RESEARCH BRIEF
Child TRENDS

PIECING TOGETHER THE PUZZLE: TIPS AND TECHNIQUES FOR EFFECTIVE DISCOVERY IN FAMILY FINDING

By Tiffany Allen, M.S.W., Karin Malm, M.S., Sarah Catherine Williams, M.S.W.,
Raquel Ellis, Ph.D., M.S.W.   December, 2011

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the family finding model is to provide child welfare practitioners with intensive relative search and engagement techniques to identify family and other close adults for children in foster care, and to involve them in developing and carrying out a plan for the emotional and legal permanency of a child. This brief examines the discovery component of the model (see description of Family Finding model on page 7) and identifies promising techniques and tools that family finding workers reported using to help facilitate the discovery of family members or other important people in the child's life. This is the second brief in a series summarizing findings from Child Trends' evaluations of the family finding model. The first family finding brief, Family Finding: Does Implementation Differ When Serving Different Child Welfare Populations?, *can be found in the resources section, under Family Finding Model in General.*

A critical component of family finding activity is the discovery phase. The goal of the discovery component is to identify as many family members and other potential adult connections as possible to provide support for the foster child. In practice, family finding workers attempt to identify at least 40 family members for the child. Extensive searches include a comprehensive review of the child's case record as well as use of a variety of search tools (e.g., US Search). Successful discovery is achieved when the family is extensively known. Child Trends researchers are currently evaluating family finding programs in multiple localities in five states. At annual visits to each program site over a 2 to 3 year period, family finding staff detailed the implementation of each component of the model, including barriers and facilitators to practice. The in-depth site visits provide a unique look into effective implementation considering different local contexts.

DATA SOURCES

Extensive field work is an important component of the ongoing Child Trends evaluation that provides a unique opportunity not only to examine the family finding approach in each locality, but also to examine practitioners' and program managers' thoughts on how best to utilize the family finding techniques. Child Trends' researchers interviewed family finding and child welfare agency staff to learn about their experiences and opinions concerning family finding, and about the local context (both in terms of location and approach) within which the program operates. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with both the specialized family finding workers and ongoing caseworkers. Child Trends also conducted focus groups with birth parents, relatives, and youth who received the services. Qualitative information was obtained during annual visits to the evaluation sites in years 2009-2011.

PROGRAM CONTEXT

The programs evaluated include private organizations under contract to public child welfare agencies as well as public child welfare agencies. In most sites, a specialized worker is trained in the family finding

techniques and conducts the family finding steps while consulting with the child's case-carrying worker. For other sites, the family finding activities are conducted by the child's case-carrying worker, in consultation with other trained staff. For this brief, any references to the "family finding worker" include those case-carrying workers that may be conducting these activities.

WHERE TO START

When a child is first referred to family finding, the primary goal for the family finding worker is to determine how many family members are currently known based on information available. The goal in the first few weeks is to gather as much information as possible that could provide clues and next steps for locating family members. Family finding workers indicated that the best sources of information at the initial stage of discovery are the child's caseworker, the case record, and the child.

Meeting with the Child's Caseworker. The family finding worker typically starts by meeting with the child's caseworker. The meeting has multiple functions, but its primary focus is to gather relevant information about the child's family and history. The meeting also provides an opportunity to explain the purpose of family finding and to overcome any confusion the caseworker may have in terms of their role in the provision of family finding services. The meeting can also be used to discuss current child-family relationships, visitation, and previous efforts made by the public agency to engage family. The caseworker provides information and context so the family finding worker is aware of any sensitive issues, potential hazards of talking with certain people, or tension within the family before engagement is attempted. The initial meeting can also serve a practical purpose, which is establishing a time to access the child's case record. Family finding workers indicated that caseworkers sometimes may be able to provide only limited information because they are new to the case or the agency has been unsuccessful at locating family in the past, but even limited information provides a foundation for proceeding with a review of the child's case record. In addition to the caseworker, other professionals such as the child's court appointed special advocate (CASA) the child's guardian ad litem (GAL), or the child's current foster parent may provide useful information.

Case Record Review. An integral piece of the discovery stage of family finding is reviewing, or "mining," the child's case record. The family finding worker reviews all sections of the child's hard copy and/or electronic case record to discover potential family members and other connections. Documents reviewed include case file narratives, court reports, school records, etc.

During the review, the worker gathers background information and compiles a list of names and contact information of individuals noted in the record. The family finding worker may go back to the case record multiple times to check for updates or to look for information missed during the initial review. Some information in the record may not have made sense during the initial review, but looking at the record with a fresh set of eyes at a later time may provide a better understanding. Documentation procedures for information discovered in the case record varies by family finding worker. No matter the method used to record information, family finding workers report several key pieces of information to capture (see sidebar on page 3).

