



# Belonging 4 Ever: Creating Permanency for Youth in and from Care

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*The Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks (FBCYICN) is a youth-driven, provincial, non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of young people in and from government care between the ages of 14 and 24.*

“The hardest part I found about living in care is having to move from place to place, and having to deal with situations that bring me down to a lower standard. Having social workers, parents, teachers and group home staff telling you how to run your life is the main thing I found to be a pain. The way I try to cope with this problem is by talking to people I feel I have a connection with, and who understand or may have been in the same situations as I have been in. Sometimes, I keep these feelings and the frustrations inside and try not to blow.

Living in care presents several problems in my day-to-day life. To me, the hardest part is not having a “family”. By family, I do not mean people who are simply related by blood or marriage. To me, family is people who love and genuinely care about one another. Sometimes, I don’t feel like I have that.”

-Milly Bagnold,

[www.youthnewsletter.net/pdf/YICNewsletter2009.pdf](http://www.youthnewsletter.net/pdf/YICNewsletter2009.pdf)

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## Overview of the Project

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All children and youth have a right to a family and a place that feels like home. Protecting this right for young people in government care can take many different forms; the best situation varies from person to person. It depends on individual circumstances and desires as well as the ways in which the care system works and is supported. Because of this, an important discussion is taking place in British Columbia around defining what permanency means for each child and youth, what is being done to support family or family-like connections for children and youth in care, and how we can do better at protecting this right.

BC young people in care have repeatedly identified the violation of their right to family or permanency, however defined, as one of their top concerns. Because of this important concern — with financial support from the Victoria Foundation — the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks (FBCYICN) and First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition (First Call) collaborated in undertaking a project to:

- Review the research on what permanency means, including gathering thoughts from youth in/from care directly, and aim to create a common working definition of permanency for children and youth in BC;
- Gather current information on the experiences of youth in care in remaining connected to their families, or in finding family-like permanency; on current opportunities and resources available to young people to help them to keep or create family or family-like connections;

and on systemic (common) barriers to achieving this goal.

- Facilitate a formal discussion involving young people about the research findings and create suggestions for improvement and changes to BC's performance in protecting the right to permanency for children and youth in care.

This paper is a part of this project. It contains an overview of definitions of permanency; a discussion of why achieving permanency is important for children and youth in care; highlights opportunities, tools and best practices (the most effective ways of achieving a goal) in permanency planning, and barriers to following best practices. For more information, companion documents are also available and include a list of resources on the topic of permanency planning and a reference sheet on maintaining the sibling bond.

Focus groups held with current and former youth in care, foster parents and other child and youth care professionals inform parts of this report. Notes from these focus groups are available from FBCYICN. Other parts of the report come from a limited review of the professional and academic literature on permanency planning for children and youth in care.

It is our hope that you will use this report and the questions contained within it to further explore your understanding and practices related to permanency. We also hope this will prompt you to find more ways that you can help create permanency for BC's youth in and from care.

## Permanency: The British Columbia Context

Safety, permanency, and well-being are goals for all children and youth, especially for those in foster care. Helping children and youth leave foster care to live with legal, permanent families is an important way of achieving these goals. Additional new strategies focus on finding and strengthening other types of on-going connections to people, culture and community.

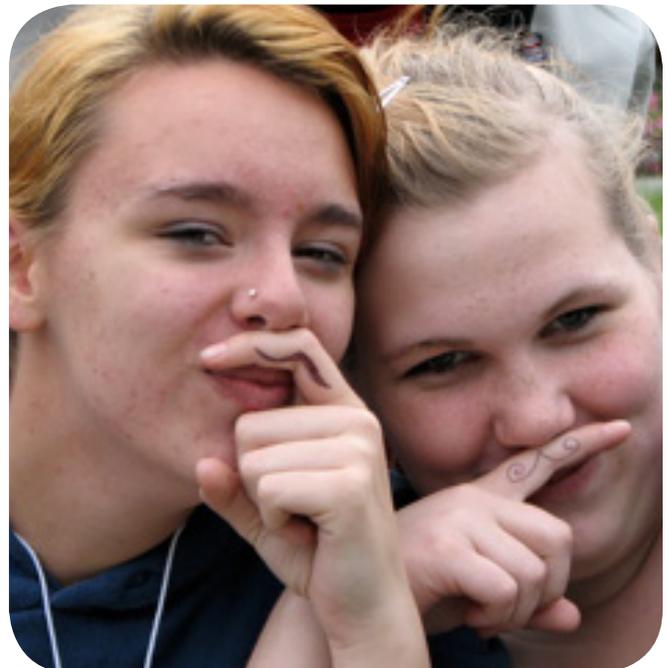
In BC, the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) are responsible for child protection or child welfare services. Guided by the Child, Family and Community Services Act, the Ministry is responsible for children in foster care, who range in age from young infants to youth of 18 years. Transition services are currently available to former youth in care who are 19 and older.

