



Oklahoma's Link to Permanency



A Publication of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services



Making the Connection:

**A special message from the
Permanency Planning Program Team**

The path towards permanency for our children, families and staff can be a long and winding road. As we seek to implement the Pinnacle Plan, Practice Model, Practice Standards, improve outcomes, increase family engagement and develop a trauma informed child welfare system it's easy for both our staff and families to feel overwhelmed.

In these exciting times of change it is important to keep the vision of permanency, safety and well-being in the forefront of our minds and hearts. We are committed to achieving positive outcomes for our children, our families, our communities and our state.

The permanency roundtables are one of many tools that will help us get where we want to go. They are the perfect forum for sharing ideas, strengthening relationships, breaking down barriers and infusing the practice standards into our everyday work.

The permanency planning team would like to thank everyone for their continued support and participation in the roundtable process. We acknowledge that implementing a new initiative is difficult, especially during times of change. We appreciate your dedication, hard work and continued commitment to achieving permanency, safety and well-being for the children and families we serve. As a result of your diligence hundreds of children have achieved permanency. Found a forever home. Increased their connections to kin, culture and community.

Thank You,

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Oklahoma Pinnacle Point 4:

**We must use the
practice model
to achieve timely
and appropriate
permanency outcomes
for all children in
out-of-home care.**



PRT Success Stories

Reinstatement of parental rights

Quinten and Terrel entered care at the ages of 5 and 4 the first time they were removed from their parents' home. They were brought into custody due to allegations of physical abuse, lack of supervision and inadequate housing. They were reunified with their parents for a year in 2000 but were picked up again in 2001 for the same allegations. Their parents tried to work their treatment plan but were not able to make the changes necessary at the time to get the boys home and lost their parental rights in 2003.

The brothers had several worker changes and placement changes during their ten years in out of home care. Adoption attempts were unsuccessful but they remained hopeful that they would someday find a forever home. Quinten and Terrel told their DHS worker frequently that they dreamed of going home to their biological family.

On April 7, 2011 the brother's case was selected for participation in the roundtable initiative. During the PRT the team stayed focused on creating a realistic action plan that would provide the brothers with the permanency they desired. The team implemented the practice standard "we listen to the voice of children" and decided to try what had been tried before and developed a plan to reunite the boys with their biological father. Recent changes in legislation allowed for the reinstatement of parental rights if it was deemed to be in the child's best interest.

Over the next few months the case worker engaged the boys in planning for their future and the brothers were placed with their father in June 2011. The case was monitored for six months and closed in December 2011.

Adoption at last

Sixteen year old Latoya and her five siblings were placed into their first foster homes in November 1998. Their parents engaged in services for two years in attempts to get their children home but were unable to make the changes necessary and lost their parental rights in 2000.

Latoya spent the next 11 years in foster care. She saw all of her siblings either adopted or aged out. She went through 15 different placements before she found her forever home. Latoya had made up her mind that she didn't want to be adopted. She didn't believe there was a home out there for her.

In the summer of 2011 Latoya's case was selected to be part of the roundtable initiative. A team of social work professionals met and focused on finding adult connections and potentially permanency, and developed a realistic action plan with Latoya's needs at center.

After the PRT the worker tried something that had been tried before and engaged Latoya in planning for her future. After several discussions centered around her future and the benefits of adoption Latoya decided maybe it was something she wanted after all. Latoya's caseworker then tried something that had never been tried before and engaged Latoya's foster family in conversations about adoption. Two months after the roundtable Latoya and her foster family were headed down a permanent path towards adoption.

Latoya is no longer in OKDHS custody and she has the safe, loving, stable home she had never dared to dream of.

The Permanency Roundtable Initiative

In spring 2011 the OKDHS Practice Standards and Casey Family Programs Permanency Roundtables process collided in a synergetic initiative providing the opportunity for many of our children to achieve permanency. Permanence. A forever home. Connection. Roots.

PRT Rounds Completed to Date:

Round I: (Spring 2011) 100 children in out of home care the longest with the goal of adoption

Round II: (Summer/Fall 2011) Children who have been in out of home care for 36 months or longer with goal of return to own home

Round III: (Spring/Summer 2012) Children who have been in therapeutic foster care one year or longer

Upcoming PRTs:

Round IV: (Winter/Spring 2013) Children ages 16 and older who are in permanent custody with no identified permanent placement

PRT Initial Outcomes:

The 18 month outcomes review data from round one shows that 53 percent of the children roundtabled have achieved permanency or are currently in trial adoption status. An additional 7 percent are in a permanent placement that is anticipated to result in permanency within the next 3 months. 13 percent have had their goal changed to more accurately reflect the case's current status.

