Hillside Family of Agencies Family Finding Proof of Concept Pilot
Final Report: Part 1 Narrative Report
April 15, 2011

Travis, age 20, has been in care with the Office of People with Developmental Disabilities since 1995, and as the years have gone by any known family members were lost to contact. No one attends permanency hearings for Travis – no agency worker, no county worker, no law guardian, no family, not even Travis. The state will take adult guardianship when Travis turns 21 and will more than likely place him in adult group care.¹

Sebastian, age 20, has been in care since about the age of seven when his family, who adopted him at 18 months, felt overwhelmed by his behaviors and his mental health issues. The family was advised by mental health providers to “give up” Sebastian because of his mental health problems. Sebastian has been in institutional care ever since, with no family resources.

Wayne, 16, came into care in February of 2001 at the age of seven and has had a number of different types of out of home placements. All told, Wayne has been away from his family for more than nine and a half of his 16 years.

The Issue
Unfortunately, the stories of Travis, Sebastian and Wayne are not exceptional. These are just three of the poignant stories that make up the life of the 25,000 children and youth in foster care in New York State (www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/fostercare/). Years spent in foster or residential care with minimal family contact – or none at all – take a toll on these children. They flounder and struggle to find the motivation to work on their issues, become hopeless or develop behavior problems, thus perpetuating their continued placement. A Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy (SCAA) Policy Brief of March 2010 documents that “The longer a child stays in foster care the less likely that a child will return home” (www.scaany.org/documents/kinship_policy_brief). Data show the likelihood of a negative outcome for the youth who age out of foster care is particularly high. The Children’s Aid Society reports that these youth, “Having reached the age of majority, are presumed to be productive, self-reliant and fully self-sufficient. We do not have these expectations of adolescents who grow up under the best of circumstances. But we insist that the most vulnerable and disadvantaged young people make the transition alone and unsupported.” Data from different states show that:

• 12-30% struggled with homelessness
• 40-63% did not complete high school
• 25-55% are not employed; only 38% of those employed were still working after one year
• 30-62% had trouble accessing health care

¹ All youth vignettes are taken from the project case reports of our workers. The youth’s names and other identifying factors have been changed.
32-40% were forced to rely on some form of public assistance
50% experienced extreme financial hardship
31-42% were arrested and 18-26% were incarcerated
20-60% young women were pregnant within 12-18 months of leaving foster care.

The social cost is extremely high in terms of damaged lives and lost potentials. The financial costs are also high. A study by Culter Consulting concluded that “a conservative cost of over $5 billion per cohort year as the costs of bad outcomes certainly makes the point that tremendous return on investment could be achieved by providing effective services and supports and especially the creation of permanent relationships with responsible and caring adults” (SCAA Policy Brief). It’s clear that from both the human and the financial perspective, minimizing length of stay in foster care and maximizing the potential for family and community relationships are desperately needed. And yet, even though the stories, the outcomes, and the staggering costs are known, many children remain suspended in the foster care system. As the years tick by, the sense of placement as ‘temporary’ erodes and foster care consumes their childhood.

With this bleak picture in mind, Hillside Family of Agencies, along with the rest of New York State, was dismayed to learn the findings of the recent federal child welfare audit, the Child and Family Service Review, in which New York State placed 47th out of 50 states in permanency performance. As a result, Hillside became determined to contribute substantially to improving the state’s performance in this critical area. We undertook research to explore what has been learned elsewhere that could make a difference in New York. On October 6, 2009, NYS-OCFS sponsored a Forum on Family Finding with the founder of Family Finding and Youth Connectedness, Kevin Campbell. Upon hearing his presentation, Hillside leadership was convinced this model of finding family and fictive kin and bringing them together to reconnect with children in placement held great promise for New York’s youth and families. We contacted Mr. Campbell and asked him to come to New York and meet with Hillside’s senior staff immediately.