Children and youth taken into care come from a variety of cultural and religious backgrounds. As of September 2009, there were 8,677 children and youth in the Ministry's care, which is just less than one percent of all children and youth in British Columbia. Aboriginal children and youth continued to be over-represented among children in the Ministry's care, making up approximately 53 percent of the total, even though they constitute only eight percent of the total child and youth population in BC.<sup>1</sup>

Statistics also show that older youth in foster care have remained in care for a disproportionately long (more than others) time compared to younger children, and their chances for achieving permanency have decreased as they get older.

"People say kids my age are hard to place and that time is running out for me. Please don't give up on trying. I'm already having trouble holding on to my hope."

- Foster youth waiting for a family



<sup>1</sup> MCFD 2010/11-2012/13 Service Plan

# Creating a Common Definition of Permanency

When asked to define permanency, National Foster Youth Advisory Council (USA) members shared words such as “life-long connections, a crutch, or a person, place or thing that will remain constant.” After a long discussion, it was clear to everyone that there is no one definition for permanency. Permanency is unique to every young person in the foster care system.<sup>2</sup>

Permanency is different for everyone – One size does NOT fit all.

It is clear that one of the struggles related to permanency is the lack of a consistent definition of the term. A review of the research identifies three types of definitions – relational, legal and physical permanency.

## Relational Permanency:

Relational permanency involves creating strong, long-lasting connections “with a biological family member/siblings, school staff, foster parents, social workers, youth workers, community members, and organizations like Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks – anybody who gives you positive, unconditional commitment” (BC Youth Focus Group 2009).

## Legal Permanency:

Legal permanency has to do with where the responsibility of guardianship for a young person rests (i.e. parents, social worker, adoptive parent, etc.).

## Physical Permanency:

Physical permanency involves creating a safe, stable, healthy and lasting living arrangement.

The majority of youth identify relational permanency as the most important type one can achieve.<sup>3</sup> However, many of our programs and services focus mostly on legal or physical permanency. It is important to consider all the different definitions of permanency outlined above, but it is more important to find out directly from each young person what permanency means to them.

## Questions to ask:

1. Are there other aspects of (things about) permanency that are missing from these definitions?
2. How can we better support relational permanency for BC’s children and youth in care?
3. What needs to change to make sure each youth in care is supported to define what permanency means to them?

<sup>2</sup> CWLA, *Ensuring Permanency for Young People in the Foster Care System*

<sup>3</sup> Sanchez 2004; BC Youth Focus Group 2009

# Permanency is Important

Research is clear that stable, healthy and lasting relationships greatly improve the social, emotional and physical outcomes (what happens later in life) for children and youth in care. These relationships help to minimize the negative impact on young people from any failed attempts at reunification (moving back) with birth parents, unplanned multiple placements and drift in the care system.

## Permanency contributes to:

### Stability and Continuity

Barth points out evidence from child development experts that “multiple placements are a developmental hazard; children benefit from stability, consistent and uninterrupted parenting and suffer from the reverse.”<sup>4</sup> Placement stability is associated with positive life-outcomes in the transition to adulthood for young people leaving care.

### Cultural Identity Formation and Belonging

Developing one’s racial and ethnic identity is an important part of child and youth development, and children and youth need to have experiences that encourage a healthy sense of self and belonging to a community.<sup>5</sup> Aboriginal children in care may face certain challenges in the process of cultural identity formation (development). Children’s lack of knowledge or understanding about their Aboriginal heritage because of placement in non-Aboriginal care has links to poor outcomes

in later life.<sup>6</sup> This information suggests that racial, cultural and ethnic identity should be considered in all areas of permanency planning, which requires the involvement of family members and indigenous community child-protection agencies in planning.

