to quality services throughout Vermont.”

The creative new backbone consortium began meeting in 1995. At that time, there was an emerging recognition of the on-going needs of adoptive families. As such, a grant was developed and appropriately called the Lifetime Adoption Program (LAP). Writing a grant proposal helped to formulate a plan for developing post adoption services and formalized the relationship between the partners in what has become the Vermont Post-Adoption Consortium. The original members were the Vermont Department for Children and Families (applicant for the grant), Casey Family Services, Vermont Children’s Aid Society (private adoption agency that administered the first grant), Northeast Kingdom Human Services (then called Futures), Easter Seals (then called Teaching Family Center) and several families. In 1997 this group applied for a second adoption opportunity grant this time with Casey Family Services as the applicant. This grant solidified the group’s commitment to this work and the Vermont Post Adoption Consortium was born.

The Vermont Post Adoption Consortium (as it is known today) started with in-home parental support and education on parenting children with challenging behaviors. Support groups focusing on parenting strategies and options for respite care were established. Through the Consortium, membership agencies came together to develop year-round adventure weekends for youth and a summer day camp called Camp For Me. This gave parents a break and provided a safe, structured and fun outlet for the children. The Consortium engaged with the Department of Mental Health and the Department of Education to learn how to assist families in navigating those systems. In addition, the Consortium has been instrumental in Vermont moving knowledge forward in areas of adjusted child development based on trauma and adoption. The concept of institutionalizing the Consortium as a backbone organization was paramount. Since inception, both Casey Family Services and Children’s Aid Society closed their operations, but others have stayed involved and new member have been added. Today, this grant has been augmented by four contracts with members of the consortium that provide a wide array of services from pre-adoption onward. Families adopting or becoming permanent guardians for children in foster care can begin working with a post-permanency support worker in the months prior to the final court action. In 2013, the state had 1,800 children in adoption assistance agreements, of which half were older than 13. On average the state compiles about 170 adoption/guardianships per year.



Parents as Civic Entrepreneurs

Adoptive parents and guardians should not simply be viewed as consumers, but instead valued for their significant leaders in identifying gaps, spreading the work, and organizing as peers for other parents in both the pre- and post-permanency process. Vermont and Utah are examples of states where adoptive parents/guardians were engaged while leaders listened early in the planning process. Thus, as Goldsmith (2010) argued, “Civic progress requires that those who advocate for new interventions build a community of engaged citizens to demand change in social-political systems” (p. 139).

As noted earlier, system change must be balanced among bureaucratic, professional, and community components, with a heavy focus on community and parents. Areas of opportunity identified in the 2013 NRCA focus groups were particularly focused on the need for meaningful parental engagement and dialogue. Generating such solutions, particularly when resources are short, can be supported by engaging parents from a new perspective.

Private and public leaders, whether in backbone organizations or provider organizations, need to be cognizant of the “curse of the professional” (Goldsmith, *The Power of Social Innovatoin: How Civic Entrepreneurs Ignite Community Networks for Good*, 2010, p. 136). Essentially, the curse of the professional is when providers and government believe that they know best. Unfortunately, this can inadvertently crowd out volunteer engagement even when such folks are invited to planning discussions. The biggest vulnerability to not fully engaging volunteers or beneficiaries is launching failed initiatives despite opportunities for others to participate. Confronting the challenges of the “curse of the professional” and political entrenchment is the active solicitation of parents for ideas and input.

When supported by a strong private-public partnership, a backbone organization, adoption competent services, and meaningful evaluation processes, parents can provide the “missing ingredient” on innovative solutions and supports for others. Ultimately these unique individual gifts and talents can have a substantial impact on the number of adoptive/guardianship families that provide stable and nurturing environments for their children.

Listening Tours and Focus Groups: Public and private leaders should actively solicit opportunities to have honest conversations with parents. The listening tour is an effective tool when initiating relationships with adoptive/guardianship parents. It not only captures important qualitative data that reveals unique connecting opportunities, but is, most importantly, a valuable and organic relationship-building conversation between adoptive/guardianship parents and policy-makers. Such listening tours should be orchestrated as private discussions that are unfiltered and unplugged.

As one NRCA focus group participant noted, adoptive parents/guardians are great at advocating for their children but are not very good at advocating for themselves. Ironically, parents become a resource to the system of ideas when they themselves have a crisis, challenge, or need.