As a result, Hillside arranged for Mr. Campbell to conduct a Family Finding Proof of Concept Pilot Project, with 24 youth whose permanency options were bleak. Participating in the pilot were Hillside staff members and their supervisors and, where possible, DSS caseworkers as partners. The pilot training took place over six two-day sessions beginning in May, 2010 and continued until September 2010 when the formal training was concluded. Family Finding work continued through March 2011, the official end of the pilot project. The Proof of Concept Project was intended to provide preliminary answers to the following questions:

- Does Family Finding make a positive difference in the lives of children and youth?
- Is Family Finding a practice that our direct service workers can learn, apply and find helpful in achieving more rewarding outcomes for children and youth?
- What time commitment does Family Finding require from front line workers?
- What are the potential financial effects of the introduction of Family Finding across our agencies?
In short, we wanted to know if Family Finding would work here at Hillside -- and if it worked at Hillside, how could we help other agencies and organizations across the state adopt this approach?

As a result of the progress with the pilot and its impact on the youth involved, Hillside has developed a long term contract with Kevin Campbell who will serve as Senior Fellow for the newly established Hillside Institute for Family Connections. Mr. Campbell has committed to provide training and coaching through the Hillside of Family Agencies to child welfare, juvenile justice, developmental disabilities, and mental health systems. Concurrently, the Hillside Family of Agencies is embedding Family Finding internally and is offering the Six Step Family Finding Model to agencies in a contractual relationship.

The Project
For the Family Finding Pilot, workers and supervisors selected 24 youth who they felt could benefit from a new type of approach. Most of these youth had long-standing involvement with one or more of the welfare, mental health, juvenile justice and developmental disabilities systems. They had experienced long-term separation and disconnect from family and had spent many years in foster or residential care. During the six two-day training/case review sessions Mr. Campbell introduced the practice and tools of Family Finding and guided workers through the six-step process he has found extremely effective in other settings.

During our first session the stories of the 24 youth were presented including some basic demographic data:

- Of the 24 youth 8 were female, 16 male.
- The average age was 15 with a range from 9 to 20.
- The group’s race/ethnicity profile showed 8 Black/African American youth; 6 multi- or bi-racial including 3 with Hispanic heritage; 1 youth identifying as solely Hispanic; and 9 Caucasian/White youth.
- Youth came from both urban and rural settings.

In addition to the demographics, a picture of the loneliness of the youth emerged:

- The 24 youth, along with Hillside and county staff, could list 155 names of family or community members previously or currently connected to the youth, for an average number of 6.5 names per youth. This number reflects just the count of the names of family & community members; it does nothing to indicate the level of involvement of the people named, which ranged from a vaguely remembered brief past interaction to a family member with consistent contact. The count of identified family members ranged from 2 to 20.
- Among them the youth had 187 years of professional/social service involvement for an average of 7.8 years per youth. The range of social services involvement was from 3 to 15 years.
- The 24 youth had 212 out of home placements, averaging 8.8 out of home placements per youth. The number of placements ranged from 1 to 42(!).

Our Family Finding tree gives a picture of the youths’ family connections at the start of the Family Finding Pilot Project. The branches of the tree represent the youth identified for our Family Finding pilot project. The gold leaves on the tree symbolize the number of
past or present family connections the youth identified at the start of the pilot. This visual presentation portrays just how disconnected the youth in this project were, giving workers additional motivation on an emotional level for their Family Finding work.

Most of the youth in the project had current or past placements at Hillside Family of Agencies as well as at other agencies.

- As of October 1, 2010, there had been 49 Hillside placements in the group for a total of 17,099 days.
- The average was 2 Hillside placements for each youth with an average 349 days per placement.
- By March 23, 2011 the number of Hillside placement had increased by 3 to a total of 52.
The County and Medicaid costs as of October 1, 2010 was $4,677,693, and the educational costs for those that attended Hillside Campus Schools was $757,350.00 for a total cost of $5,435,043 for the Hillside family of Agency placements.

As of 3/23/2011 the county and Medicaid costs for placements had increased to $5,373,600 while the education costs for the students in Hillside Campus Schools was $875,500 for a total of $6,249,100 in placement costs.

Extrapolating these costs to the 168 non-HFA placements of the youth can give some idea of the magnitude of the cost of care for these children.

