



Office of CBC and ME Financial Accountability

CBC Financial Viability Effective Practices

Partnership for Strong Families:
Twelve months to Permanency

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Practice Summary

Percent of children exiting foster care to a permanent home within twelve (12) months of entering care (M05):

The percentage of children who entered foster care during the report period where the child achieved permanency within twelve (12) months of entering foster care. This measure is similar to the federal indicator, Permanency Performance Area 1: Permanency in 12 Months for Children Entering Foster Care.

Time is of the essence for permanency of children in the dependency system. Partnership for Strong Families (PFSF) combines routine permanency staffings with multi-stakeholder safe reduction workgroups to identify and address local, systemic barriers to permanency. This work has allowed PFSF to maintain consistent, sustained high performance on permanency over time.

PFSF has always had a strong staffing protocol to review cases for permanency prior to the first and second judicial review hearings. Permanency Staffings are scheduled for cases with length of out of home care stay at 4 months and 8 months. The Permanency Staffings focus on Conditions for Return to identify cases that can be reunified with a safety plan. If cases are not able to reunify, action steps to address barriers and preparation for a goal change are identified so recommendations regarding a change in permanency goal can be made at the earliest opportunity before the court.



In 2015, PFSF started the Safe Reduction Workgroup (SRW) that addresses barriers to permanency in the thirteen-county area. First implemented in Alachua county, the workgroups work through local systemic issues to further permanency options for children and address stakeholder barriers. Prior to the 2015 kickoff of the SRW, PFSF received technical assistance from Casey Families. SRW continues to this day addressing barriers, large and small, as they arise. Barriers addressed include ensuring service delivery to rural areas, slow judicial dockets, or strengthening stakeholder collaboration.

PFSF's performance in Exiting Children to Permanent Homes within 12 months reflects a focus on early permanency planning for children in out of home care and addressing those barriers early on within the local community.

CBC Context

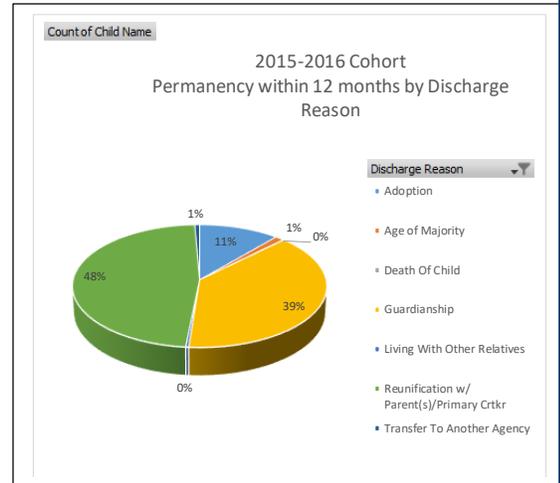
PFSF serves thirteen primarily rural counties over two judicial circuits in the Northeast Region. PFSF serves counties within two judicial circuits; Eighth Judicial Circuit: Alachua, Baker, Bradford, Gilchrist, Levy and Union; Third Judicial Circuit: Columbia, Dixie, Hamilton, Lafayette, Madison, Suwannee, and Taylor. The service area covers a vast area over 8,000 square miles of predominantly rural territory serving a combined population of approximately 583,444. Approximately 45% of the population is in Alachua County with an estimated population of 263,496.

Practice Detail

This section contains three parts; a description of the core elements of the practice, a description of barriers encountered and ways they are addressed, and the resources used to implement the practice.