### Supportive Relationships

Research shows that quality relationships with adults are important to all children and youth, however this is a particularly important issue for children and youth in care. Adolescents without supportive adult relationships are often anxious, isolated, and have trouble relating to others.<sup>7</sup> When young people experience a caring relationship with an adult they are more likely to do well in school, in other relationships and in overcoming adversity.

### Connectedness

In the report ‘Adolescent Health Survey II Fact Sheet’,<sup>8</sup> researchers found that connections to family, school, friends and community are important for good health. Connectedness means a sense of attachment to others; it is something to draw upon in times of stress or in reaction to difficult experiences or decisions. Connectedness contributes to resilience, which is the ability to cope with and overcome negative events or circumstances.

The research suggests that children and young people who do best in long-term foster care are those who have relational permanency—that is, ongoing contact and/or links with their families or family-like connections. In comparison, most

<sup>4</sup> Barth (1997)

<sup>5</sup> Harden 2004

<sup>6</sup> Cunneen & Libesman 2006

<sup>7</sup> Hair, Jager, & Garret, 2002

<sup>8</sup> McCreary (2008)

## Permanency is Important, cont'd

children and young people without ongoing involvement with their families don't do as well. Families can provide continuity, roots and identity for children and young people in care.<sup>9</sup>

### Questions to ask:

1. Is this research evidence about the importance of permanency reflected in MCFD child welfare policy? In practice? In budget priorities?
2. From your experience, which areas most urgently need to improve?
  - Stability of placement?
  - Maintaining cultural connections?
  - Securing supportive adult relationships?
  - Getting and staying connected to family? To school? To friends? To community (place)?



<sup>9</sup> Curtis, et al. 1999

# Permanency: Opportunities and Tools

There are various programs, projects, and tools used in BC and around the world that encourage permanency for children and youth in care. A number of these are highlighted below.

## Family Preservation and Reunification

Maintaining a child safely in the home with their birth family is still the first priority. For youth living at home, but at risk of removal due to their own behaviour and/or a parent's behaviour, family preservation services may provide support and resources to the children and the parents so that these young people can remain in their homes.

Reunification (moving back with birth families) can still be an option for youth who have been in care for years as the time may have allowed the family to address the issues that brought the youth into care. However, in cases where steps toward preservation and/or reunification have not been successful, youth who are aging out of care should be supported with other permanency options.<sup>10</sup>

## Concurrent Planning

Concurrent planning is intended to cut delays in finding permanent family placements for children in the foster care system. Typically, the primary plan is reunification with the child's family of origin (birth family). In concurrent planning, an alternative permanency goal, such as living with a relative, or a secure foster/adoption placement is pursued at the same time.<sup>11</sup> This minimizes the delay and drift for youth in care by speeding up their placement into permanent families.

"When a child is taken into care, immediately plan for two homes, one for immediate placement and one for long-term commitment."

- BC Permanency Project Youth Focus Group Participant - 2009



<sup>10</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway 2006

<sup>11</sup> Katz, 1994; Lutz, 2000. Child Welfare Information Gateway 2005

## Permanency: Opportunities and Tools, cont'd

### **Guardianship**

Legal guardianship may be an option for families to consider. Legal guardianship offers kin or other caring, committed adults an opportunity to take on responsibility for the child, without severing (ending) parental rights.

### **Kith and Kin Care: Aboriginal Children and Youth**

Kith and Kin or Kinship care is the full time care, nurturing and protection of children by relatives, members of their band, or any adult who has a kinship bond with a child or youth. This definition is designed to be relational, inclusive and respectful of cultural values and ties of affection. It allows a child/youth to grow to adulthood in a family environment.

A Kith and Kin arrangement is a written agreement between a social worker and a child's extended family member or other person known to the child, to care for and financially support the child's living arrangement. The child is not under government care and the parent remains the legal guardian. The parent agrees to this arrangement and is involved in the child's care plan.<sup>12</sup>

### **Custom Adoption: Aboriginal Children and Youth**

Custom adoption provides greater choice when considering permanency options for aboriginal children in continuing care. It enables (allows) Aboriginal families,

organizations and communities to use cultural values in creating a permanency plan for Aboriginal children.