What the numbers can never convey, however, is the devastating effect of being cut-off from the normal family experience during the crucial years of a child’s development. The stories of these 24 youth and others like them provide a clear picture of the personal price paid by them. These stories must instill a sense of commitment – a sense of urgency in the professionals involved in the foster care system. For these young people connecting with life-time family and other supports is too crucial to wait another day, another week, another year, ten years... This sense of urgency provides a driving force behind all Family Finding work. Indeed, during all training and review sessions, Mr. Campbell imbued this sense of urgency in his teaching and mentoring, always helping workers seek out the next action to take in order to accomplish the following six steps of the Family Finding process.

**Family Finding’s Six Steps**

Family Finding challenges workers to find and engage lifetime supports for youth and families using the six-step framework. These steps are Discovery, Engagement, Planning Decision Making, Evaluation, and Follow-up/Support.

Although the steps may be iterative, the process flows from expanding the pool of possible resources for each youth through Discovery, and from this expanded pool finding and engaging those people who are willing and able to be lifetime supports for the youth and family at various levels of involvement.

**Step 1 Discovery:**

During Discovery, workers gather information about family members from the youth, other workers and other known and available family members. Armed with this information, workers use on-line people search tools to locate as many more family members as possible. The goal of this step is to locate for each youth at least 40 family or community members who have been in the past and/or may be in the future key supports to the youth and his caregivers as lifetime network members. Locating as many family members as possible expands the pool of potential lifetime network members for the youth and provides a foundation for creating more options for support and planning for the future.

Using Mobility Mapping, a technique for supporting Discovery, a worker guides a youth in making a picture or map of remembered past locations and relationships. Mr. Campbell introduced Mobility Mapping to our Family Finding workers to enable them to
help the youth access more remote memories regarding past important connections in their lives.

The underlying message of Discovery is that almost every child has untapped resources and unexplored options for support. This step begins the reconceptualization of the ultimate responsibility for the child as belonging to the family rather than to professionals or “the system.”

**During Discovery:**
- 1008 potential lifetime network members were found for an average of 42 per youth. The range of discovered potential network members was from 8 to 150.
- Twenty of the 24 youth (83%) did Mobility Mapping with their workers.

Discovery can be an iterative process as the identification of family members often leads to the identification of more family members.

*At the start of Family Finding, we had identified 10 relatives for Tristan: mother, father, maternal grandmother, sister, paternal uncle and spouse, two cousins, and two of mom’s cousins. Seventeen more relatives were found during the discovery phase for a total of 27 relatives. Because Tristan had been separated from family for so long, making contact with these relatives was a very slow and discouraging process. During our struggle to locate these out of state relatives we asked Mr. Campbell for advice. Mr. Campbell suggested that we apply “The Rule of Three” and find at least three people who were willing to make a commitment to Tristan. We found five. ...Tristan was happy to have people to call when others in the group home make calls to their families.*

**Step 2: Engagement**
Engagement is the process of contacting and sorting through all the people identified at the start or in Discovery to find those who are capable of and interested in participating in planning and decision making for the youth and/or family. During Engagement, workers connect with the discovered family and community members on a deeper level, using individualized engagement strategies and enlisting the support of as many family and community members important to the youth as possible and appropriate. The worker prepares these family and community members so that they can participate in the subsequent Family Finding steps and provide support to the young person through committed engagement.

**During Engagement:**
- Workers engaged 226 Planning/Decision Team members – an average of 9.5 per youth. The range was 0 to 26. However, the youth for whom no family members were engaged had found a potential adoptive resource by means of a chronicle. (See below for more information on chronicles.)
- 110 Lifetime Network members made commitments to the youth – an average of 4.5 per youth.

*Christopher’s aunt and uncle for both the maternal and paternal sides of the family became engaged in planning for Christopher. Both sets of relatives opened their homes to him during family gatherings and agreed to stay in contact with him regularly. The*
paternal uncle and aunt stated that they had had frequent contact with Christopher prior to his placement – Family Finding has brought about the possibility of this bond being reestablished. Christopher’s therapist is more hopeful for him now that his family supports have increased. He will have family gatherings and visits to look forward to and a probable increasing motivation to engage in treatment as a result.

