



QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CENTER
ON ENGAGING YOUTH IN
FINDING PERMANENCY

Program Implementation Primer

**Rhode Island: Permanency Through
Enhanced Case Planning Program**

Program Implementation Primer

Permanency Through Enhanced Case Planning Program

The Quality Improvement Center on Engaging Youth in Finding Permanency (QIC-EY) Program Implementation Primer introduces the Permanency Through Enhanced Case Planning Program and serves as a comprehensive guide for child welfare agencies considering its implementation. Designed for agencies ready to make a meaningful impact, this guide goes beyond a simple overview. It shares the insights and tools needed to assess interest, to ensure infrastructure readiness and to navigate implementation with confidence. It includes the following:

- **Logic Model:** a framework that illustrates how program resources and activities lead to intended outcomes
- **Core Components:** the essential functions and practices that need to be delivered consistently and with fidelity to ensure effectiveness
- **Program Delivery:** the amount and intensity of participant engagement necessary for achieving program success
- **Implementation Supports:** foundational resources that enable high-quality delivery (such as staffing, training, policies, supervision, partnerships and data systems)
- **Evaluation:** systematic measurement of fidelity in program delivery and of outcomes, performed to monitor progress and to demonstrate program impact
- **Implementation Lessons Learned and Tips:** common barriers to implementation and practical strategies for overcoming them
- **Additional Program Materials:** practical aids — program manuals, logic models, fidelity checklists, scripts and other resources — that support consistent and effective delivery

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1. Program Overview

Youth engagement in permanency planning is a critical factor in achieving meaningful and lasting permanency outcomes. When youth engage in these discussions, they gain decision-making skills, develop a sense of agency and become more likely to share information about their relationships and preferences that can support achieving permanency (Augsberger, 2014).

The *Permanency Through Enhanced Case Planning Program* is a structured, youth-centered intervention designed to strengthen permanency outcomes by intentionally engaging youth as active partners in the case planning process. Through participation in the program, youths will

- gain a clear understanding of permanency planning and their role in the process,
- articulate and take ownership of their goals, and
- meaningfully participate in decisions that affect their lives.

Organized in five stages that progress sequentially -- Preparation, Discovery, Case Planning, Check-Ins and 90-Day Reassessments -- this program emphasizes consistent, intentional engagement between youths and their caseworkers. The entire program is grounded in the principle that youths are experts about their own lives and that their ongoing engagement in planning their own permanency can influence positive outcomes, helping youths to achieve long-term stability.

This program is based on the steps in the *Safety Assessment Through Family Engagement (SAFE) Practice Model (Action for Child Protection, 1986)*. It is informed further by the QIC-EY initiative and aligned with the *Transforming Engagement: Keeping Children and Youth at the Center of Our Work* (QIC-EY, 2025) training for child welfare professionals. This combined approach provides youths, caseworkers and supervisors with a shared foundation for authentic engagement with youths throughout the permanency planning process.

“[Participants] feel empowered, they’re seeing that their voice matters and I found that they’re a little more open to talking about more stuff with me.”

- caseworker

2. Program Goals

Youths who understand permanency planning are more likely to share their perspectives, to participate meaningfully in this process that will affect their futures and to identify their supportive connections — all of which increase their likelihood of achieving lasting legal and relational permanency (Farmer, 2008; Friend, 2009; Welti et al., 2021). By embedding authentic, youth-centered practices into routine child welfare practice, the *Permanency Through Enhanced Case Planning Program* supports meaningful and lasting permanency outcomes.

THIS PROGRAM AIMS TO:

- embed authentic engagement with youth as a foundational element of permanency planning and case planning practices;
- support youth understanding of and participation in permanency planning;
- strengthen trust-based partnerships between youths and their caseworkers;
- build youths' agency, voice and ownership of their own goals and futures;
- align case plans with youths' goals, preferences and supportive connections;
- maintain permanency as a consistent focus through the duration of each case; and
- integrate youth-centered engagement into routine, child welfare agency practice, policies and expectations.

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

As a result of participating in the program, youths will have

- a better understanding of their cases and permanency plans;
- increased ownership of their own futures and confidence in their abilities to achieve their goals;
- improved self-advocacy skills;
- improved relationships with their caseworkers; and
- improved alignment of their case plans with the youths' desires, preferences and identified sources of support and strength.

As a result of participating in the program, agency staffs will see

- more case-specific, permanency planning consultations between caseworkers and their supervisors;
- increased use of tools for youth engagement in permanency planning and case planning;
- increased participation by youths in these planning processes;
- improved alignment of permanency and case plans with youths' desires, preferences and sources of support; and
- changes in child welfare philosophy and culture so that the normal practice of agency staff includes enhancing youth engagement in permanency and case planning.

