



In 2006, the national news program *60 Minutes* featured a segment on Family Finding, developed by Kevin Campbell, which offers methods and strategies to locate and engage relatives of children living in out of home care. As a result, Children's Service Society of Wisconsin began investigating the child welfare model as a tool to improve outcomes and well-being for children in the foster care. Children's Service Society has more than 120 years of experience providing adoption, foster care and prevention services to the most vulnerable children and families. The inspirational stories featured by the CBS show prompted Children's Service Society to bring Kevin Campbell, an internationally known youth permanency expert and founder of the Center for Family Finding and Youth Connectedness, to Wisconsin. Training programs instituted in 2007 and 2008 started Children's Service Society staff on the path to become Wisconsin's experts on intensive relative search and a driver of permanence.

Family Finding is rooted in the belief that:

- Every child needs and deserves a safe and loving family. Family is the most normative and healing environment to raise children.
- Current child welfare practices do not consistently ensure that children/youth are provided the benefit of a loving family, and research clearly demonstrates this failure endangers the lives of young adults and their subsequent children.
- Children and youth in foster care need consistent connectedness to loved ones during their stay in care.
- Entry, lengths of stay and placement changes in foster care can be reduced by energizing a lifetime network of loving family inclusive of a primary parenting relationship.
- Permanency and safety issues can be addressed and pursued with the same urgency, and will yield greater well-being for children, youth and families.
- Child welfare organizations must continuously evaluate their results and educate their staff, trainers and those involved in child welfare to improve the results of positive efforts for children, youth and families.

More than 6,000 children are in out of home care placements in Wisconsin. Approximately one-third of these children come from Milwaukee' Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare. Approximately one-third of the 6,000 children are in relative placements – placed with relatives.

Children's Service Society received a 1.2 million dollar federal grant from the Children's Bureau in 2009 to demonstrate the effectiveness of the Family Finding model. Funding for these competitive grants was authorized by the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (P.L. 110-351). The purpose of the demonstration grant project is to help children who are in or are at-risk of entering into foster care reconnect with family members.



The interim evidence affirm the promise of this approach: of the 293 children who have received Family Finding services, 83% increased the number of family connections, and kin (relatives) were being considered for placement for 21% of children at the time of case closure. The average length of time to permanency declined from 1.5 years to 1.3 years, and 11% of children who received Family Finding services (treatment group) had their current or last placement with a relative compared to 5% of children who did not (control group). Evidence from other programs indicates that it (Family Finding) can lead to shorter stays in foster care; improved knowledge and understanding of families of origin; increased connections and better relationships with maternal and paternal relatives; identification of possible permanency options; and improvement in overall child well-being.

The six-step Family Finding model effectively connects children with supports through: Discovery (identify as many relatives and connections as possible that may demonstrate a willingness to be a lifelong connection); Engagement (convey to these relatives and important adults the importance of lifelong, meaningful relationships for the child and ask for their assistance); Preparation and Planning (bring team members together, allow participants to have a voice in a solution-focused meeting after learning about the youth's essential, lifelong need for support); Decision-making (the team makes timely decisions that provide the youth with appropriate levels of affection and belonging that are expected to be enduring); Evaluation (the team takes responsibility for the child's success. An inclusive, individualized, and unconditional plan to achieve legal and emotional permanency is created with a timeline for completion); Follow-up (necessary formal and informal supports are secured).

Additional information can be found at the National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness (<http://www.senecacenter.org/familyconnectedness>); The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections (<http://www.nrcpfc.org/index.html>); Child Trends (<http://www.childtrends.org/listAllPubs.cfm?LID=4D7366E5-AEF5-4F94-8B842104664487A6>); as well as the website of Children's Service Society of Wisconsin (<http://www.chw.org/display/PPF/DocID/45279/router.asp>)