Custom adoption refers to the cultural practices of Aboriginal peoples to raise a child, by a person who is not the child's parent, according to the custom of the First Nations and/or Aboriginal community of the child. Custom adoption is a permanent version of custom care (which provides temporary or alternate care for Aboriginal children whose parents are not able to care for them) and makes sure Aboriginal children maintain their cultural, language and spiritual identity.<sup>13</sup>

### **Child in Home of a Relative Program (CIHR)**

This program has offered financial support to extended family members who take on the care of a child relative. As of March 31, 2010, family members who took on the care of a child relative no longer have access to CIHR. All those who were currently in receipt of CIHR will be 'grandmothered' (continue) as needed until the youth age out at 19 years. The Ministry of Housing and Social Development will continue to deliver CIHR under existing regulations and policy as long as the file stays open.

### **Extended Family Program (EFP)**

As of April 1, 2010, MCFD introduced the new Extended Family Program (EFP). Under strict eligibility criteria (must have a particular situation), including an agreement by the parent(s), this program can offer

<sup>12</sup> MCFD Service Plan 2006/07-2008/09

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Children and Family Development BC

## Permanency: Opportunities and Tools, cont'd

supports to families when children are temporarily unable to live with their parents.

For eligible families, EFP is intended to offer access to services over and above the financial assistance provided by the previous Child in the Home of a Relative program, including:

- Individual assessment and long-term planning.
- Increased supports for children, parents and caregivers, such as counselling, respite and/or training.

As of April 1, 2010, all families requesting supports previously provided by the CIHR program may choose to access a range of other services, including EFP, depending on their individual circumstances and needs. If they are legal guardians of the child, they do not qualify for the new EFP and they will not be eligible for financial support.

### Adoption

Adoption options potentially available to children and youth include:

- Formalizing an existing foster care relationship into an adoption;
- Open Adoption: While adoption is a legally permanent family arrangement, some youth may resist it because they believe it requires severing (cutting off) relationships with their birth parents or siblings. Open adoptions allow for both a permanent legal family for the youth and continued connections with birth parents, siblings or other relatives.

Children between the ages of seven and 11 who are being considered for adoption must have their feelings about the adoption plan and any name change documented for the court. Children 12 and over must consent to the adoption and name change.

The Adoptive Families' Association of BC (AFABC) hosts a Teen Adoption Project, which focuses on educating social workers and youth in care about teen adoption possibilities, seeking out and recruiting potential adoptive parents and engaging youth in the project.

### Roots Reconnections

A program designed to reconnect Aboriginal children in care with their extended families. This program exists in various communities throughout BC. For more information, contact the Provincial Roots Analyst within MCFD.

### Coming Home Camps

These camps are for Aboriginal children in care and their families and/or caregivers, and provide opportunities for children to connect with their territorial lands, communities, culture and traditions. Each Delegated Agency plans and runs their Coming Home events and camps. Information about Coming Home Camps can be found by phoning the Delegated Agency in your region:

[http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/about\\_us/aboriginal/delegated/pdf/agency\\_list.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/about_us/aboriginal/delegated/pdf/agency_list.pdf)

## Permanency: Opportunities and Tools, cont'd

### Family Finders

This program's purpose is to create lifelong attachments between children and extended family or other important people in their lives. Social workers take on searching for and finding these relatives or important people and supporting the connection.

This program operates in different MCFD regions under somewhat different models, sometimes with a Ministry social worker assigned and sometimes through contracted non-profit programs. For example, the Wendy's Wonderful Kids program offered by the Adoptive Families Association of BC, which is currently available in the Vancouver Coastal and Fraser MCFD regions.

In the United States there is federal law requiring an intensive search for close and extended family members within the first month after a child enters foster care.

### Permanency Pact: Foster Club USA

The Foster Club, based in the US, has designed a Permanency Pact that is a pledge by a supportive adult to provide specific supports to a young person in foster care with a goal of establishing a lifelong, kin-like relationship.