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

The program also aims over time to increase all of the following:

- rates of legal permanency
- presence and quality of relational and cultural permanency
- thoughtful judicial decisions in dependency cases
- stable permanence



“When you put it in their hands and let them know this is your life and I’m here to help you move forward...I think it really hits home... when you are coming to them from that angle, they really trust and believe that you are there to help them”

- caseworker

3. Logic Model

A logic model illustrates how to achieve expected outputs and outcomes of a program through implementation of its core components and activities. A logic model needs to explain clearly how specific activities and services are expected to produce or to influence their associated short- and long-term outcomes.

Agency resources, goals and other factors will impact the logic model. The Additional Program Materials section of this primer includes an example of a logic model, which can be modified to fit a particular agency's specific approach to implementation.



4. Core Components

Core components are critical to the identity and the aim of each program. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (Education Development Center, 2018), “Core components are the most essential and indispensable components of an intervention practice or program.” The core components of the Permanency Through Enhanced Case Planning Program include the following:

Relationship-Centered Support and Building of Connections

This component ensures that each youth receives ongoing support through a consistent, trust-based partnership with an assigned caseworker. The caseworker’s role is to build the youth’s psychological safety, to strengthen the youth’s sense of agency and to support the youth in identifying and sustaining meaningful, supportive relationships with caring adults. This relationship-centered approach provides both emotional and informational scaffolding. The youth-caseworker relationship serves as the primary mechanism for promoting engagement, continuity and permanency-focused actions throughout the program.

Youth Education and Transparency About Case Planning and Permanency

This component provides youths with clear, accurate information – appropriate for each young person’s developmental stage -- about why they are in the child welfare system’s care, their rights, their permanency options, the roles of professionals in their cases, plus how the youths can participate in their own permanency planning. Establishing this shared understanding between

youths and their caseworkers reduces power imbalances, supports informed participation by youths and equips them to engage confidently in case planning and permanency-related decisions.

Youth-Led Goal Setting and Reassessment

This component centers on youth voice and self-determination by enabling and encouraging young people to identify their own needs, priorities and goals. Through structured dialogue and tools for promoting youth voice, youths articulate what matters most to them, regularly revisit and revise their goals and plans as their circumstances change, and reflect on their progress over time. By emphasizing youth voice, this component ensures that planning remains grounded in each youth’s perspective rather than being driven solely by process requirements of the case. Youth-driven reflection reinforces youth ownership, empowerment and meaningful participation throughout the program.

Collaborative Planning and Action

This component translates youth-defined goals into concrete case planning and service delivery. Youths and their caseworkers work together to develop plans and to implement them through action steps that align with each

youth's perspective and priorities. Through coaching, support from resources and shared accountability, this component ensures that youth voice becomes embedded into the daily practice of casework and results in measurable progress toward permanency and stability.

Coaching and Group Consultations

This component supports consistent application of the program model and youth-centered engagement practices in daily casework. Coaching and consultation provide ongoing, structured support to child welfare supervisors and caseworkers by bridging training and practice through micro-learning sessions, group consultations about cases, tip sheets and visual reminders that reinforce key elements of the program model. Coaching and skill development through these brief, targeted learning opportunities strengthen caseworker and supervisor knowledge related to relational permanency, case planning and effective engagement with youth. Optional, quarterly consultations with supervisory involvement may be scheduled at the unit level (e.g., a supervisor and their assigned caseworkers) to review the program model, to support intentional reflection and to apply youth engagement strategies to the problem-solving of active cases. Together, these activities reinforce skill development, maintain visibility of the program model and embed youth-centered engagement practices within routine supervision and casework.

Sequential Program Design

This component ensures that caseworkers use a defined sequence of five stages building progressively on one another to deliver the intervention to participating youths. The program's structure provides for pacing and consistency, allowing youths to increase their understanding, to practice new skills and to revisit their goals in an intentional, supported manner. Adherence to the following sequence is essential

for maintaining program fidelity and achieving meaningful youth engagement and positive permanency outcomes.

