

WHY SEARCH FOR FAMILY AND PROMOTE REENGAGEMENT?

Children and teenagers deserve to have a loving family to help them grow up and prepare them with the life skills that they need for the challenges that await them as young adults. They are at a disadvantage if they have to learn these skills on their own. Additionally, family provides a sense of identity and belonging; unconditional love, positive discipline, acceptance, tolerance, self-respect, consideration for others, and leadership – invaluable resources that every child needs! Family could also offer youth unconditional support – cheering them through their triumphs and consoling them through their tribulations. Likewise, family is also a prime resource of learning about relationships and helps youth determine what kind of family that he or she may have of their own, someday. In other words, the best way of learning about family is to be part of one. Unfortunately, many foster youth spend their formative years in group care, or shuffling around from various fosters families, or in residential placements – missing out on this essential learning and personal development.

WHAT IS FAMILY SEARCH & ENGAGEMENT (FSE)? / WHAT DOES FSE DO?

FSE is a structured step-by-step approach to searching for and engaging family and fictive kin connections, and establishing permanent connections to children and

teenagers, who are currently in foster care. Likewise, FSE works to establish both legal and non-legal permanence. (Permanence or Permanency for children in foster care means a legally permanent, nurturing family, occurring through reunification with a child's family, adoption, or guardianship.)

The purpose of FSE is to bridge connections between long-term foster youth and their biological or fictive relatives once again by establishing or reestablishing contact with relatives on behalf of the youth. By this, FSE Case Managers through The Children's Cabinet conduct diligent searches on each youth's relatives and attempts to establish contact. The Case Manager then provides each probable and possible relative contact to the Washoe County Social Worker, who supervises the youth's case. The Case Manager and Social Worker partner to establish potential contacts between the youth and his relatives through various mediums, including telephone, mail, social media, and/or in-person. The relative contacts are shared with the youth, who with assistance from the social worker and case manager begin establishing connections with his or her relatives on multiple levels. Meanwhile, FSE Case Managers construct comprehensive family trees or genograms for each youth to help him recognize and preserve his ancestry.

HOW DID THE PROGRAM BEGIN?

Family Search and Engagement or FSE is in part of Washoe County Initiative to Reduce Long-Term Foster Care*, which co-developed a five-year pilot program entitled: Permanency Innovations Initiative

(PII). The program, which launched in Washoe County, Nevada late 2010, is one of six states that are currently operating similar platforms. The PII Program is based on the FSE model developed by Catholic Community Charities of Western Washington.

SOME COMMON *MYTHS* & *MINDSETS* ≠ –

1 . “The apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.” *Some families have previous involvement with Social Services or CPS, but many families have healthy members that can be valuable resources to foster youth.*

2 . “If family is available, why haven’t they come forward?” *There are many reasons why relatives do not come forward. Some of the more common reasons are **fear of retaliation from family; fear of CPS involvement; belief that the child was already adopted; cannot find their lost relative; unaware that the child is in need; afraid of damaging family relationships, & feeling powerless to advocate for their relative.***

3 . “The child’s behavior / physical limitations is too challenging for this family?” *Some youth who are in care do experience cognitive and behavioral issues, and some may experience physical limitations. However, we must remember that these imperfections are not their fault, and these challenges should not hinder his or her chance of belonging to their family. Many children in foster care are receiving the necessary treatments that they need. However, what every child and teen needs most is a loving and nurturing family, who could heal those wounds and ailments that no other treatment could remedy.*