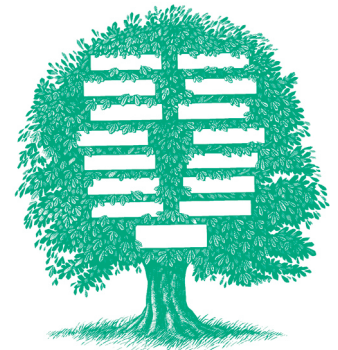


## Family Permanence



*It's About Family*

### Key Definitions

The Annie E. Casey Foundation defines **family permanence** as an enduring family relationship that:

- “Is safe and meant to last a lifetime;
- Offers legal rights and social status of full family membership;
- Provides physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and spiritual well-being;
- Assures lifelong connections to extended family, siblings, and other significant adults; and
- Promotes an understanding about a family’s racial and ethnic heritage and traditions.”<sup>1</sup>

**Out-of-home care** refers to “the placements and services provided to children and families when children must be removed from their homes because of child safety concerns, as a result of serious parent-child conflict, or to treat serious physical or behavioral health conditions which cannot be addressed within the family.” Courts and law enforcement are the only entities that can remove a child. Children are placed in relatives’ homes, family foster homes, treatment foster homes, or group or residential care.<sup>4</sup>

**Family Group Decision Making** – The Village Family Service Center, through a Bush Foundation grant with the ND Department of Human Services, has launched Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) services in North Dakota. FGDM is a “strength-based, decision-making process that brings together family members, friends, service providers, and others to create a care and protection plan for the permanency and reunification of children.” This new “family” creates a plan to address the children’s particular needs and situation.<sup>5</sup>

The Annie E. Casey Foundation believes that “a strong family is the best predictor of any child’s long-term success and the key to helping every child become a secure, thriving adult.” When the fabric of a family unravels (e.g., illness, poverty, addictions, violence, physical or sexual abuse, child neglect, mental health issues), child protective services may intervene and remove children from a situation to shield them from harm.<sup>1</sup>

Protecting children in these situations often comes at a high cost to them: physical relocation, confusion, isolation, trauma, fear, guilt, and grief. The children lose family, friends, relatives, and support people (e.g. teachers, coaches, pastors, neighbors) who have been a positive influence on them. The uncertainty of when and if they will ever return home to their families and having to adjust to new foster parents and a new home creates anxiety.<sup>1</sup>

Research shows that rates of developmental delay are higher among children in foster care compared to children who are not.<sup>2</sup> Research also shows that “kids who spend extensive time in foster care fare poorly on virtually every predictor of making a successful transition to adulthood when they exit the system without a permanent family.”<sup>1</sup>

North Dakota Adults Adopting Special Kids (AASK) Director Leanne Johnson noted that when an adoption worker told a seven-year-old foster child that she had been adopted by her foster care parents, the young girl replied, “I’m real!” According to Johnson, “Permanency for children in foster care means helping children find the family with whom they can live and be connected for their whole life, even after age 18. Preferably, children can be reunified with their birth families for this permanence. However, when this isn’t possible, adoption can be a life-giving option.”

The North Dakota Department of Human Services Children and Family Services Division and its partners (see box below) work to reduce the length of time young people stay in foster care, reduce the number of times they are removed and placed, and help them be part of permanent families and communities.

### North Dakota Resources for Family Permanence (Foster Care and Adoption) include:<sup>3</sup>

- County Social Services
- Regional Human Service Centers
- Youthworks
- Therapeutic Foster Care Services
- Licensed Residential Facilities
- Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTF)
- Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Program (Lutheran Social Services)
- Adults Adopting Special Kids Program (AASK) (Catholic Charities North Dakota and PATH North Dakota, Inc.)

## Foster Care in North Dakota

- 2,152 children were in foster care in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2007, down from 2,209 children in FFY 2006 and 2,314 in FFY 2005.<sup>7</sup>
- 60% of children in foster care in FFY 2006 were placed in family home settings throughout the state (26% with relatives and 34% with licensed non-relatives).<sup>8,7</sup>
- American Indian children comprised 7% of all North Dakota children but 26% of children in foster care in 2006.<sup>9</sup>
- 30% of children in foster care were ages 15 to 17 in FFY 2006.<sup>9</sup>
- 20% of child removals in FFY 2006 involved parental drug use, up from 6% in FFY 2000 (see Figure 1).<sup>7</sup>
- 786 children exited foster care in FFY 2006: 51% were returned to their parents, 23% transferred to another agency, 12% were adopted, 7% aged out of the system, 5% left to live with relatives, and 2% left for other reasons.<sup>9</sup>
- The “permanency goal” was reunification with parents for 53% of children in foster care in FFY 2006; 68% of these children attained that goal.<sup>9</sup>
- Of 111 finalized adoptions in FFY 2006, 85% involved foster parents.<sup>10</sup>