Core elements

1. Permanency staffings are conducted for cases with length of stay at 4 months and 8 months. They can be held daily, depending on the number of cases needed to be staffed that month. Staffings are attended by the case manager, case manager supervisor, and Operations manager, as well as family and other stakeholders and conditions within the case warrant. The Permanency Staffing focuses on Conditions for Return to assist in identifying early reunifications. Permanency Staffing agendas are generated based on length of stay at 4 and 8 months with a design to have the cases staffed prior to the judicial review milestones. The staffing focus on Conditions for Return helps to identify cases that are nearing readiness for reunification assessment and in home safety planning as well as identifying steps that would help prepare the case for a change in permanency goal should that become necessary. Beginning in 2014, Family Functioning Assessment Progress Updates are used to inform the discussion and decision making. Utilizing the formalized assessment work product streamlined the staffing preparation and focused the decision making on the ongoing case assessment regarding Conditions for Return. Including parents and caregivers in early Permanency Staffings helps establish reasonable efforts to engage parents in planning, services, and efforts toward reunification. Assisting parents and caregivers in understanding Conditions for Return requirements helps set shared expectations regarding what is necessary to move forward with reunification. Of children in the cohort for the calendar years 2015 and 2016, 71% of children who achieved reunification were reunited with their family prior to the end of the 9th month in out of home care. Of the children who achieved permanency through placement with a permanent guardian, 65% did so prior to the end of the 9th month in out of home care.
2. Safe Reduction workgroups were established for each Judicial Circuit. Participants from PFSF, the Department of Children and Families, Children’s Legal Services, Regional Council, Guardian ad Litem and the Judiciary meet regularly to discuss and address systematic barriers to timely permanency. The Safe Reduction workgroups for each Judicial Circuit allow the local teams and stakeholder to identify and address county or circuit specific challenges. The workgroups improve communication and coordination for overall better permanency outcomes of children in the system. Through the workgroups, many systemic barriers were identified and addressed for overall system improvement. The Eighth Judicial Circuit Safe Reduction workgroup was established in 2015 and replicated in the Third Judicial Circuit in January, 2017.



Barriers to permanency identified by the Workgroups and methods to address

Barriers encountered	Addressed by:
Unclear paternity delayed permanency	Processes were implemented to ensure establishment of paternity is addressed early in the case, beginning with the shelter hearings. Establishment of paternity was determined to be a critical case factor that if not addressed early would likely result in permanency delays. CLS and the courts started routinely addressing

	paternity from shelter hearings forward. Clearing up paternity issues such as cases where the child has a legal and a biological father, or the father is undetermined with early DNA testing enables the court to make findings regarding paternity.
Starter tasks	Early identification of parent tasks that directly relate to an apparent deficit that lead to the removal. These starter tasks are immediately referred to in order to expedite getting the parent engaged in treatment. This practice allows for parents to begin working toward reunification prior to the court adopting a formal case plan.
Quality Provider Reports	Processes were implemented through PFSF's Utilization Management Department to ensure timely and quality provider information is available to the court for informed decision making.
Parent Readiness assessment	Parent Readiness assessment is conducted prior to referring clients for parenting classes. This enables clients to focus on their mental health or substance abuse treatments as a priority and only adding parenting training in when the client is ready. Delaying parenting services until other key services are complete, helps prevent overloading parents with tasks upfront in a case.
Tracking "Discretion to Reunify"	Case Management Agencies track cases that the court has granted the agency "discretion to reunify" to ensure steps toward reunification are taken at the earliest opportunity that an in home safety plan is deemed sufficient to manage the danger threat.
Concurrent Planning	Filing case plans with concurrent goals up front in the case enables case managers to work toward reunification while also taking steps toward alternative permanency outcomes.
Caregiver Participation	Lead agency staff invite licensed caregivers to participate in staffings. Case management agency staff invite parents and non-licensed caregivers to participate in staffings. Family and caregiver participation assist the professionals in making well informed recommendations regarding permanency.
Conditions for Return training	PFSF in conjunction with Children's Legal Services, provided training to Regional Counsel, GAL counsel, and private attorneys for parents on Conditions for Return. The intention of the training was to better enable defense counsel to consult with their clients about safety resources that could expedite in home safety planning.
Case scrub	CLS and Safe Reduction workgroup participants conducted case scrubs for cases 12 months and older in which permanency had not yet been achieved. The reviews focused on identifying and addressing specific case barriers as well as systemic barriers resulting in delays in permanency.

Resources used to implement

PFSF Lead Agency Quality Operations Managers (5 positions) chair and manage the Permanency Staffings as a part of their duties over 13 counties served by PFSF and account for 10% of their job duties throughout the month. Additionally, two Administrative Assistant positions provide assistance with scheduling and ensuring documentation generated is entered into FSFN. Oversight is provided by PFSF Director of Quality Operations (2 positions). Case Management Organization Program Directors, supervisors, and Family Care Counselors are critical partners in the staffings.