While family finding workers attempt to review the entire case record, if workers obtain information on a large number of relatives they may not review the full record. One exception is for children in care for an extended period of time. Family finding workers reported that they often find it useful to review the oldest case files for these children in order to identify family members who have lost contact with the child over the years.

There is no guarantee that many family members' names and addresses will be found through case mining, but family finding workers report it is still a vital tool. In many cases, incomplete information on family members is gathered through case mining but can then be enhanced through other discovery methods. Family finding workers have also found it useful to record names of deceased family members as a starting point for discovering additional family members. When using different search websites (see Table 1), it is helpful to have names of associated family members, even those that are deceased, to help verify the identity of others.

> **Important information to document from child's case record**
>
> - Date of the case record review
> - Child's name
> - Child's age and identification number
> - Names of all potential connections including:
>   - Relationship to the child
>   - Dates of past contacts with the child
>   - Contact information

Interviewing the Child. In some instances, the family finding worker may have the opportunity to talk with the child about family members with whom s/he may have an existing or past connection. The usefulness of this method depends on the child's age, memory, and emotional well-being. For some children, talking about their past, even if done in a respectful and delicate manner, may stir up painful memories. Family finding workers consult with the child's caseworker, and, in some cases, the child's therapist, to determine if interviewing the child is appropriate. If the child is resistant to the interview, some family finding workers have found it useful to revisit the topic later or to introduce information about the family gradually so as not to traumatize the child further.

There are a number of methods currently in use to obtain family history from children. Two of the most frequent techniques reported by family finding workers are mobility mapping and connectedness mapping. For more information on other tools, such as genograms, eco maps, and connectograms, see the **Resources** section.

Mobility Mapping[1] is described as "a child's mental picture of his or her life before separation translated onto paper" (De Lay, 2002). The main goals are to stimulate the child's memory to uncover clues about missing family, and to encourage discussion about the child's past. Mobility mapping, compared to traditional structured interviews, helps uncover more information for children whose families are difficult to locate, and is a more relaxed and informal technique to explore the child's history.

When conducting a mobility mapping, family finding workers typically have large sheets of paper and drawing utensils on hand. The worker asks the child to recall his or her earliest memory and to draw a picture of the first house that he/she remembers living in. Next, the worker asks the child who lived in the house, what important people s/he remembers while living in the house, and if s/he would like to connect with those individuals. The worker and child walk through each "home" the child remembers to help recall family members and other important individuals. The worker may ask questions such as, "Who lived near you?" or "Who came over for important events?" to help recall additional memories. Unless otherwise desired by the child or advised by the caseworker and/or therapist, the mapping is conducted one-on-one with the child. Mobility mapping may not be appropriate or necessary with older youth who are able to provide relatives' names and contact information without this exercise. The mobil-

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[1] Mobility mapping is a tool used by the Unaccompanied Children Reunification and Reintegration Program of the International Rescue Committee–Rwanda (IRC-Rwanda), and is an alternative to standard documentation interviews for displaced children.

ity mapping sessions can last anywhere from 30 minutes up to 2-3 hours. For a step-by-step guide to mobility mapping, see De Lay (2002).

Connectedness Mapping is a technique typically used to graphically illustrate the loneliness of a child in foster care by showing family members and others connected to a child, or the lack thereof. Family finding workers view connectedness mapping as less intrusive than mobility mapping. Using the connectedness map may help the child avoid recalling traumatic events from the past that may surface during mobility mapping. Connectedness mapping discovers not only the family members to whom the child feels connected, but also other adults in the community. On the connectedness map, the child is shown in the middle of the page, and family members and other important individuals are circled around the child. A solid line between an individual and the child depicts a reciprocated connection between that person and the child. A one-way arrow drawn to a person represents a connection the child may feel with the person, but the feeling is not returned. Dotted lines are drawn between a person and a child with whom there is an established "formal or genetic" connection, such as a foster parent or relative, but with whom the child does not feel a connection. Connectedness maps can utilize detailed graphic representations for different types of connections and relationships, but this level of detail does not appear to be widely used by the family finding workers in the evaluation sites. Once complete, the connectedness map is used as a tool for engaging family members during meetings by highlighting the child's loneliness and the urgency of developing connections and supports for the child. For more information on connectedness mapping, see Pennsylvania Child Welfare Training Program (2010).