STAGE 1: PREPARATION

Preparation begins at the point of case assignment to align supervisory support, caseworker practice and youth understanding. It starts with a joint coaching session between the youth's caseworker, the caseworker's supervisor and a program coach to prepare for relationship-centered engagement with the youth. Supervisory guidance focuses on strategies for building trust. This includes encouraging the caseworker to learn something new about the youth during each contact with the young person. After this initial coaching session, the caseworker meets face-to-face with the youth to introduce the case planning process and to clarify the youth's role in it. During this meeting, the youth needs to receive clear information about youth rights, supports and services available; what to expect from permanency planning and court involvement; and how to prepare for participating in decision-making. Additional meetings between the caseworker and the youth may be needed during the preparation stage to establish rapport and the youth's sense of psychological safety.

STAGE 2: DISCOVERY

The discovery stage focuses on strengthening the caseworker-youth partnership through continued rapport building. In new cases, this stage functions as an initial assessment. In cases in which the caseworker and the youth already have worked together, this stage requires the caseworker to concentrate on learning something new about the youth and to make the youth's engagement in permanency planning a higher priority. In both contexts, the youth functions as the expert and primary source of information on the young person's own life. The caseworker shares clear, developmental-stage appropriate information about the case, the permanency plan and the permanency options available. This includes explaining aspects of the case in which the youth can exert influence

and decision-making power. The caseworker invites the youth to identify persons that the youth would like to involve in case planning because of their importance in the young person's life. The caseworker also explores the youth's goals, desires and preferred medium for communicating as well as any needs for help to obtain legal, relational and cultural permanency. To reinforce that the youth's perspective is valuable, the caseworker needs to document the youth's desires even if they are not immediately actionable. During the discovery stage, the caseworker gives the youth a resource binder, explains its purpose and introduces its contents.

STAGE 3: CASE PLANNING

Case planning centers on a purposeful, face-to-face process in which the caseworker and the youth collaboratively produce a case plan grounded in a future for the youth that takes into account the young person's needs and goals that were identified during the discovery stage. Together, they develop a statement of needs reflecting what matters most to the youth. This statement forms the foundation of the youth's case plan. Then the caseworker coaches the youth to translate needs into self-defined goals for relational, legal and cultural permanency. Together, they identify actionable steps to take within the time frame of the intervention. Each step needs to promote a "learning-by-doing" mentality that will empower the youth to take age-appropriate risks and to seize opportunities for developing skills and abilities. The planning process includes identifying and determining how to obtain the material supports that the youth will need to progress from step to step. Deciding on goals important from the youth's perspective may take time, but this process will motivate the youth to make progress toward achieving those goals. Face-to-face visits and other caseworker-youth interactions need to include time set aside for ongoing case planning. Once the plan is finalized, the youth receives a copy.

STAGE 4: CHECK-INS

Regularly scheduled check-ins ensure intentional, ongoing engagement between the caseworker and the youth. Face-to-face meetings occur at least monthly over a three-month period, with check-ins between these meetings via phone, texting or email (based on the youth's preferred medium for communicating). During check-ins, the caseworker uses the case plan to guide dialogues with the youth about goals, progress, barriers and necessary supports. Beyond routine check-ins, these conversations need to support the youth when circumstances change, to reinforce the young person's strengths and to measure progress. Permanency discussions continue during each check-in, exploring the youth's connections, supports and age-appropriate opportunities. Before and after each in-person contact between the caseworker and the youth, the supervisor coaches the caseworker to act on the steps described in the permanency plan. The check-in stage repeats itself following each 90-day reassessment to support continuous youth engagement and progress implementing the case plan.

STAGE 5: 90-DAY REASSESSMENTS

This stage consists of a youth-driven, face-to-face meeting between the youth and the caseworker at the 90-day and the 180-day points of the program to review progress toward the goals in the youth's permanency plan. These meetings focus on celebrating progress, identifying barriers, resetting goals and continuing meaningful conversations about permanency. The youth sets the agenda while the caseworker prepares by asking in advance what the young person wants to talk about during the reassessment. Together, they review the youth's entire plan and log the steps that have been reached and the youth's needs that have been fully or partially met. They also determine new steps or revise existing ones, based on changes in the youth's circumstances and case plan. Involving the youth in the reassessment process and focusing on the youth's goals ensure the young person's continuing engagement and ownership of the plan.

5. Program Delivery (Intensity and Duration)

The *Permanency Through Enhanced Case Planning Program* is designed for delivery over a period of nine months. However, the check-ins and 90-day reassessment stages could become circular processes for revisiting and refining goals for the duration of each youth's case. The program can be integrated into existing caseworker practice, such as monthly home visits, scheduled contacts with youths outside of their homes, plus meetings with supervisors. The pace of the stages minimizes the need for scheduling additional meetings between regular contacts with youths and other job duties. This emphasizes that the program promotes a change in approach for caseworkers, not an increase in their responsibilities.