Stakeholder participation in a Safe Reduction Workgroup depends on the barrier being addressed, so the structure of the group can ebb and flow depending on which subject matter expert(s) are needed. Typically, a workgroup member can anticipate spending 1 to 5% of their time dedicated to the SRW and its outcomes.

Staff Feedback

Feedback supports that this approach has proven effective and helps to move cases to permanency outcomes efficiently.

CLS feedback: “The 4 and 8 month staffing schedule has changed Circuits 3 and 8 for the better. Since implementation, we have been more prepared walking into both the first judicial review and the first permanency hearing. We have been able to have much more robust discussions around Conditions for Return, reunification, and possible goal changes at much earlier junctures in our cases. We are consistently in the top 3 in the state in 15+ month reunification goals, which is likely a direct result of these staffings. Permanency for our children is a top priority of our child welfare system, and the process we have in place helps us achieve permanency in a timely and effective manner.” (Francine Turney, Managing Attorney, Children’s Legal Services for Circuits 3 & 8)

CMO feedback: “The 4 and 8 month staffing have been integral in not only showing us where the parent stands with services and behavior change but also showing the parents that this process is working for them and not against them. For the parents that hit the ground running and are engaged in services from the start of this case this will be a quicker process, and we might be able to say at 4 or 8 months that we are ready to move from supervised visits to unsupervised visits then eventually to reunification.” (Jessica Eickstedt, Program Director, Camelot Community Care)

CMO feedback: “Maintaining a strong dedicated focus for each individual family allows for our agency to ensure that children achieve the timely permanency that they deserve. Group staffings and a team focus allows for each family to be seen via every possible solution aspect that can be reached. The timely permanency in a safe and healthy environment is the upmost important foundation that can be given to a child.” (Dory Young, Program Director, Devereux)

Statement from CBC leadership: “When children are removed from their caregivers, we owe the family our best efforts to determine an appropriate case plan goal and achieve it as expeditiously as possible. By focusing on common barriers and emphasizing continual assessment of conditions for return, we have reduced the time a child is under supervision. Our objective is to achieve permanency more quickly regardless of whether the goal is reunification, permanent guardianship, or adoption. One process that has served us well is a “case scrub” by CLS and case management at twelve months for those cases that still have a goal of reunification. It has highlighted paternity determination, service provision, and obtaining trial time as elements that, when approached systemically, result in an overall reduction in time to permanency.” (Stephen Pennypacker, CEO, Partnership for Strong Families, Inc.)

Practice Example

HH is a 17-year-old with autism. HH spent his entire youth as the only child with a single mother, who through the years has experienced her own set of mental and medical health issues. As HH grew older,

his outbursts and symptoms would worsen, to the point that his mother, Tabitha, would become unwilling (and at times, unable) to manage him, leaving him to his own will. HH would run away for hours, destroy property, and even become physical with his mother. Instead of seeking out for preventative help through community resources, Tabitha would have HH placed under Baker Acts as these would at least give her a few days of rest. This method was not working as upon one Baker Act in June 2017, Tabitha refused to pick HH up from the facility, leaving DCF with no option but to place HH in foster care. Paternity was established at the onset of the judicial case at the shelter hearing. Shortly after DCF identified present danger, a case manager was identified to provide safety management services. During this phase, the case manager met the mother and assessed for her overall functioning. It was evident that there was more than just inadequate supervision, abandonment, or any failure to protect. Tabitha was willing but was defeated by her inability to manage HH's regressing behaviors, largely because of how much his life triggered aversive memories of her own past trauma.

Through early initiation of services, to include therapeutic intervention, the two were able to address some of their own issues, to include how they interact with one another. One of the service providers brags about how Tabitha has made clear behavioral expectations and follows through with rewards and consequences for HH. Through services, they created a sleep cycle chart, where they found that the days when HH is extremely hyper, talkative and volatile are preceded by nights of minimal sleep. Discoveries (or breakthroughs, as we like to call them) such as this have given Tabitha some confidence in her ability to manage HH's inevitable behaviors and to minimize her own reactivity.