**Chronicles:**
Often during the Discovery and Engagement steps the timing is such that the people found and engaged cannot meet or talk directly with the youth at that time. As a result, these people may focus less on the youth as a whole person and more on his or her current situation. They may see a ‘placement’ or ‘one of those foster care kids’ rather than a young person as an individual with a unique personality and a variety of qualities, talents, and interests. Chronicles, specially made videos of the youth, are important tools to help family or community members experience a more meaningful picture of the youth. In the Chronicles the youth talk about who they are, their lives, their wishes and hopes in response to an interviewer’s questions. Chronicles are especially valuable for youth who currently have few, if any, family resources and are seeking a reintroduction to identified family members or an adoptive family. While not every youth needs or is willing to have a chronicle completed, when appropriate, chronicles provide very powerful messages regarding both the longing and the resiliency of these youth.

At the end of the Family Finding pilot, 18 or 75% of our youth had Chronicles completed.

Chronicle excerpts:
Steven: If I found a family for myself I’d probably be happy because I haven’t really had a family who has always been there. My family would be honest. The house would be clean. They would always be there if I need somebody to talk to. If you think about a family you think about people who have time; you’re always with them during the holidays. I never had the experience of that. I’m never with my mother, never with my father. My brother comes from Florida. He visits and then leaves. That’s all I know about family. Like one time I was at my friend’s house for Christmas and his whole family was there. They set a place for me, and we ate right there. (Interviewer: Were they laughing and having fun?) Steven: Yes, I’ve never seen people like that before.

Claudia: My favorite president is Theodore Roosevelt... he seems very determined, like me...My life started out pretty rough, but I didn’t try to let that bring me down and stop me from doing what I want to do. I didn’t want to be known as a statistic, like growing up in the system and stuff. I have a lot of big dreams and goals. I’m very determined and wanted to achieve them.

Peter: I am most proud of my ability to help people. If I see somebody who’s upset and feeling down I try to help them out, try to help them solve their problems. I do that a lot especially at the agency. ... (Interviewer: What advice would you give someone going through the same things that you have been going through?) Peter: To keep their head up, to never give up and to trust in and love the people around you. Surround yourself with people that bring out your best qualities...Don’t let yourself be led astray into doing things you know you shouldn’t be doing.
Because Chronicles are such powerful communication tools, Hillside has invested in the video equipment and expertise to produce Chronicles for the many Hillside programs across the state and for other agencies interested in using these tools for finding adoptive families or re-engaging a child’s known family members. A number of Chronicles from Hillside Family of Agencies can be viewed at http://www.adooptionchronicles.com.

**Step 3: Planning**
During this step, workers schedule and hold Blended Perspective meetings with the people mobilized during Engagement to focus on planning for the successful future of the youth. The intention is for the meeting to have representation from both the mother’s and father’s side of the family with at least eight to ten family and/or other connected resources for the youth attending. The team members educate each other about the youth’s essential, lifelong need for support and affection. Youth must have a voice in the process. Of primary importance is the youth’s need for a family to live with and an enduring support network. Planning is done on a “plans fail, our children do not” basis. The key outcomes of this step are the occurrence of at least one Blended Perspective meeting and working with the family to list the youth’s strengths and unmet needs so that the family can begin to identify ways they can work together to help the youth. As a result of a Blended Perspective meeting, willing and appropriate family and community members coalesce into a Decision Making Team and begin to move towards creating a life-time network for the youth. Moving from Engagement to Planning is sometimes a challenging. To be successful, workers must sometimes overcome system barriers and divisive family dynamics that can delay the process.

**During Planning:**
- 22 of the 24 youth (92%) had at least one Blended Perspective meeting. (Of the two youth without a Blended Perspective meeting, one youth was reluctant to participate and preferred to act independently, and one youth was held up in the Discovery step due to system barriers including his county’s reluctant to allow engagement of family members.)
- 22 (92%) had an unmet needs statement completed by the family.