Additional Tips

The Practice Guide to Family Search and Engagement developed by the National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning, and the California Permanency for Youth Project, offers additional tips for carrying out a case record review (see http://www.nrcpfc.org/downloads/SixSteps.pdf)

- Look for names that repeat themselves throughout the file.
- Pay attention to who attended court hearings.
- Look at court documents and juvenile justice files.
- Make a list of all social workers, even if they no longer work at the agency.
- Note teachers, therapists, residential treatment and group home staff, etc.
- Make a chronological list of all placements to review with the youth. This can spur memories and is important for youth as part of the youth's history.

OTHER DISCOVERY METHODS

Interviewing family. Family finding workers will often ask discovered family members to identify other relatives or supportive adults. At first, family members may be guarded about providing information about other relatives, and family finding workers report it often takes multiple face-to-face interactions with family members to build rapport and trust.

Family finding workers reported that some caseworkers are apprehensive about them having contact with relatives deemed by the child welfare agency as inappropriate for placement or contact with the child. However, family finding workers have found that all family members can be sources of important information. Relatives who cannot have contact with the child due to termination of parental rights or criminal charges may have been involved early in the case, and may have historical information otherwise lost as the case progressed. Family finding workers have found it helpful to interview incarcerated rela-

tives and others to gather information on family members, yet making sure they receive approval from the child's caseworker and that they assess whether it is safe and appropriate to proceed with contact. Family finding workers also report that it is helpful to identify a family leader who can provide the family's genealogy or verify information obtained using other discovery methods.

Another method used during discovery is interviews with the child's birth parents. The parent's involvement in family finding may vary depending on the length of time the child has been in out-of-home care. When family finding is conducted with children new to out-of-home care, family finding workers report greater engagement with the child's birth parents. However, even family finding conducted with children who have been in out-of-home care a number of years has, on occasion, re-engaged birth parents.

Internet and data system searches. Internet searches are one of the key tools used during discovery to expand upon initial discovery techniques. The search engine that family finding workers are typically trained to use is US Search. However, family finding workers reported a number of other websites beyond US Search that have proved helpful. Table 1 lists the reported websites and their common uses. Some of these websites have subscription fees, but many of these sites are free resources. Workers reported using the free resources prior to using paid search tools.

Table 1. Family Finding: Mining Websites and Data Systems

Website Type	Website Name	Common Use
Paid Search Engines	ussearch.com, accurint.com	Provides detailed information about potential family members; includes addresses, employment status or history, household composition, criminal and other background information.
Social Media Sites	facebook.com, myspace.com, twitter.com, classmates.com, myyearbook.com	Provides social information such as school enrollment, family/friend relationships.
Phone and Address Directories	whitepages.com, anywho.com, switchboard.com, dogpile.com, dexknows.whitepages.com, whiteyellowpages.com, Reversephonedirectory.com, zabasearch.com, radaris.com, google.com	Finds names, current and past addresses, household composition, age, and possible employment status. May or may not show a phone number.
Family History Websites	Ancestry.com, obituaries.com, findagrave.com, obitlinkspage.com, obitcentral.com, legacy.com/obituaries.asp, ancesterhunt.com, genealogytoday.com, usgenweb.org, genforum.genealogy.com, rootsweb.ancestry.com, familysearch.com	Details family history, pictures, birth/death/marriage records, military info, census records, naturalizations. Some sties list other people who have searched for the same person. Obituaries may also list contact information for relatives.
Meta Search Engines	pipl.com , mama.com, dogpile.com	Searches a number of different search engines at once, including social media sites, to avoid doing a number of independent searches for different types of information.
Prison/Criminal Offender/Court Websites	vinelink.com, Inmatesplus.com, bop.gov, familywatchdog.us	Provides information on court proceedings, such as plaintiffs and/or defendants and other court information
Local Government Systems/Resources	Child abuse history, local Department of Motor Vehicles, State Board of Elections/Voter registration, Local and state clerks of record, register of deeds, real estate records, birth, divorce and marriage records, online newspapers/newsletters, church records, SSDI/Social Security death index, child support enforcement agency/Federal Parent Locator, TANF/Food Stamps	Provides addresses for relatives who receive government assistance, or are connected through local community systems.

COMMON CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Discovering at least 40 family members for a child in foster care can be extremely rewarding but also frustrating. Family finding workers shared a number of challenges to the discovery process and offered solutions to overcome these challenges (See Table 2).