A permanency staffing was held in October, 2017, where the mother participated and was able to articulate how the aforementioned Conditions for Return were rectified. Thanks to the collaboration of the CPI and case manager, as well as the quick assessment and service provision to the family, it became clear that HH could return home to a calm, consistent environment with a sufficient safety plan and safety services in the home. Although the caregiver was unable to attend the permanency staffing to provide a formal input, the case manager was able to articulate in her FSN notes as well as in person at the staffing the caregiver's concurrence with Tabitha's progress and ability to care for HH safely. HH spent just 4 ½ months in foster care before his reunification with his mother. Reunification was authorized by the court as of November 2, 2017 and following a transition period, HH finally returned home on November 22nd, right in time for the holidays!

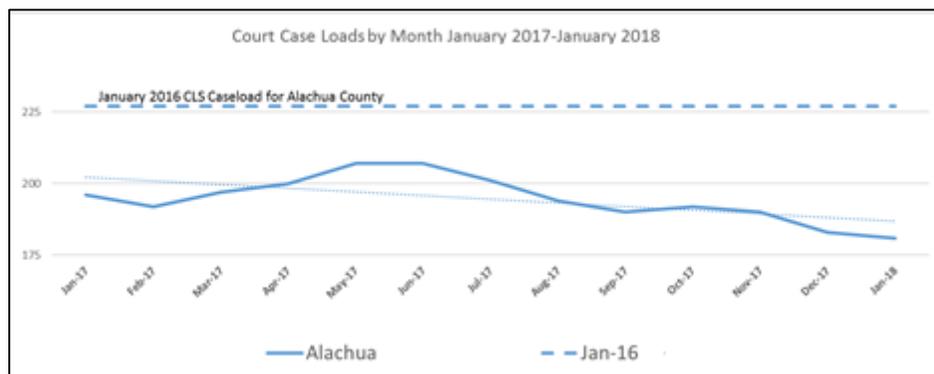
While post placement supervision is still ongoing, and HH continues to struggle to manage some of his impulses, it is clear that Tabitha's confidence as a mother has increased, as well as her ability to call for help and prevent future incidents from becoming dangerous situations for both HH and herself. Expediting critical services and the mother's participation in early permanency planning helped identify that Conditions for Return could be met with an in home safety plan allowing HH to be reunited with his mom.