*The blended perspective meeting did a lot to change the opinions of those in control of Joel’s safety and helped open up opportunities to engage non-service providers in his life. As a result Joel’s sister became engaged with him, allowing Joel to take a trip to have a visit with his sister. The siblings took part in many activities, interacted more than either one usually does. Joel talks about maintaining email communication with his sister.*

**Step 4: Decision Making**
During this step, the Family/Community team, with the social worker, makes timely decisions that provide the youth with enduring plans for affection and belonging. The Decision Making team meets with sense of urgency and must be fully and candidly informed regarding the needs of a youth and expected consequences of not having a ‘safe forever’ family. The team is prepared to make key, informed decisions about the youth’s future, including his or her safety, physical and emotional well-being and belonging in a life-time family. Long term placement without legal permanency is not a successful outcome for Decision Making.
During Decision Making:
- 16 of 24 youth (67%) had Decision Making meetings held. (In addition to the two youth mentioned above in the planning step, one youth left services following his Blended Perspective meeting. Another youth went AWOL from services. Four other youth were participating on this step at the end of Family Finding)

Albert’s family was able to come together in both a Blended Perspective and Decision Making meeting to begin safety planning for him. The family has begun to discuss how to solve their conflict with each other through improved communication and to recognize that this impacts how Albert is doing. He has begun to have phone calls with his half-sister and has begun to have regular visitation with his father and paternal grandmother. He has been more motivated to complete his treatment and more open to talking about what support he needs from his family to be successful upon his return to the community. The family has been able to supervise and support Albert for overnight visits since Family Finding has begun.

Step 5: Evaluation
The goal of the Evaluation step is the production of an inclusive, individualized and unconditional plan to achieve legal and emotional permanency with a time plan for completion. This step entails asking the Decision Making team to answer the following questions.
- If our first plan fails will the youth return to the foster care system?
- Have we identified an adequate level of enduring support for the youth and caregivers?
- Has team created a plan that team is willing to support if plan A fails? Are there at least 3 options: Plan A, Plan B and Plan C?
- Is there a plan and a commitment to reconvene in response to threats to the youth’s safety and stability?
- Has a member of the team been selected to organize and facilitate future meetings?

During Evaluation:
- 16 youth have a plan for continued engagement of the team in place.
- 15 youth currently have 3 permanency options specified.
- 3 have 2 permanency options specified.
- 6 have 1 permanency option specified.
- 22(92 %) had a plan and commitment to reconvene in response to safety and stability concerns.

Tyreke’s birth mother was a full participant in the process and was on board with making a back-up plan for Tyreke in case he could not return home. At the same time she was able to complete services she needed to and demonstrate parenting skills so that he could return home during the process. As a result of family finding, however, she now has a natural support team around her to help her with the care of her children in an effort to prevent them from returning to foster care. Her mother has moved in with her for this purpose. Tyreke is happy to be home and his behaviors de-escalated the more time he spent with his mother.
**Step 6: Follow-up on supports**

The goal of this step is to have the Decision Making teams actively support the youth and caregivers successfully access and use services, supports and key relationships, emphasizing natural and community supports that are normative and enduring. Paid services are considered temporary and not as a basis for lifelong relationships. This is an ongoing process of providing support for newly formed or strengthened relationships and empowering the family to assume greater and greater responsibility for the youth and his or her future.

*During Family Finding, Alaiya’s foster mother made the decision to adopt Alaiya despite her concerns about nearing retirement age. She was able to make this decision due to the support that would be available and organized through the Family Finding process. The adoptive mother’s fears regarding her age and her ability to care for Alaiya in the long term were helped by mapping plans B & C. Alaiya and her foster mother are both more openly affectionate now that they now are a forever family, and her foster mother talks about being happy about the ongoing adoption support she will be receiving and because she is aware that Alaiya will have long term needs met.*

Our Family Finding tree was much healthier at the end of the pilot project. Youth who were previously disconnected now have a lifetime network of support. The different colored leaves represent different types of relationships with the youth. Starting with known relatives signified by the golden leaves we began searching for other sources of support. The orange leaves stand for professionals who work with the youth. The green leaves are found family members and other community members important in the life of the child. Some of these people became team members, represented by the yellow leaves. They participated in meetings where decisions were made about the youth’s future and lifetime network. The deep orange oak leaves represent members of the child’s lifetime network.
Our Four Questions
At the beginning of the Family Finding Pilot we wanted to answer four questions:

- Does Family Finding make a positive difference in the lives of children and youth?
- Is Family Finding a practice that our direct service workers can learn, apply and find helpful in achieving more rewarding outcomes for children and youth?
- What time commitment does Family Finding require from front line workers?
- What are the potential financial effects of introduction of family finding across our agencies?

