

CASEY FAMILY SERVICES

The direct services agency of the Annie E. Casey Foundation

for every kid,
a forever
family





Everyone is born into a family.

But sadly, many children who spend years in foster care lose touch with their families. Too often, they spend their entire childhood waiting to belong. In spite of the dedicated efforts of child welfare professionals, every year nearly 30,000 young people age out of foster care without the safety net of parents and extended family to help them stay in school, find jobs and guide them along the path to becoming successful adults.

CASEY FAMILY SERVICES, the direct services agency of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is finding forever families for kids in foster care with a new practice approach called Lifelong Families.

Lifelong Families is rooted in the firm conviction that every young person—whatever their age or circumstance—deserves a forever family and can be prepared to live successfully in a family environment. It is a process of restoring relationships, rebuilding and creating families. It provides a bridge of healing that helps young people from foster care re-establish relationships that may have been lost to them and build new relationships to fill in the gaps.

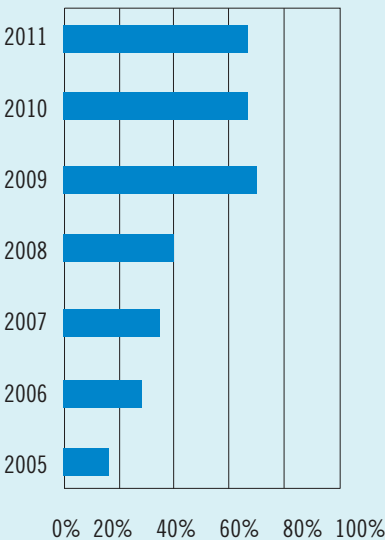
Designed especially for success with older youth in treatment foster care, Lifelong Families brings people together to work as a team toward the shared purpose of ensuring that a young person leaves foster care to join a permanent, legal family. This approach helps prepare and support a youth and parents as they build a successful, lifelong relationship. Whenever safe and possible, youth are reunited with their birth parents; when this is not possible, Lifelong Families helps young people develop lasting connections to adoptive parents, siblings and other significant people in their lives.

At every step along the path to a permanent family, the youth’s participation is central to planning and decision making, alongside parents, family members, professionals and other caring adults who share a commitment to that child’s well-being.

Of Kids Entering Casey Foster Care:

- 65% had more than three prior placements
- 70% had a history of intensive treatment (institutionalized care)
- 50% had multiple psychiatric diagnoses
- 45% had Individualized Education Plans

Youth in Casey Foster Care Who Achieved Permanent Families through Reunification, Legal Guardianship, or Adoption within 18 Months or Less



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How do you know it works?**

Lifelong Families, developed and tested by Casey Family Services, shows positive results. More young people are exiting Casey foster care to lifelong families and kids are spending less time in care.

- **How is this different from what we do now?**

Lifelong Families places the child or youth at the center of a team convened to guide that young person to a legal family. Unlike other teaming models that are focused on single issues, decision points or events, this approach places the child's need for a family at the center to ensure that children spend less time in foster care and stay out of the system in the future.

- **How will this impact a social worker's job?**

This approach presents a shift in how social workers do their jobs. Lifelong Families uses many of the skills and strengths social workers already employ and offers a goal-oriented process of finding a family for every child, backed by a whole team of people dedicated to making that a reality. Many workers say they find relief and support in the collaborative decision making.

- **Is this approach more expensive?**

No, the cost per child is comparable to other practice approaches, yet it secures permanent families more quickly and youth spend less time in care, saving the state money.

- **Does this practice mean more work?**

At the beginning, additional time is invested to build the team, but this pays off in the end as the team shifts responsibility from the agency to the parents and family network.

This has been a great experience because of your willingness to do the [team] work. We know that the more contact between the [birth] parents and the foster parents, the more the barriers break down, and they can see each other as people. And that helps everyone to focus on the child—not on their own role or limitations.

— State worker who was part of a

CASEY PERMANENCY TEAM

5.6:

median number of years
spent in Casey foster
care prior to Lifelong
Families, compared to

1.0:

year using Lifelong
Families approach

*The model incorporates proven
best practices and Casey's own
experience to provide a compre-
hensive approach that ensures
that a youth leaves foster care to
live in a lifelong family.*

— Project Director, CASEY FAMILY SERVICES



Daniel's story

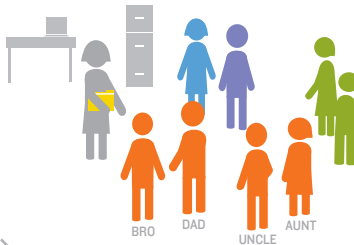
KEY ● Daniel ● Social Worker ● Foster Parents ● Friends, Family Members ● Therapist ● Coach



1 Youth Enters Treatment Foster Care
Daniel, a 15-year-old youth in treatment foster care, is referred to Casey. Losing contact with his family has left holes in Daniel's heart.