Results

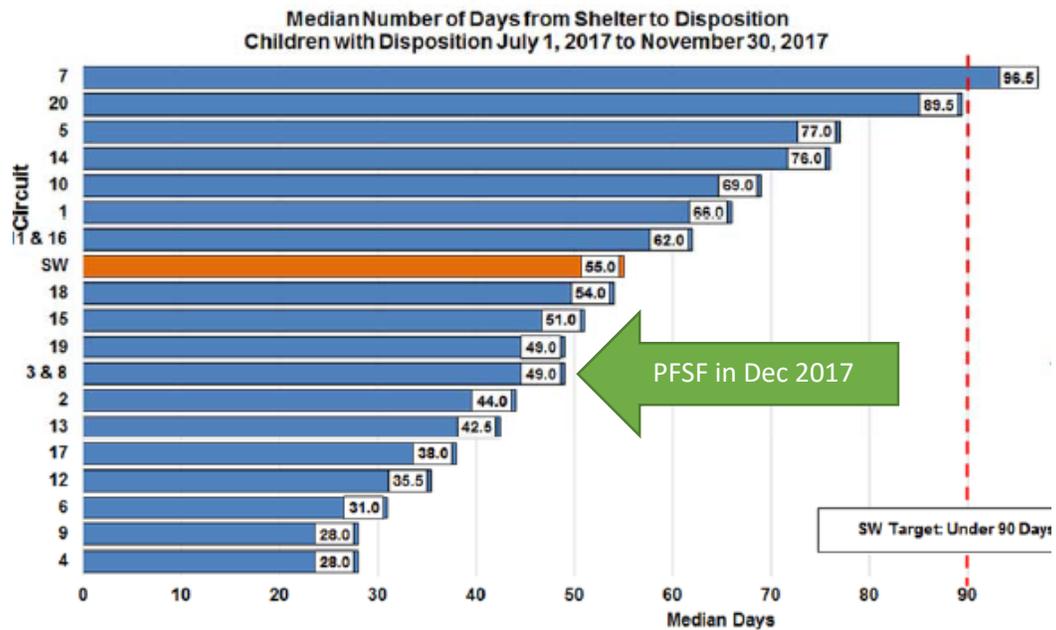
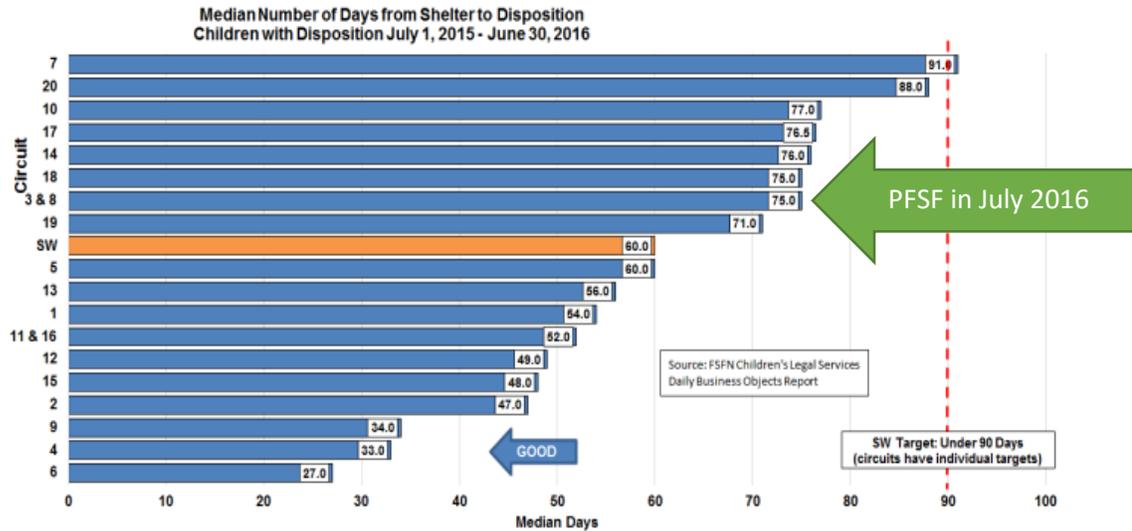
Primary benefits: PFSF performs consistency well on Federal Child Welfare Permanency Indicators (M03) Percent of children exiting foster care to a Permanent home within 12 months of entering care, (M04) Percent of children exiting foster care to a permanent home within 12 months for children in foster care 12 to 23 months and, (M05) Percent of children exiting to a permanent home within 12 months for those in care 24+ months. The focus on Conditions for Return not only helps the permanency outcomes for cases within 12 months, but also those cases with 12-23 and 24+ length of stay continue to see positive permanency outcomes.

Federal Measure	FY 2015 Q4	FY 2016 Q1	FY 2016 Q2	FY 2016 Q3	FY 2016 Q4	FY 2017 Q1	FY 2017 Q2	FY 2017 Q3	FY 2017 Q4	FY 2018 Q1
M03: % of children exiting to a permanent home win 12 months of entering care	45.80	58.90	47.80	50.20	52.50	60.80	49.70	52.40	48.50	44.00
M04: % of children exiting to a permanent home win 12 months for those in care 12 to 23 months	64.10	69.80	68.80	64.10	63.20	56.70	58.80	58.00	64.90	71.00
M05: % of children exiting to a permanent home win 12 months for those in care 24+ months	30.70	36.90	32.70	31.80	31.60	34.90	37.50	37.60	30.60	35.40

The Safe Reduction workgroups with judiciary and local stakeholders helped identify and address barriers to permanency which resulted in overall lower numbers of court involved cases. Alachua dropped from 227 court cases in January, 2016 to 181 as of January, 2018. The Alachua reductions are indicated by the chart below. Columbia county also had a significant drop in court involved cases in the 2017 calendar year which in part can be attributed to resolving paternity establishment barriers identified through the case scrub reviews.