Each stage builds upon the immediately preceding one to strengthen the caseworker-youth partnership through intentional, trust-building engagement. All five stages consistently reinforce permanency planning through direct conversations about permanency goals and discussions with youths about their supportive connections, preferences and goals for their futures. Maintaining this focus helps youths to develop ownership of their futures and self-confidence in their skills and abilities to achieve goals. The program's pace also allows time for youths' perspectives regarding permanency to evolve. By keeping permanency at the forefront of routine caseworker-youth interactions, the program supports identifying and strengthening meaningful relationships that eventually may translate into legal permanency for youths.

The program consists of five stages delivered sequentially, primarily through in-person meetings.

The complete delivery plan includes the following:

- When a case is assigned, the caseworker meets with a designated, frontline supervisor and a program coach.
- The caseworker and the youth meet in person at least twice during the preparation and discovery stages to introduce the case planning process, to clarify the youth's role in planning and to explore the youth's needs. They may need additional weekly meetings to build a trusting relationship.
- The caseworker and the youth meet in person at least once to work together drafting a statement of the youth's goals and producing a permanency plan to reach them.
- They meet in person at least three more times over a three-month period. Typically, these meetings take place during monthly home visits as regularly scheduled check-ins. Check-in contacts also may occur via phone, texting or email communications between visits. Following each 90-day reassessment, these check-ins continue.
- In a face-to-face, reassessment meeting at the 90-day point of their relationship, the caseworker and the youth review progress and adjust goals for the youth's case plan. In another 90 days, after the second round of check-ins, they conduct another in-person reassessment together.

Estimated Total Contact Time:

- **Caseworker-Supervisor-Coach Meetings:** approximately 1 to 2 hours during the preparation stage to prepare for relationship-centered engagement with the youth. The caseworker and the immediate supervisor may meet periodically for consultations, as needed, for the duration of the case.
- **Caseworker-Youth Meetings:** approximately 11 hours total across the preparation, discovery, case planning, check-in and reassessment stages.

Program Timeline

STAGE	ACTIVITY	ESTIMATED DURATION	FREQUENCY	TYPICAL TIMING
1	Preparation: Caseworker, Supervisor and Coach	1 to 2 hours	One time	First 30 days
1	Preparation: Caseworker and Youth	1 hour	At least one in-person meeting	First 30 days
2	Discovery	1 hour	At least one in-person meeting	First 30 days
3	Case Planning	1 hour	At least one in-person meeting	Days 31 – 60
4	Check-Ins	1 hour	At least one in-person meeting each month	Months 3 – 5 and 6 - 8
5	90-Day Reassessment	1 to 1.5 hours	At least one in-person meeting	End of months 5 and 8

Although the program was designed for implementation over a defined period, its final two stages function as a cyclical process rather than a linear sequence. This makes the program adaptable to cases of variable lengths and complexities. The program design provides for continuous opportunities to reinforce youth-centered engagement practices and to strengthen them over time. These design elements combine to stress that the program needs to extend beyond a time-limited model in order to embed youth engagement as a lasting, normalized practice within the agency's culture.



6. Implementation Supports

Staffing

Effective program delivery requires qualified administrative and program staff who have the skills to support youth engagement, to facilitate orientation activities and to manage logistics. To implement this program effectively, child welfare agencies need to determine the necessary number of staff members, to consider staff-to-youth ratios and to plan for recruitment and retention. They also need to anticipate potential barriers to implementation, such as turnover, limited expertise and competing responsibilities.

Caseworkers and their supervisors currently on an agency's staff may implement the *Permanency Through Enhanced Case Planning Program*. Caseworkers working with youth typically hold entry-level positions and, at a minimum, possess a bachelor's degree in social work, psychology, sociology, child development or a closely related field. To support meaningful engagement with youths and effective implementation of the program model, an ideal youth-to-caseworker ratio of approximately 15:1 is recommended. Caseworker supervisors, who oversee case assignments and provide monthly coaching and supervision related to youth engagement, also generally hold a bachelor's degree in social work or a related field. They typically have at least three years of relevant experience, ideally within a public, child welfare system.

Given the demands on child welfare professionals, agencies may benefit from dedicating a staff person – or hiring one – specifically for the program's role of coach. A dedicated coach helps to ensure consistent support for caseworkers and to sustain changes made to child welfare practice by the program implementation.

A program coach ideally would fit into a layer between supervisors and administrators. The coach's duties include handling day-to-day business of the program, such as discussing youth engagement with supervisors, conducting micro-learning sessions about youth engagement and facilitating group case consultations quarterly. The program coach would need a master's degree in social work and at least two years of relevant supervisory experience.