### Family Group Conferencing

A family group conference (FGC), also known as family group decision-making (FGDM), is a meeting where the youth and their family make decisions together with input from everyone present. This meeting

creates an opportunity to assist the youth in sorting through issues and find out about supports in the community. This group will then help make a formal plan for their future that meets the needs of the youth and builds on family strengths. The proposed plan must be reviewed by the child welfare worker to ensure that it meets all the youth's needs.<sup>14</sup>

### Kinnections Youth Mentorship Program

Kinnections is a mentoring program focused on supporting youth aged 15 to 19 who are in long-term, continuing care, as they transition into adulthood and out of government care by establishing a supportive long-term connection with a volunteer mentor. As of April 2010, new matches will be supported for Aboriginal youth only.

### Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks

FBCYICN is a youth-driven, provincial, non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of young people in and from care in BC between the ages of 14 and 24. It provides programs and services that help young people come together (connect), get individual support and link with learning opportunities (empower), and unite their voices to create positive change in the system (advocate). Young people in care created FBCYICN in 1993.

<sup>14</sup> Adapted from 'Family Group Conferencing For Youth', MCFD, BC.

## Permanency: Opportunities and Tools, cont'd

### Ministry of Children and Family Development Service Standards

The purpose of the BC Child and Family Development Service Standards are to promote consistent high-quality service for vulnerable children, youth and families while allowing flexibility in the way services are provided to meet the unique needs of communities. The standards apply to anyone providing service under the Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA).

British Columbia's Ministry of Children and Family Development Service Standards use the phrase "stability and continuity of lifelong relationships" instead of permanency. Their definition reads: "continued or new relationships with family and significant people, including extended family and community connections. This includes relationships with parents, siblings, extended family, friends, caregivers and others with a connection to the child through family, culture, faith, identity or community."<sup>15</sup>

MCFD services should promote stability and continuity of lifelong relationships by:

- promoting and facilitating regular ongoing contact with those important to the child,
- maintaining or where required, developing enduring and stable living arrangements for the child as quickly as possible,
- minimizing disruption of caregivers or care providers, and
- fitting services to meet the child's age, developmental level and sense of time.



<sup>15</sup> MCFD Service Standards, 2008

## Permanency: Opportunities and Tools, cont'd

### Some of the key Child and Family Service Standards related to permanency are:

**Standard 2:** Children and Families from Aboriginal Communities

**Standard 6:** Promoting and Maintaining Continuity of Lifelong Relationships

**Standard 8:** Informal Kinship Care

**Standard 20:** Placements When a Child Comes into Care

### Some of the key Children in Care Service Standards related to permanency are:

**Standard 1:** Preserving the Identity of an Aboriginal Child in Care

**Standard 2:** Providing Services that Respect a Child's Culture and Identity

**Standard 9:** Developing and Maintaining a Meaningful Relationship with a Child in Care

**Standard 10:** Meeting a Child's Need for Stability and Continuity of Lifelong Relationships

**Standard 12:** Supporting and Assisting a Child with a Change in Placement

### Ministry of Children and Family Development – Service Transformation

The Ministry intends to transform planning for children in care. They acknowledge that little emphasis has been placed on permanency planning, and children and youth in care have drifted until the age of majority. They want to transform child welfare practice to “promote family stability and continuity or to provide children with life plans involving alternative guardianship options that offer family stability and opportunities for lifelong relationships.”<sup>16</sup>

### Questions to ask:

1. Why are some programs that support permanency offered only as pilot projects, or only in certain geographical areas? How can these be extended as options for all children and youth in care?
2. How are children and youth in care told about these various programs and opportunities?
3. Is MCFD meeting its own service standards related to permanency? If not, what can be done about this?

<sup>16</sup> MCFD, *Director's Case Practice Audit Report – Vancouver Coastal Region, 2008*

## Promising Principles and Practices

In the Permanence for Young People Framework, seven principles (defining goals) express the overarching (overall) values that should guide all policies, programs, practices, services and supports for young people:<sup>17</sup>