Through Safe Reduction workgroup efforts the Median Number of Days from Shelter to Disposition was reduced from 75 days in July 2016 (July 1, 2015-June 30, 2016) to 49 days as of December 2017 (July1, 2017-November 30, 2017). (Child Welfare Key Indicators Monthly Report)



Secondary benefits:

An early focus on permanency helps to ensure work is focused on reunification when possible and alternate permanency options when reunification is not possible. Children need stable nurturing relationships with a caregiver. Brain development science highlights how critically important stable nurturing relationships with at least one consistent adult is to a child’s growth and development. PFSF consistently performs well on the measure Placement Moves per 1,000 days in Foster Care for children Entering Care. More stable placements contribute to better permanency outcomes with timely reunification or achievement of an alternate permanency goal prevents children from lingering in out of home care.

Placement Moves per 1,000 Days in Foster Care For Children Entering Care									
CBC Lead Agency	10/1/14 - 9/30/15	1/1/15 - 12/31/15	4/1/15 - 3/31/16	7/1/15 - 6/30/16	10/1/15 - 9/30/16	1/1/16 - 12/31/16	4/1/16 - 3/1/17	7/1/16 - 6/30/17	10/1/16 - 9/30/17
Big Bend CBC	4.07	3.64	3.70	3.38	3.65	3.37	3.63	3.45	3.20
Families First Network	4.47	4.92	5.02	5.52	5.90	6.10	6.50	6.06	6.19
Community Partnership for Children	3.21	3.42	3.31	3.14	3.10	3.14	3.48	3.55	3.64
Family Integrity Program	2.81	2.45	2.28	2.74	2.91	3.02	3.29	3.71	5.49
Family Support Services of North Fla	2.80	3.38	3.46	3.82	3.77	4.08	4.07	3.94	3.66
Kids First of Florida, Inc.	2.87	3.04	2.92	2.47	1.79	1.72	1.05	1.40	1.95
Partnership for Strong Families	3.70	3.79	3.50	3.25	3.64	3.33	3.35	4.10	3.77
Brevard Family Partnership	3.11	2.97	2.64	3.44	4.18	3.92	3.76	3.24	3.16
Community Based Care of Central Fla	3.91	3.66	4.16	3.49	3.60	3.89	4.13	4.80	5.03
Community Based Care of Central Fla (Seminole)	4.13	3.49	3.44	3.63	3.74	3.24	3.73	3.23	3.24
Heartland for Children	3.37	2.87	2.70	3.05	3.73	3.48	3.13	2.83	2.99
Kids Central, Inc.	3.98	3.46	3.44	3.65	4.21	4.40	4.14	4.47	3.98
Childrens Network of SW Florida	5.39	5.02	5.29	5.45	6.39	6.31	6.48	6.40	5.81
Eckerd Community Alternatives	3.65	3.71	3.48	3.65	3.86	4.03	4.07	4.41	4.36
Eckerd Community Hillsborough	4.59	4.54	4.91	5.53	5.58	5.55	5.58	5.28	5.70
Sarasota Y/SAFE Children Coalition	4.20	3.95	4.32	4.27	4.68	4.55	4.48	4.29	4.18
ChildNet-Broward	3.25	3.14	3.12	3.46	3.46	3.38	3.52	3.34	3.18
ChildNet-Palm Beach	3.00	2.96	3.10	3.23	3.54	3.58	3.80	3.50	4.02
Devereux CBC	4.57	3.94	3.93	3.54	4.53	4.11	4.06	3.96	3.79
Our Kids of Miami-Dade/Monroe, Inc	5.09	4.95	4.88	5.16	5.62	5.63	5.76	5.14	5.13
Statewide	3.94	3.80	3.83	4.03	4.37	4.38	4.47	4.39	4.36
National Standard	4.12	4.12	4.12	4.12	4.12	4.12	4.12	4.12	4.12

Source: FSN OCWDRU Report #1102: "Placement Moves Per 1,000 Days in Foster Care"



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