Training and Coaching

Effective implementation of a program requires both training and coaching to ensure program fidelity and optimal quality. Plans for training need to describe the program's curriculum and to detail who will be trained, who will conduct the training, the length of the initial training and any booster sessions, plus certification requirements that may apply. Coaching and supervision provide support for staff members as they apply the model in practice; they also maintain adherence to program standards. Coaching may include individual or group sessions scheduled at regular intervals. These sessions need clearly defined start and end times. Agency leaders need to determine the structure and frequency of coaching sessions to ensure that their staff members receive support consistently while delivering the program as intended.

Training is essential to make sure that staff members understand the core components of the *Permanency Through Enhanced Case Planning Program* and can deliver each element with fidelity.

A program-specific training has been developed for key program staff to introduce the model, to review its core components and to let these staff members practice applying implementation strategies. The program-specific training establishes a shared foundation for authentic engagement with youth within the context of case planning. To support consistent implementation, the program model calls for caseworker supervisors as well as caseworkers assigned to youths to participate in the training.

Staff members may need additional training to ensure that they have the knowledge and skills to support effective engagement. For example, the QIC-EY's *Transforming Engagement: Keeping Children and Youth at the Center of Our Work* (QIC-EY, 2025) training provides practical strategies for achieving authentic engagement with youth. It equips caseworkers and other staff to support youth participation in permanency planning and decision-making.

Caseworkers alone cannot achieve sustainable changes in agency culture. Therefore, ongoing coaching becomes critical to support implementation. Supervisors trained in the program model coach caseworkers for the duration of the program. Their coaching reinforces expectations and supports the application of program components in real time. Coaching occurs during the preparation phase, then becomes embedded in regular supervision. Supervisors assist their caseworkers in navigating the program's five stages, addressing challenges to implementation and maintaining a consistent focus on youth-led permanency planning. This coaching, along with group consultations, can sustain skill development, mitigate learning loss and support consistent application of the program, particularly in environments with high turnover of caseworkers and frequent shifts in case assignments.

Additional coaching support through group case consultations and micro-learning sessions focuses on youth engagement and permanency-related topics. Quarterly case consultations are recommended. Ideally, a senior supervisor or a designated program coach delivers this supplemental coaching.

Policies and Procedures

Clear policies and procedures are essential to support implementation of a program and to ensure fidelity in its delivery. This includes documentation of any adaptations required to integrate the model into existing agency practices. It also includes identification of potential barriers that could hinder implementation. Establishing formal guidance helps staff members to understand expectations, promotes consistency across the intervention group and supports successful delivery of the selected model.

The program must be supported and integrated within the agency's overall policies and practice expectations. It is important to consider whether policy modifications or additions are needed to administer this program.

Detailed procedural guidance for the program can be found in the Program Manual, located in the Additional Program Materials section of this primer. Some general considerations are noted below.

A new policy may be necessary to define the role and the responsibilities of the program coach. New policies also may serve to clarify expectations for the content of each program stage and its place in the five-stage sequence. Determining which information can be shared with youths regarding their permanency and case plans – and how to share it appropriately – may pose a barrier to implementation. This is because of frequent misunderstandings and lack of clarity about what should be shared. Clarifying these protocols and providing staff members with clear guidance promote consistency in program delivery and ensure a transparent, comprehensive, information-sharing process.

Fidelity

To ensure implementation of this program as intended, fidelity measurements and protocols are used to assess whether practitioners are delivering the core components of the model as designed. Fidelity tracking needs to include forms to capture key details about each session and meeting, such as start and end times, who delivered the program, the delivery format (in person, virtual, hybrid) and the time spent preparing for and following up after the session.

Fidelity tools, such as checklists, track completion of key activities, participation in required meetings, plus the frequency and the type of each contact between caseworkers and the youths assigned to them. Indicators for each stage enable staff members to assess whether essential steps in the program have occurred, including preparation meetings, youth engagement activities, development of goals and the case plan, and reassessment of progress and goals.

Fidelity tools also capture reflections and explanations of factors that may influence program delivery, such as notable observations or missed activities. Participation in micro-learning sessions and group case consultations is tracked as well. The fidelity tools promote consistency in program delivery and support continuous program improvement while ensuring that each youth receives ongoing preparation and opportunities to express one's own voice throughout the program.

Fidelity to the program is defined not only by completion of activities but also by consistent implementation of the core components. In particular, fidelity tools need to measure the extent to which the case planning process reflects expression of youth voice, partnership between the youth and the caseworker and ongoing youth engagement.