### Resources:

1. KIDS COUNT, 2007 Essay and Data Brief. [www.kidscount.org/datacenter/databook.jsp](http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter/databook.jsp)
2. “Developmental Services for Young Children in Foster Care.” [cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/articles.cfm](http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/articles.cfm)
3. NDDHS Children & Family Services. [www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/](http://www.nd.gov/dhs/services/childfamily/)
4. Child Welfare Information Gateway. “Out-of-Home Care Overview.” [www.childwelfare.gov/outofhome/overview.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/outofhome/overview.cfm)
5. The Village Family Service Center. [www.thevillagefamily.org/programs/fgdm.html](http://www.thevillagefamily.org/programs/fgdm.html)
6. KIDS COUNT, 2007 Data Book Press Release. [www.kidscount.org/datacenter/db\\_press.jsp](http://www.kidscount.org/datacenter/db_press.jsp)
7. AFCARS data from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
8. 2007 North Dakota KIDS COUNT *Fact Book and Overview*. [www.ndkidscount.org](http://www.ndkidscount.org)
9. *FFY 2005/2006 Children and Family Services Statistical Bulletin*. [www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/family.html](http://www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/family.html)
10. “2006 Child Welfare Data Snapshot.” [www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/family.html](http://www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/family.html)

## Family Permanence, continued

### National Fast Facts<sup>1</sup>

- 48% of teenagers who entered care in 2005 were placed in a congregate care setting.
- 62% of children under age 1 placed in 2000 were in foster care for more than a year.
- 15% of children who left foster care in 2004 reentered within a year.
- See left sidebar for facts about foster care in North Dakota.

*“Rather than a final destination for children, foster care should instead be viewed as a temporary placement that can serve as a bridge to permanence.”<sup>1</sup>*

### Expectations for Child Welfare

The expectations we carry for our own families should be the norm for how child welfare systems operate across the nation.<sup>6</sup> A commitment to improving child welfare systems and helping children find permanence should include:<sup>1</sup>

- **Strengthening and preserving existing families** of children in at-risk families because removal should be the last option.
- Viewing placement as a way of **moving toward a strong lasting family** by keeping siblings together, ensuring a family (not institutional) setting, recruiting family members or other adults who already care about the children, and keeping children in their own neighborhoods and schools.
- **Ensuring brief foster care stays** by “identifying and supporting safe, permanent families through reunification, legal guardianship, or adoption.” Children should never age out of foster care without a permanent family connection.
- **Providing families with supports and services that will help them succeed** such as counseling, education, financial help, and respite care.
- **Paying attention to the most vulnerable children** including children of color and older youth.

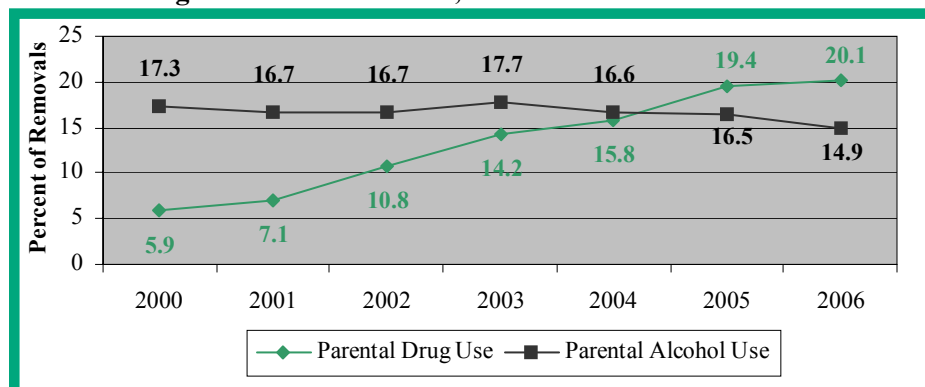
### How Policy Makers Can Help<sup>6</sup>

- Focus on child welfare financing reform;
- Improve data collection and data sharing across agencies;
- Increase accountability to supporting goals of permanency for children;
- Allow federal funds for permanent guardianship; and
- Create flexibility to use funding for programs that stress prevention, family support, and services for all children, but especially for those children aging out of the system.

### How You Can Help

For more information about the importance of family permanence, and how you can help, visit [www.ndkidscount.org/family/fostercare.htm](http://www.ndkidscount.org/family/fostercare.htm).

**Figure 1. Percent of Child Removals from Home Associated with Parental Drug Use and Alcohol Use, North Dakota: 2000-2006<sup>7</sup>**



Source: AFCARS data from the North Dakota Department of Human Services