- 1. Recognize that every young person is entitled to a permanent family relationship.** Demonstrate that the agency is committed to achieving that goal and include multiple systems and the community at large in the effort to identify and support such relationships.
- 2. Are driven by the young people themselves,** together with their families and the agency in all decision-making and planning for their futures, recognizing that young people are the best source of information about their own strengths and needs.
- 3. Acknowledge that permanence includes: a stable, healthy and lasting living situation** within the context of a family relationship with at least one committed adult; reliable, continuous and healthy connections with siblings, birth parents, extended family and a network of other significant adults; and education and/or employment, life skills, supports and services.
- 4. Begin at first placement.** Work to achieve permanency through reunification with the young person's birth family must begin as soon as the young person is placed, while concurrently (at the same time) engaging in contingency planning (other options) with family involvement regarding the range of permanency options that can ensure stability and continuity of relationships if continued out-of-home placement is needed.
- 5. Honour the cultural, racial, ethnic, linguistic (language), and religious/spiritual backgrounds of young people** and their families and respect differences in sexual orientation and sexual identity.
- 6. Recognize and build upon the strengths and resilience (ability to heal and change) of young people,** their parents, their families, and other significant adults.
- 7. Ensure that services and supports are provided in ways that are fair, responsive (respond quickly), and accountable (answer to) to young people** and their families, and do not stigmatize them (assume negative things about them), their families or their caregivers.

“Involve and inform a child in care to the greatest extent possible in all case planning and decision-making, according to the child's developmental level and taking into account his or her views”.

BC Ministry of Child and Family  
Development CIC Service Standard 8

<sup>17</sup> National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning 2004

## Promising Principles and Practices, cont'd

A few other promising practices that promote permanency have also been identified:

- 8. Make every effort to keep siblings together.** Recognize the importance of the sibling bond as it is the longest lasting relationship most people ever have. Studies have shown that foster children have an easier time transitioning when they have the emotional support of their siblings. Good reasons must be provided for failure to place siblings together.<sup>18</sup> (See companion document [Maintaining the Sibling Bond](#) for more information.)
  
- 9. Recognize youth have their own rights and ensure that these rights are being protected.** Youth in care have the right to be consulted (asked about their preferences) and to express their views, according to their ability, about important decisions that affect them. They also have a right to live in a caring, secure, nurturing environment.



### Questions to ask:

1. What are some examples of where or when you have seen some of these principles or good practices put into action?
  
2. What are some examples of these principles being violated or ignored?

<sup>18</sup> *Child Welfare Information Gateway, Sibling Groups*

## Barriers to Permanency

The report 'Enhancing Permanency for Older Youth in Out-Of-Home Care'<sup>19</sup>, identifies the following as barriers (things that get in the way) to permanency:

- 1. Policies and attitudes that may not reflect an emphasis on permanency.** Workers in programs for older youth may resist spending time and money on establishing permanency for this group who they might consider 'unadoptable.'
- 2. Case planning may be inadequate for permanency.** The use of sequential planning (going through certain steps) can slow the permanency process. When an agency waits until parental rights have terminated (ended) before considering alternative permanency planning, the permanent family connection for the youth is delayed.
- 3. Not enough families recruited to foster and adopt youth and sibling groups.** There needs to be a greater emphasis on identifying and recruiting families who are willing to provide homes for teens and to find homes open to sibling groups.
- 4. Potential resistance by youth to permanency planning.** Youth may show resistance to permanency planning that involves termination of their birth parents' rights because they still feel emotional ties to their families. They may fear starting a new relationship with a family because of past disappointments. Youth may not fully understand the long-term consequences of not having a permanent family to turn to as a young adult.

Other barriers include the following:

- 5. Social workers change often.** This is a key relationship for many youth in care yet young people can experience multiple changes in their social worker.
- 6. Behavioural issues and special needs may make children/youth more difficult to place.** These young people need support, understanding and guidance to overcome these issues.

"Expect me to do or say some really crazy things, just to see if you can handle it. How do I feel safe until I know there's nothing I can do to make you leave me? I will test you. I am an expert at testing people. I desperately want you to pass. But I expect you to fail."

- Foster teen waiting for a family

- 7. Lack of stable, sufficient funding for programs and services for youth in care.** As a result, programs are started but not sustained (kept going), creating further disruption in a young person's life. As well, these programs and services are not always accessible to all young people and may only service a particular region or community.

<sup>19</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2006

## Barriers to Permanency, cont'd

Finally, the learning from programs with demonstrated success are lost when they are cancelled.

“Provide sustainable funding for services such as Family Finders, Roots, Kith/Kin, and Child in Home of a Relative. These MCFD funded services are inconsistently provided across the province.”

“Ensure long-term sustainable funding for programs and services that address the needs of youth.”