This fascinating dynamic was noted in Central Florida where Salena Burden, a Post-Adoption Specialist at Devereux Florida, oversees the post-adoption services in three counties. Devereux is contracted by Community Based Care (CBC) of Central Florida to provide adoption support in Orange, Osceola and Seminole County. After being part of the state’s first foray into post-adoption supports, she noted that “we did not realize the magnitude of what was needed.” An early key driver was families self-referring without any constructive organizational marketing outreach process. Preventing dissolutions were the priority and the “first line of defense was a therapist” according to Burden. Over time, components related to adoption competency training were identified as a major need, and Burden’s employer at the time - Family Services of Metro Orlando—conducted the first adoption training for therapists in Orlando. The Florida Department of Children and Families also emphasized the importance of educating mental health counselors and developed a state-wide initiative for adoption competency training. Since then, over 100 professionals have been trained just in three counties in Central Florida and over 200 statewide.

Along with adoption competent therapists, parents particularly acknowledged the importance of therapeutic in-home supports—those components that would help prevent crises while supporting children in their own



environment. Burden and Devereux Florida thought of leveraging the Medicaid systems of in-home supports. As the state's largest children's behavioral health provider, Devereux was experienced in Medicaid-funded Targeted Case Management (TCM). TCM is a holistic model that is Medicaid-funded at no cost to parents or the child welfare system. Children must have a mental health diagnosis to qualify for this program. Targeted case managers go into schools and homes, offering a community-based perspective. Parents, in turn, are actively engaged in advocating for mental health and emotional needs of their children. Service duration can be up to six months, thereby ensuring sustainable stability in both the home and school.

Planning Venues: A number of communities have councils and coordinating bodies that are typically made up of providers and human services leaders. One idea is adoption/guardianship planning "councils" that allow for building community-based strategies and policy changes. These councils can yield new resources if adoptive parents/guardians are given a consistent and meaningful platform to exchange ideas, understand the big picture, and create recommendations around policy and service delivery.

Illinois has been a leader in creating a venue focused on adoptions by parents and adoptees themselves. The Illinois Adoption Advisory Council (IAAC) has been functioning since 2000 with the purpose to advise the Director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) on matters involving or affecting the provision of adoption and guardianship services. The Council is also interested in working to preserve and expand funding for post-adoption and adoption preservation services, and enhancing the child welfare system's ability to find permanent homes for teens and other children for whom permanency has not been arranged. The DCFS Director appoints council members. Members consist of adoptive parents and adoptees representing each DCFS administrative region, as well as experts in child welfare and adoption, some of who are employed by contract agencies. Two adoptive parent members also hold joint appointments to the Child Welfare Advisory Committee (CWAC). The council meets six times a year and posts all of its minutes on the DCFS website.

Planning venues can also be in the form of constructive work projects that are led by adoptive parents/guardians. In Central Florida, adoptive parents were engaged in developing the state's first post-adoption resource guide. One adoptive parent, who was a professional social worker and worked for a local church was particularly engaged in the development of the manual. The adoptive parents developed a framework on "20 things I wished I knew before I adopted." The adoptive parents' active involvement in soliciting other's input and collaboration with staff was directly utilized in developing that state's first meaningful and dynamic post-adoption resource guide.

Parents as Connectors and Mavens: Adoptive parents/guardians are usually resilient and learn to become resourceful for themselves and their children. Significant opportunities exist for parents to act as "community connectors" for others. Parents acting as connectors and liaisons do more than develop ideas, concepts, or methods. They lead other adoptive parents/guardians to unique opportunities and open the door to community resources that providers or government are not attuned to. They can recruit other connectors, enroll connection partners, carefully listen for opportunities, and ultimately support such connections that add real value.

Connectors, according to Malcolm Gladwell, are people with a special gift for bringing others together, oftentimes people who would never have any chance of meeting each other. What makes someone a Connector? The first—and most obvious—criterion is that connectors know lots of people and run in lots of social circles. They are people who are willing to share their knowledge with others. These connectors should be highly valued and when appropriate, paid for their efforts.

Family and Community Assets: Perhaps the most underutilized assets in post-permanency, community-based systems are the gift and assets of parents themselves. Partnerships that design effective comprehensive strategies must know what assets are available and which are at their disposal. Assets include individuals, associations, institutions and their strengths and resources. The process of identifying assets and accessibility issues is known as



community mapping (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Community mapping involves collecting information from existing sources and conducting focus groups, community forums, interviews, and surveys. This source of mapping must take inventory of the skills and capacities of parents, informal community associations, and formal institutions.