Data Systems

Data systems are necessary to support program implementation and to ensure accurate monitoring of fidelity and outcomes. Effective data systems require clear processes for collecting and managing information about the delivery of core components as well as indicators of program impact and satisfaction. Necessary modifications to hardware, software and data format should be identified early, along with potential barriers to timely implementation (e.g., limitations of system flexibility or competing priorities of information technology staff). Well-defined expectations and technological tools promote consistent data collection, strengthen accountability and support continuous evaluation of the selected model.

An effective data system for case planning aligns with the program model's timeline, tracks goal reassessments and produces printed case plans that are easily understood by youth. It also captures data about delivery of the program's core components, such as the frequency and the type of caseworker-youth contacts. For example, data recorded would include the number of in-person visits conducted during each stage as well as additional contacts occurring via phone calls, text messages, etc. In addition, an effective data system documents youth engagement activities completed during development of the case plan. Examples of these include providing each youth with a resource binder, helping the youth to identify and to maintain important relationships, developing goals through caseworker-youth collaboration, reviewing the case plan and goals together, and providing the youth with a copy of the finalized plan. An effective data system also records program impact via indicators of the youth's understanding of one's own role in case planning and progress toward achieving permanency goals.

Program Experts

Each program expert brings specialized knowledge, experience or both in the design, implementation and ongoing delivery of the program. Experts may include the model developer, the model purveyor and other individuals who can provide guidance regarding program fidelity, best practices and effective strategies for implementation. Experts also may support adaptation of the program to fit local contexts, including cultural considerations and relational permanency practices. Experts help to ensure that the program is delivered as intended and that the needs of youth and their families are met.

For more information about implementation of the *Permanency Through Enhanced Case Planning Program* in Rhode Island, please contact Jennifer Silva, Senior Casework Supervisor, Department of Children, Youth and Families, at jennifer.silva@dcyf.ri.gov.

Partner Systems and Community Linkages

Successful implementation of a program by child welfare agencies relies on strong partnerships with external systems and collaborators, such as mental health providers, educational institutions, courts, substance use treatment providers and other relevant organizations. Child welfare agencies need to identify partners already engaged with them as well as those to be brought on board. Agency staff also need to determine the strategies, resources and support necessary to engage effectively with these partners. Strong collaboration ensures coordinated services, expands program reach and supports positive outcomes for youth and their families.

Collaboration with court partners, such as Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and Court Improvement Programs (CIP), can strengthen program implementation and normalize practices supporting youth engagement within

court-related processes. Encouraging youths to participate in hearings whenever possible is important because decisions made in court directly impact the young persons' lives. Even when a youth does not attend hearings in person, the young person's voice can be represented. When the young person leads the process of developing a case or transition plan according to the program model, the plan clearly will tell judges what matters most to the youth.

Collaboration with state and local youth advisory boards can strengthen program design and implementation. Youths with lived experience offer critical insights into what meaningful youth engagement looks like in practice. These insights can help to shape training materials for caseworkers and supervisors in addition to resources used by youths who participate in the program.

Other Resources (Meeting Space, Materials, etc.)

Implementation of a program often requires access to tangible resources, including space for orientation sessions and other meetings, materials and supplies for activities, plus technology for virtual or hybrid delivery. Additional considerations may include travel expenses, meals or snacks for participants and help with logistics that contribute to a welcoming and functional environment for staff and youth. Availability of these resources is essential for smooth program operation and participant engagement.

Materials needed for staff training on the program model include folders, pens and printed handouts. Training can be delivered via a PowerPoint presentation. In-person training sessions need adequate meeting room or office space. Virtual or hybrid delivery requires access to appropriate technology and reliable connectivity. Meals or snacks support participant engagement during training sessions.

The coaching component of the program also needs designated space for caseworker

meetings with supervisors as well as for group case consultations and micro-learning sessions. Caseworker-youth meetings held in child welfare agency offices also need appropriate space allocated.

Tip sheets providing concrete examples of program model elements put into practice can be developed or adapted to demonstrate effective implementation for caseworkers and supervisors. Visual reminders of the model, such as posters displayed throughout child welfare offices, reinforce key concepts and promote consistency in practice.

Youths participating in the program receive resource binders containing a list of relevant resources and an introduction to the shared language of case planning. The budget for these binders needs to cover the costs of the binders, section dividers, plus printing and copying. For caseworker-youth meetings held on agency premises, supplies such as fidgets or playing cards support youth comfort and engagement.