2 Social Worker Connects with Youth

The social worker makes sure Daniel has a safe, stable foster family placement. She meets with Daniel to explain her role in making sure Daniel is in foster care just long enough to find out who can safely parent him—forever. She spends time talking to him about who is and has been important in his life and what are his hopes and dreams for a family and the future.

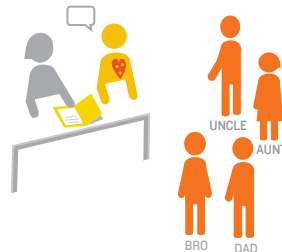


3 Permanency Team Is Formed

The social worker uses all available means to contact the people Daniel says are important in his life, as well as relatives who may have lost touch with him. She contacts these prospective Permanency Team members and also includes the state worker, a therapist and Daniel's attorney on the team. She advocates and provides for all therapeutic services necessary to address Daniel's mental health needs.

4 Case Is Managed with Focus on Permanency

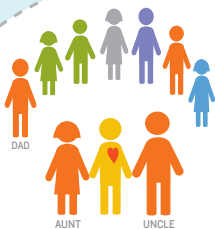
With support and guidance from the social worker and team, Daniel begins to sort out the events of his life, and understand why he is in foster care and what it will take to get him back to family. He begins to reconnect with his birth dad and other relatives.



5 Team Develops Permanency Plan

Daniel's Permanency Team meets every few weeks to develop two concurrent permanency plans. Daniel's dad is not able to parent him full time, although the two wish to stay connected. The team's Plan A is legal guardianship with Daniel's aunt and uncle. Plan B is adoption by another family.

The social worker ensures that the momentum toward a lifelong family for Daniel never slows.



6 Youth and Family Are Prepared

Daniel's aunt and uncle want to be his permanent family. The social worker and the Permanency Team will help prepare Daniel for family living, and prepare his aunt and uncle to parent safely and sustain their commitment to Daniel—unconditionally and always.



7 Youth Has a Lifelong Family and Permanency Support

Daniel's aunt and uncle become his legal guardians. Daniel and his aunt and uncle continue to stay connected to his birth father, siblings and other family members. With the help of the social worker and the Permanency Team, Daniel and his family have identified community supports to continue strengthening the family into the future.



COMPONENTS OF THE MODEL

Permanency Teaming In this key component of the Lifelong Families model, the social worker assembles a team of people who work together on behalf of a young person in foster care. The youth is always at the center of Permanency Teaming, which engages birth parents, relatives, foster parents, caregivers and other significant adults and professionals, including the public agency social worker. Together, this team develops and implements a plan for the youth's safety and lifelong family membership.

Permanency-Focused Case Management All of the youth's placement and mental health needs are addressed, while the momentum to find a permanent family never slows. This kind of case management uses proven treatments to help heal the youth's trauma and offers positive parenting approaches to the family.

Permanent Family Identification and Engagement The social worker uses every available resource—including case mining, internet search technologies, phone and in-person networking—to research and locate birth parents and other family members to safely reunify or reconnect the youth. For those young people who cannot be reunified with their birth families, other adults are identified who can adopt the youth.

Permanency Preparation The youth is prepared for family living and the parents are prepared to safely parent and sustain a lifetime commitment to the child/youth. The team also develops a back-up permanency plan to ensure that the child leaves foster care to join a lifelong family.

Permanency Support Planning The team works with the family to determine the types of ongoing services and supports needed to help sustain a lifelong family relationship, after the relationship is legalized.

500:

The number of
kids in treatment
foster care who
have gained
permanent
families since
Casey adopted
Lifelong Families
in 2005.

Casey Family Services was the direct services agency of the Annie E. Casey Foundation for more than 36 years, providing innovative child welfare practice models such as Lifelong Families throughout New England and in Baltimore, Maryland. For more information about the Lifelong Families model for foster care reform, visit www.aecf.org/lifelongfamilies.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21202
410.547.6600
www.aecf.org