Mapping does not need to be complicated or too formal, and can start with adoptive parents/guardians. None of the participants in the NRCA focus groups revealed community mapping that started with adoptive parents/guardians. Mapping from the perspective of individuals accomplishes two goals. It helps a partnership understand human strengths and needs. And, perhaps more importantly, it helps the individuals understand how to use his or her own assets to contribute to the community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

Information on individual assets should address skills, interests, and experiences. For example, an adoptive parent in Central Florida assisted with the development of a post-adoption resource manual, utilizing her experience as an adoptive parent, her skills as a social worker, and her interest in caring and sharing as part of her faith-based work. There are literally thousands of adoptive parents/guardians who have never been asked what type of skill or interest they have that can be supported or exploited. Adoptive parents/guardians have skill sets in finance, technology, marketing, web design, entrepreneurship, health care, special events, education, insurance, cooking, child care, advocacy, writing, and numerous other components that can be utilized in some capacity for the adoption community.

Additionally, adoptive parents/guardians are members of organizations such as school associations, faith-based institutions, service clubs, small businesses, corporations, service clubs, neighborhood associations, recreation groups, and other entities that may have abilities to support the development of post-permanency services. Such organizations are often more willing to support in this development if they know it can directly impact their own members. Adoptive parents/guardians, with appropriate guidance on message development, can be powerful speakers in sharing their challenges, and most importantly, their success stories.

“Associations, together with the capacities of individuals, are the basic community-building tools of local neighborhoods....[A]n effective process of regenerating local communities requires an organization that identifies and involves as many of the these associations as in creating and implementing a vision for the local community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).”

So where do the resources come from to harness all of these wonderful potential opportunities? By taking a community-based approach, leaders can, in turn, tap into resources designed for community building. AmeriCorps is one such resource. Funded by the federal government to create national service opportunities for citizens, AmeriCorps provides modest stipends to “volunteers” who are screened and placed in organizations that are either doing community service or community capacity-building, depending on the rules of the particular AmeriCorps program. Each state has a designated liaison that can provide technical assistance and planning to help place volunteers.

Capacity building, however, is rather broad. It can include everything from managing social media to planning events such as national adoption day activities. Designing processes for communication and tracking of assets and community scans can certainly qualify. For example, Devereux Florida has an AmeriCorps volunteer who assists on designing communications strategies such as the community adoption newsletter. Thinking about non-traditional approaches can also be helpful. Post-permanency service providers often access interns with a social work or clinical background. But a community-based approach opens up possibilities for interns in various fields. For example, the need for a marketing component or development of a speaker’s bureau could be provided by an intern in public relations or media.



Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation play a key role in developing a community based system of care. As with parent engagement, robust evaluation processes, particularly around the area of impact on the logic model, were something participants in the NRCA focus groups stated were lacking in their states. However, a number of backbone organizations were reporting on service outputs and outcomes and utilizing satisfaction surveys. The more mature post-permanency systems are collecting data on outputs, such as numbers of parent liaisons and mentors, types of trainings available to adoptive parents/guardians, and call and referral volume to hotlines.

Managing and designing evaluation systems can be time consuming and further challenged by the lack of integrated data management systems. But, evaluation of post-permanency programs can particularly impact the possibility of future funding as well as the realignment public funding. Monitoring and evaluation is a powerful tool that can answer the “so what” questions and respond to the growing demands for results. By focusing on outcomes, and not merely outputs, evaluation helps analyze why intended results were achieved and to identify the contributing factors.

Specifically, longer-term outcomes could include the following:

- Prevention of adoption disruptions/Increased family stability
- Increase in school stability and educational attainment of children
- Improved quality of life for adoptive families and youth (e.g., less behavioral problems, less familial stress, greater emotional security of youth).

Perhaps a significant reason for evaluation is the increased awareness for measuring Social Return on Investment (SROI) (Cabinet Office of the Third Sector, 2009). Measuring SROI is mainly determined by assessing the costs and benefits of a particular intervention against the costs and benefits of a counterfactual, or essentially the status quo. The more longitudinal the benefits are when compared to short-term costs, the greater the SROI.

Perhaps the power of measuring results is best summarized as follows (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992):

- If you do not measure results, you cannot tell success from failure
- If you cannot see success, you cannot reward it
- If you cannot reward success, you are probably rewarding failure
- If you cannot see success, you cannot learn from it
- If you cannot recognize failure, you cannot correct it
- If you can demonstrate results, you can win public support

From a post-permanency perspective, the cost of services and supports that are needed once an adoption/guardianship case has dissolved should be compared to the cost of services that are effective in preventing one such dissolution. Ultimately, evaluation and monitoring also provides for a powerful argument to help create additional funding opportunities for post-permanency services. It is not enough to simply implement post-permanency services because parents and adoptive children may need them. One must also examine the outcomes and impacts of such services and how critical they are to supporting the larger goals of a child welfare system.



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