7. Evaluation

This program was implemented and rigorously evaluated in Rhode Island, based on a logic model, a theory of change and the following question:

Among youth aged 14-18 in the Rhode Island child welfare system, does exposure to the program improve their odds of experiencing increased, stable permanence when compared with youth who did not receive the program?

To answer this question, a research team carried out a study with a quasi-experimental design in which an intervention group received implementation of the program model and a comparison group received services as usual. The team collected fidelity data from workers in the intervention group to measure and to understand better the delivery of the model. Baseline and follow-up case review forms and administrative data were collected from both groups to learn how the program impacted actual outcomes. The research team also conducted youth satisfaction surveys and youth focus groups to collect feedback from youths about their experiences in the program. Finally, a cost evaluation was performed to understand the cost of implementing and delivering the program. Highlights of the evaluation results can be found on the QIC-EY website: www.qic-ey.org.

8. Implementation Lessons Learned and Tips

Successful implementation of the *Permanency Through Enhanced Case Planning Program* requires thoughtful planning, coordination and clear communication. The following guidance is organized into two parts:

1. Program Planning and Preparation: overarching lessons learned related to setting up the program

2. Stage-Specific Lessons Learned and Tips: practical guidance for implementing each stage of the program, from preparation meetings through both goal reassessments

Program Planning and Preparation

Begin by establishing a strong foundation to ensure smooth execution of the program.

FORMATION OF A PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

Lessons Learned

- A cross-disciplinary planning team strengthens coordination and fosters shared ownership of program implementation.
- Including individuals with lived experience on the planning team improves relevance, messaging and overall program design.
- Early relationship building within the team, and with agency leaders, supports alignment and smooth implementation.
- Clearly defined roles for logistics, content development, youth engagement and evaluation improve efficiency and accountability.
- The cadence of meetings may need to shift over time to stay in rhythm with evolving needs during program implementation

Tips

- Form a planning team that includes:
 - » child welfare professionals
 - » individuals who have lived experience
 - » agency leaders
- Clarify roles and responsibilities early to streamline communication and to reduce duplication of effort.
- Establish a schedule for regular meetings that allows flexibility to adjust their frequency as implementation progresses.
- Use team meetings to monitor progress, to address challenges and to maintain alignment among team members.

IDENTIFICATION OF KEY PARTNERS

Lessons Learned

- Understanding of the program and commitment to its objectives by agency leadership directly impacts staff buy-in and the overall success of implementation.
- Caseworkers and supervisors are critical to day-to-day implementation. They need to understand clearly how the program aligns with their roles and the expectations that it places on them.
- Individuals who have lived experience offer essential insights into what meaningful engagement with youth looks like in practice. These insights need to inform program design as well as implementation.

Tips

- Strengthen the buy-in of agency leaders by providing these leaders with early orientation and ongoing communications.
- Identify and engage with key partners early to build shared understanding, ownership and alignment. These partners include the following:
 - » caseworkers
 - » supervisors
 - » agency leaders
 - » Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) staff
- Maintain regular communication with partners. This will smooth the process of making program adjustments, when needed.
- Involve individuals with lived experience to help shape program design, messages and implementation strategies.

PLAN FOR PROGRAM OPERATIONS AND LOGISTICS

Lessons Learned

- Planning needs to include development and organization of the following: training content, materials for youth participants (e.g., binders and their contents) and meeting content for all five stages of the program.
- Micro-learning sessions are most effective when developed with input from individuals with lived experience.
- Clear eligibility criteria and systems for tracking progress are essential for youth outreach and enrollment.
- Successful implementation becomes more likely when agency staff can integrate the program into their existing structures and timelines. This spares them from having to add to their workloads by making program implementation a separate set of tasks.
- Adding multiple new expectations for staff members to fulfill can generate resistance and reduce consistency in program implementation unless the expectations align with current practice.
- Thoughtful planning for meeting structure and materials supports consistency and improves the quality of engagement with youth.

PLAN FOR PROGRAM OPERATIONS AND LOGISTICS (CONT...)

Tips

- Prepare a logistic plan for meetings that includes the following:
 - » agenda
 - » activity flow
 - » materials and supplies
- Develop clear processes for caseworker identification of youths who could benefit from enrollment in the program, outreach, enrollment and tracking of progress.
- Incorporate program activities into existing casework practices (e.g., monthly visits, supervision) to avoid overburdening staff and to support consistency.
- Be intentional about limiting additional requirements for staff members. Integrate the program's tools and processes into existing agency processes.
- Incorporate youth-friendly tools into visits with caseworkers to make youths feel welcome and to encourage their engagement.