At the end of the Pilot we revisited these questions to evaluate our experience.

Does Family Finding make a positive difference in the lives of children and youth?
At the start of the Pilot, workers had identified 24 youth whose permanency options were bleak. When evaluating the outcomes for the individual youth we found that 23 of the 24 had at least some level of increased family connections and family involvement in their lives and permanency planning for these children had been transformed from an unfocused generic goal to specific, concrete plans. Although not all the youth were living with a birth or adoptive family at the conclusion of the pilot, all but one had family and/or adoptive resources identified and involved with them. Unfortunately, for one youth the Family Finding process was derailed by the county who would not allow the process to continue beyond the Discovery step. A table with the Family Finding status, living situation and family involvement level for each youth at the end of the Pilot is below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Family Finding Step Status</th>
<th>Living Situation</th>
<th>Family Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alaiya</td>
<td>Completed: Support</td>
<td>Adoptive Home</td>
<td>Life-time back-up support team of extended adoptive family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyreke</td>
<td>Completed: Support</td>
<td>Birth Mother</td>
<td>Extended family support for mother. Extended family is committed to assume parenting if needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sebastian</td>
<td>Completed: Support</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Reconnection and with adoptive father. Reconnection and support from birth mother and father. Reconnection to other maternal and paternal extended family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diamond</td>
<td>Completed: Support</td>
<td>Adoptive Home</td>
<td>Multiple supports from extended adoptive family members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Travis</td>
<td>Completed: Support (Awaiting move to another facility to be closer to family)</td>
<td>OPWDD Facility</td>
<td>Reconnection to out-of-state birth family and siblings. Will move closer to them for in-person visits. For now, contact via internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Completed: Support</td>
<td>Foster Care</td>
<td>Foster Family has signed permanency pact with commitment from extended foster family for life-time support. Reconnection with birth father and siblings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albert</td>
<td>Completed: Support</td>
<td>Birth Mother</td>
<td>Reconnection with paternal side of family. Father has become potential back-up permanency plan. Paternal visits set up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joel</td>
<td>Completed: Support</td>
<td>OPWDD Facility</td>
<td>Reconnection with out-of-state bio sister and her adoptive family and visited with them. Continues contact via internet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>Summary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Precious</td>
<td>Completed: Support</td>
<td>OCFS Group Home</td>
<td>Multiple adoptive resources identified including out-of-state relatives. Reconnection with birth mother. Has daily phone contact with mother, siblings and other relatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayne</td>
<td>Completed: Support</td>
<td>Residential Placement</td>
<td>Re-established family connections with increased family involvement. Family visits went from none to a visit every 2 weeks with daily email contact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry</td>
<td>Completed: Support</td>
<td>Residential Placement</td>
<td>Reconnection with both birth parents with holiday visits with family. Long-term trial discharge to bio mother planned with father co-parenting. Older sister to provide respite and back-up living arrangements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tristan</td>
<td>Completed: Support</td>
<td>Residential Placement</td>
<td>Relatives in another state identified as three permanency resources: an uncle, and aunt, and grandparents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>Completed: Support</td>
<td>Group Home</td>
<td>Now has regular home visits with birth mother. Discharge plan is to her with extended family members and former foster parents as backup.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Continuing: Evaluation Step</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>Planned discharge to his birth mother with aunt and uncle as additional resources for him.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>Continuing: Evaluation Step</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>Sixteen family members attended Blended Perspective meeting. An aunt has been identified as potential adoptive resource.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassidy</td>
<td>Continuing: Evaluation Step</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>Reconnection with siblings and several potential adoptive resources identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Continuing: Decision Making Step</td>
<td>Birth Family</td>
<td>Returned to birth family with more extended family supports in place. Reconnection with numerous older siblings that she had never known.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>Continuing: Decision Making Step</td>
<td>Foster Care</td>
<td>Reconnection with family members with increased contact with birth mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Continuing: Decision Making Step</td>
<td>Foster Care</td>
<td>Adoption chronicle viewed and potential foster family identified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyquan</td>
<td>Continuing: Decision Making Step</td>
<td>Transitional Living for Independent Youth</td>
<td>Reconnection with father, older siblings, aunt and uncle. Another team meeting planned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coral</td>
<td>Continuing: Engagement</td>
<td>Non-family Caretaker</td>
<td>Connections to non-family caretaker strengthened. At this point, searching independently for birth father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hector</td>
<td>Not Completed: Left Services following Planning</td>
<td>AWOL</td>
<td>Twenty-three family members Discovered. Three attended blended perspective meeting. Further involvement awaits his return to service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diego</td>
<td>Not Completed: Left services following Planning</td>
<td>Independent – Job Corps</td>
<td>Reconnection with and went to live with birth father. Reconnection with cousins and maternal aunt. Former foster family also became life-time resource.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippe</td>
<td>On-Hold</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>Family members Discovered, but county has barred effort to move family finding process forward.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Is Family Finding a practice that our direct service workers can learn, apply and find helpful in achieving more rewarding outcomes for children and youth?
During the Pilot Project workers were asked to rate the effectiveness of Family Finding:

- 14 workers rated Family Finding as **highly effective**.
- 9 workers rated Family Finding as **somewhat effective**.
- 1 worker rated Family Finding as **no more effective** than other practices generally used.
- 0 workers rated Family Finding as **less effective** than other practices they have used.

A number of Family Finding workers wrote about their experience with the Family Finding Process:

_As seems to be the case with many individuals who participate in Family Finding, optimism among staff for Joel and other clients has improved. Several staff have asked for work to find families for specific clients and the process seems to have improved perceptions about the Individual Residential Alternative placements and the need for youth to have consistent networks._

_The Family Finding Initiative has proven to be very beneficial in permanency and treatment outcomes in Precious’ case. The program treatment team feels confident that the initiative could change the lives of other freed clients by incorporating a sense of hope and family connectedness within their treatment._

_Through the Family Finding project, Travis recently had a visit with one brother that he has not seen in nearly two years and talked with another brother he has not seen in more than 8 years. The boys had a wonderful reunion with plans to meet on a regular basis. Travis’s Family Finding worker had a conversation with his birthmother and is planning to meet her to talk about extended family. Although it is likely that Travis will require adult group care, his brothers are very interested in remaining connected and involved with Travis and helping to provide input into his continued care. Travis’s mom is also hoping to play a role._

_Family Finding provided the opportunity for Sebastian to reconnect with his family. His Family Finding worker was able to locate Sebastian’s adoptive father who had not seen Sebastian for 8 years. Sebastian is SO happy to be back in contact with his father. The future is so much more hopeful for Sebastian now, with a place to live and a family to call his own, his motivation to maintain positive motion is greatly increased._

_As a result of Family Finding Wayne’s family is becoming much more involved in Wayne’s treatment. Family Finding has helped tremendously in re-establishing those familial connections severed long ago, which ultimately might make the difference in turning hopes for Wayne into realities. Wayne’s family has begun the process of taking ownership over his treatment. The Family Group Decision Making Team has made a commitment to strengthen their life long connection and improve Wayne’s quality of life. Wayne’s family had walked away a long time ago, frustrated by a system that all too often shuts families out of the lives of their children. Many members of Wayne’s family reported at the Blended Perspectives meeting that Wayne had become a stranger to_
them. Our collective hope for Wayne is that he becomes a significant member of his own family in both their hearts and minds, and becomes their child once again.