– First Call BC Youth Forum Participants 2009

**8. Sexual orientation.** Youth in foster care who are lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, inter-sex, two-spirited or queer are less likely to find a permanent home than children who are not. “One of the issues that affects youth in the system who are sexual or gender minorities is not enough focus on permanency. Child welfare workers often give up on the idea that these youth will find a family that’s excited to have them.”<sup>20</sup>

**9. The court process may slow or frustrate efforts towards permanency.**

Efforts to provide permanency can be held back by court processes that are slow or by judges who are reluctant to terminate (end) parental rights. Another barrier may be the lack of a good working relationship between child welfare workers and the courts.

**10. The lack of family supports prior to and during family interventions.**

In the 2009 report Hands Tied,<sup>21</sup> many BC social workers discussed not having the time to assess family needs and not having enough time and resources to find appropriate alternatives to placement in foster care, as well as to provide counselling and other necessary services.

“Better support is needed for families prior to children being taken into care”

– BC Permanency Project Youth Focus Group Participant 2009

<sup>20</sup> National Centre for Lesbian Rights 2009

<sup>21</sup> Pivot 2009

## Barriers to Permanency, cont'd

**11. Caseloads are too big**, which can affect a social worker's ability to explore a young person's permanency options and involve them in the planning process.

"Increase number of social workers in order to reduce caseloads and give more time to youth issues and concerns."

- BC Permanency Project Youth Focus Group Participant 2009

**12. Need more training for adoptive parents.** It is critical (important) for adoptive parents of children in care to receive ongoing support, counselling, training about potential care issues (such as Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Attention Deficit Disorder & Hyperactivity, learning disabilities, attachment disorders, developmental delays, etc.) and respite, if needed, just as foster families receive such supports in caring for the same children prior to adoption.<sup>22</sup>

### Questions to ask:

1. Which of these barriers have you experienced?
2. How can these barriers be addressed by making changes to policy? To practice? To resource allocation?

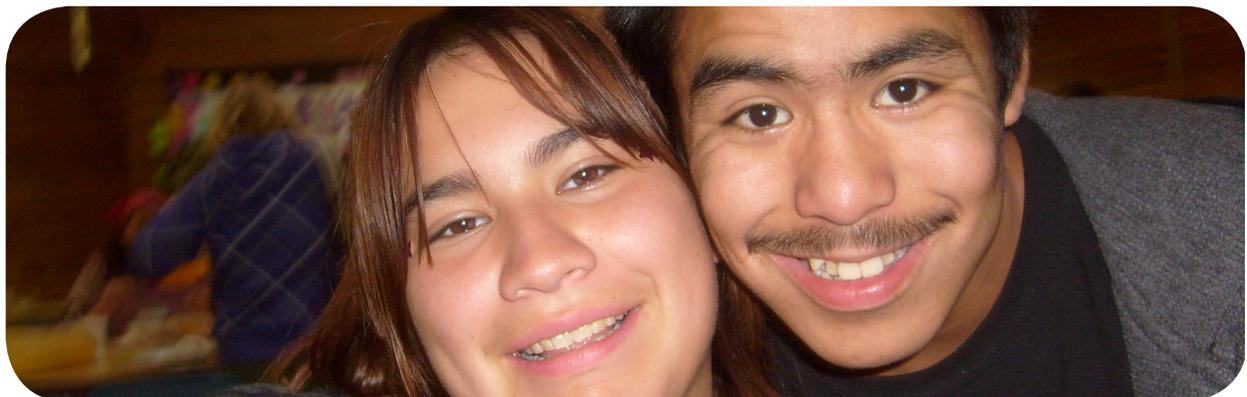


<sup>22</sup> Ross 2001

## Conclusion

There is a growing understanding about the importance of permanency among social work practitioners and policy makers. This growing understanding is informed by studies of the current practices and the outcomes for children and youth in care. It is also informed by the voices of young people in and from care who are becoming more aware of their rights and speaking up about their experiences.

This report is intended to encourage dialogue (discussions) that will help BC's child protection system focus more on what permanency means to each child or youth in care, and the importance of supporting them in making and keeping the connections that give them a sense of identity, family and belonging. Any steps to better support permanency options and address existing barriers through improved policy, practice, and resource allocation, will greatly enhance the well-being of these most vulnerable children and youth in our care.



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