Table 2. Common Discovery Challenges and Solutions

Challenge	Solution
Family members reside outside of the United States	• Gather information from a local family member about landmarks in the child's country of origin since mailing addresses do not exist in many countries. • Contact local social service agencies and community organizations for assistance to knock on doors and contact people. • Make direct contacts with people who can help with searches, as international search engines can be limited. • Email proves more effective than phone calls because some families may not have phones but have email access through public internet cafés.
Family members are resistant to providing information about other family members	• Build a good relationship with a family representative whom other family members may trust more than the family finding worker.
Need to verify an address before conducting a cold call	• Search for businesses near the address and contact the business (using a web search engine such as Google) to inquire about what they know about their neighbors.
Family member is deceased	• Search for the deceased member's surviving relatives using tools such as the Social Security Death Index or the family member's obituary • Find the last place of residence for a deceased relative to help target the search for living relatives in that geographical area, or look at real estate records.

CONCLUSION

The discovery component is the foundation of the family finding model. Discovery involves a number of different moving pieces that the family finding worker uses to piece together information about fragmented families. Family finding workers have found that one discovery method or tool may not be the most effective for every case. Also, the steps to discovery are not always linear, with prescribed steps falling in the same order for every case. Discovery is an iterative process, where the different methods all inform each other. Gathering information from each discovery method individually may not produce much information, but a combination of these techniques can produce the information needed to begin engaging family.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Tiffany Allen is a Senior Research Analyst at Child Trends. Karin Malm directs the Child Welfare Program Area at Child Trends. Sarah Catherine Williams is a Research Analyst at Child Trends. Raquel Ellis, formerly a Research Scientist at Child Tends, is now a Senior Study Director at Westat. Questions or comments about the brief should be directed to Tiffany Allen, tallen@childtrends.org.

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RESOURCES

Mobility Mapping

- http://www.pacwcbt.pitt.edu/curriculum/207%20Family%20Finding/Day%201_2/TrnrRsrcs/Res04_MbltyMppng_FlwDgrms.pdf

- http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTTOPPSISOU/Resources/1424002-1185304794278/4026035-1185375653056/4028835-1185375938992/3_Mobility_mapping.pdf

- http://www.fao.org/Participation/tools/mobilitymap_545.html

Connectedness Mapping

- http://www.pacwcbt.pitt.edu/curriculum/207%20Family%20Finding/Day%201_2/Hndts/HO16_OthrFmlyFndngTls.pdf

Other Discovery Resources

- http://www.senecacenter.org/perm_search-tools

- http://www.childfocuspartners.com/relativesearch/NYCChildQuestionnaire.pdf

- http://www.childfocuspartners.com/relativesearch/MNBestPracticesGuide.pdf

About Family Finding

The family finding model provides child welfare professionals with techniques for identifying and finding family members and other adults who care about a child placed in foster care. Other adults may include friends, neighbors, mentors, school teachers, coaches, teammates, religious leaders, youth group leaders, and community supports. In addition, family finding provides strategies for involving these adults in developing and carrying out a plan for helping children achieve emotional and legal permanency. The program was first conceived in 1999 by Kevin Campbell and colleagues at Catholic Community Services in Tacoma, Washington. Campbell was inspired by the family-tracing techniques used by international aid agencies to find and reunite family members who had been separated by war, civil disturbance, or natural disaster. Using genealogical archives and internet-based services, Campbell and colleagues were not only able to increase the number of life-long connections for children in foster care in the agency's service area and decrease the number of children in non-relative care, but to also inspire the passage of state legislation in 2003 requiring intensive relative searches for all children in out-of-home care. With the passage in 2008 of the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, all states are now required to notify relatives of the placement of a related child in foster care.

The family finding model is comprised of six stages or steps, including: 1) discovering at least 40 family members and important people in the child's life through an extensive review of a child's case file, through interviewing the youth (if appropriate) in addition to family members and other supportive people, and through the use of internet search tools; 2) engaging as many family members and supportive adults as possible through in-person interviews, phone conversations, and written letters and emails, with the goal of identifying the child's extended family. The engagement phase also includes identifying a group of family members and supportive adults, as appropriate, willing to participate in a planning meeting on how to keep the child safely connected to family members; 3) planning for the successful future of the child with the participation of family members and others important to the child by convening family meetings; 4) making decisions during the family meetings that support the legal and emotional permanency of the child; 5) evaluating the permanency plans developed for the child; and 6) providing follow-up supports to ensure that the child and his/her family can access and receive informal and formal supports essential to maintaining permanency for the child (Campbell, 2005; 2010).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Family Finding Model in General

- http://www.senecacenter.org/familyfinding/resources
- http://www.pacwcbt.pitt.edu/curriculum/207FamilyFindingSeries.htm
- http://www.nrcpfc.org/downloads/SixSteps.pdf
- http://www.ccsww.org/site/DocServer/Family_Search_and_Engagement_Guide_CCS-EMQ.pdf?docID=641
- http://www.childtrends.org/Files/Child_Trends-2011_10_17_RB_FamilyFinding.pdf

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