Following the pilot project the Family Finding supervisory group reconvened to reflect on their experience and what they had learned. The following points were the most significant lessons learned:

- A change in worker during Family Finding significantly impacts and slows down the progress of Family Finding efforts.
- Any change in placement or discharge from agency during the Family Finding process makes continuing the process extremely challenging and slows down the process.
- The commitment of the individual worker and the worker’s supervisor to Family Finding has a strong impact on the pace and success of the work.
- Support of the county worker for Family Finding work is necessary to move forward with Family Finding efforts.
- Staff believe in Family Finding principles but sometimes lack confidence in their ability to do the work.
- Staff would like more training in some of the nuts and bolts of the process, such as how to conduct a Blended Perspectives Meeting and how to complete each individual step of the process.

What time commitment does Family Finding require from front line workers?
During the pilot workers were asked monthly to estimate how much time they had invested in Family Finding activities. We were interested in several figures – total hours spent working on behalf of the Family Finding youth and families; number of hours spent in activities providing a direct benefit to the youth and families (phone calls to family members, family team meetings, etc.) and the number of hours spent overcoming barriers to Family Finding (legal issues, competing program goals, system sluggishness etc.).

- The total number of hours workers spent for Family Finding at the conclusion of the pilot was 1529 for an average 64 per youth. The range of hours: 12 to 228.
- The total direct benefit hour was 1086 or 71% of the total hours.
- The average number of direct benefit hours per youth was 45 with a range of 10 to 158.
- The total hours spent overcoming system barriers: 443 or 29% of the total hours.
- The average number of hours spent overcoming system barriers per worker: 18 with a range of 4 to 89.

What are the potential financial effects of introduction of family finding across our agencies?
During our Pilot we collected data on placement days and placement costs for Hillside Family of Agency placements for the youth in the pilot. Ordinarily, across a cohort of youth with few permanency options and few discharge resources we would expect to see costs increasing on a consistent daily basis. (Recall the SCAA Policy Brief cited previously: “The longer a child stays in foster care the less likely that a child will return home.”)
The application of Family Finding with our pilot cohort introduced additional dynamics which on an overall basis have an impact on ongoing costs. As connections were made with families, the youth generally responded positively from a behavioral standpoint, enabling transfers to lower levels of care. As permanency is achieved for some youth, costs are no longer incurred or are greatly diminished.

To begin to measure the cost impact of Family Finding, we determined the aggregate cost of placement for the 24-youth pilot cohort as invested with Hillside Family of Agencies at specific points in time. We have no information on costs of care for these youth outside of Hillside. We also identified the total number of days of placement for the cohort.

In order to achieve visibility into the cost dynamics of the cohort, we constructed a financial measure representing the average daily placement cost by youth for the pilot cohort as a whole. By dividing the difference in total cohort costs over time by the number of days between data points and the number of youth in the cohort, we can identify the extent to which the benefits of Family Finding reduce system costs.

Our results showed that the placement rate and cost increase rate decreased steadily over the three follow-up data points.

**Cost and Rate of HFA Placements Over Time**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Data Collection</th>
<th>Baseline 8.11.10</th>
<th>10.1.10</th>
<th>2.28.11</th>
<th>3.23.11</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Cohort Cost of Placement at Data Point</td>
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<td>$6,171,535</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Calendar Days Between Data Points</td>
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<td>52</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cost Difference Between Data Points</td>
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<td>$77,567</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Average Daily Cohort Placement Cost Per Youth</td>
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<td>$262**</td>
<td>$216**</td>
<td>$161**</td>
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</table>

* Baseline average daily placement cost calculated by dividing total cohort placement costs by the number of days of placement and the number of youth in the cohort.

** Average daily placement cost for the measurement interval calculated by dividing total cohort placement costs by the number of calendar days between placement and the number of youth in the cohort.

Note: For cost calculations, 21 youth were used instead of 24 to exclude the impact of 1 youth who went AWOL and 2 youths who transferred to a lower level of residential care outside of HFA over the course of the pilot.

**The Future**

As the result of our experience with Family Finding during this project Hillside is moving ahead with plans to extend the application of Family Finding throughout the Hillside Family of Agencies, making it part of our culture through widespread training and
practice with many more positive outcomes to come. In addition, Hillside has
developed the capacity to assist other agencies, either by providing a complete menu of
Family Finding services for identified youth, consulting on specific Family Finding steps
such as the Blended Perspective Meeting, or providing Family Finding training to agency
staff.