The 12 month outcomes review data from round II shows that 49 per cent of the children roundtabled from round II have achieved permanency or are currently in trial adoption status, 26 percent of the children have achieved permanency through reunification and another 22 percent have achieved permanency through adoption.

What staff are saying about the Permanency Roundtables:

"I felt very supported with so many important people meeting to help me with my case, I left feeling hopeful that we would see positive outcomes" Child Welfare Specialist Region 3.

"It was nice to get new perspectives on a case that I had been working with for years, sometimes you get focused in on the specifics and it gets harder to be creative" Child Welfare Specialist Region 4.

"The PRT was a positive experience. At first I was nervous but everyone was so positive and supportive, I wish I could have a PRT on every case" Child Welfare Specialist Region 2.

Practice Spotlight

One of the benefits of the permanency roundtables is the provision of a "real life learning lab" in which policy and procedure meet to inform practice. A common task on the action plan is to have a Family Team Meeting to seek input, guidance and decision making from the people who are connected to the child. Typically, caseworkers utilize service resources (counseling, therapeutic foster care, group home services and other service providers) to meet the needs of children in care. The child's family and supports offer services that differ from those of service providers. They offer permanent connections, long-term support, unconditional love and an expertise in the history of the child/family that is rooted in their experiences rather than a historical recollection provided by individuals inside the support family. This expertise is sought out through the PRT team to drive the case towards permanency for the child and to help the agency engage in the practice standard **We believe in the Value of Nothing About Us Without Us.**

Family Team Meetings in Action

We Actively and Continuously Seek to Learn Who Families Are and What They Need

Sally turns 18 in a few short months. She is inpatient and has needs that cannot be addressed outside of an inpatient setting with little to no family support.

Prior to the PRT, the caseworker, inpatient staff and Sally were all concerned about what would happen on her 18th birthday. They feared that Sally would be given a plastic bag full of her belongings and would have no other option than turning to the street. The other alternative would have been living with her 19-year-old sister who wasn't prepared to meet Sally's needs. A PRT was held that included DDS staff, a liaison from the inpatient facility, the PRT core team, the PP worker and supervisor. The team discussed many options for this youth. However, these options needed a missing element to work. They needed the support of the youth's family.

An FTM was suggested as part of the action plan. The resulting meeting included experts from the inpatient facility, DDS staff, PP Program staff, Suzy (Sally's sister), Denise (Sally's church grandmother), Sally and the OKDHS PP worker. Throughout the meeting, Suzy and Denise were shocked to hear what needs Sally had. Due to confidentiality, Denise and Suzy were not privy to the specifics of Sally's needs. These needs were more severe than either had anticipated.

The OKDHS worker was able to communicate that Sally needed someone to make medical, placement and financial decisions for her for the rest of her life. They asked the family to assist in identifying who that person could be. Denise and Suzy realized that together they were that "someone." This was a life changing decision that they needed time to process.

We Maintain a Child's Permanent Connection to their Kin, Culture and Community

Sally turns to Denise for support and guidance. Denise cares about Sally and remained connected to her even as she moved to different inpatient facilities. Denise fears for needs that were not identified by OKDHS such as Sally's mother coming back into the picture to take Sally's SSI money from her. Denise also is aware that Suzy is eager to help her sister; however she is trying to go to school and begin her life. Denise is a spunky older lady with pep and energy right now. She understands that Sally needs someone all her life and that Suzy will eventually need to be Sally's guardian due to her age.

Denise had a difficult decision to make as she realized Sally needed someone to protect her, make decisions for her and ensure she was getting the care she needed. As Sally's 18th birthday approached, Denise made the decision to be her legal guardian into adulthood. Suzy agreed to be Sally's guardian in the event that Denise was no longer able to fulfill those duties.

Sally will not be going to the street with a plastic bag, but rather to an adult group home for people with mental health needs. She will have the continued, permanent support, connections and guidance from her grandmother and sister.



S12078 OKDHS

Issued 2-13

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