Stage-Specific Lessons Learned and Tips

STAGE 1: PREPARATION

Lessons Learned

- The preparation stage establishes the foundation for sustained youth engagement. It needs to emphasize that encouragement of youth voice is an ongoing practice, not a onetime activity.
- Integrating preparation activities into existing agency practices (e.g., regularly scheduled meetings with supervisors, routine visits) supports consistent implementation of the program and reduces its burden on caseworkers.
- After their initial training, staff members need ongoing support to reinforce their skills and to prevent learning loss. Coaching, group consultations and micro-learning sessions can be means of providing this support.
- Preparation efforts tailored to each staff member, youth and the youth's case prove most effective.
- Especially during the preparation stage, the caseworker can expect to engage in multiple interactions with a youth to establish rapport and the youth's sense of psychological safety.

Tips

- Reduce scheduling challenges for caseworkers by making regularly planned contacts with youths also serve as opportunities to introduce the program.
- Use examples from prior case plans to help caseworkers perceive the differences between how youth engagement was defined in those plans vs. how it is envisioned in the program model.
- To gain caseworkers' understanding of the program and their buy-in, provide them with materials such as the program overview, the preparation agenda and case planning tools.
- Use supervision and preparation meetings to reinforce expectations, to model engagement strategies and to plan for the initial contact with each youth.

STAGE 2: DISCOVERY

Lessons Learned

- Caseworkers need to revisit permanency planning conversations over time and to make them an ongoing part of their practices, not treat them as onetime discussions.
- Building trust and engagement requires an approach specific to each young person. Some youths may need multiple interactions with their caseworkers to establish rapport and to start participating meaningfully in their own permanency planning

Tips

- Revisit permanency-related information regularly. Present it to youths in different formats to reinforce their understanding and authentic engagement.
- Use open-ended questions to probe youths' thoughts about permanency, relationships and goals.
- Use the youth binder as a tool during home visits to reinforce the caseworker-youth partnership and shared ownership of permanency planning, as well as to provide continuity in their conversations.
- Encourage youths to keep and to organize important documents, such as their case plans, in their binders. Having these materials readily available allows youth to revisit important information and supports their active participation in future meetings and planning.

STAGE 3: CASE PLANNING

Lessons Learned

- Case planning becomes most effective when caseworkers embed it into their existing touchpoints with youths, such as monthly home visits.
- Some youths need multiple conversations and extra time to identify goals that feel meaningful and authentic to them.
- Ongoing supports (e.g., visual reminders, micro-learning sessions and group case consultations) help caseworkers to integrate the program model into their daily practices consistently.

Tips

- To enhance relevance and guidance for caseworkers, include the perspectives of individuals with lived experience in coaching efforts and in the development of program materials.
- Offer youths multiple ways to communicate their goals (e.g., via texting, writing goals down, sharing them through a trusted adult).
- To reduce formality and to encourage open dialogue, discuss goals with youths in informal settings, such as during walks, car rides and other shared activities.

STAGE 4: CHECK-INS

Lessons Learned

- The case plan is a living document, not just a requirement for compliance. It needs to guide ongoing youth engagement.
- To maintain engagement with youths, caseworkers need to conduct check-ins (e.g., via phone, texting, email) between scheduled visits and other in-person meetings.
- During age-appropriate activities with youths and conversations about their relationships and other connections, caseworkers can interject the subject of permanency without using child welfare jargon. This supports the youths' meaningful engagement in their own permanency planning.

Tips

- Use the case plan and youth-defined goals as anchors for each caseworker-youth interaction to maintain focus and to make progress.
- Before visits with a youth, check in with the young person's service providers and other supportive adults to gather updates and to coordinate support.

STAGE 5: 90-DAY REASSESSMENTS

Lessons Learned

- Youth involvement in the reassessment process is critical to sustain youth ownership, engagement and shared decision-making in permanency planning.
- Although the formal program is designed for a nine-month timeline, reassessments and check-ins need not occur in a linear sequence. They may happen cyclically throughout the duration of a case.
- In many cases, achieving goals takes longer than three months. A better indicator of program success is how well goals have evolved over time to become more specific, descriptive and appropriate for the youth's developmental stage.
- Sustaining youth-centered practices beyond the formal program requires embedding them into the child welfare agency's culture and providing ongoing support for caseworkers and supervisors.

Tips

- Allow youths to set the agendas for their reassessment meetings to reinforce youth ownership and engagement.
- Celebrate successes, including incremental progress and small wins, to maintain motivation.
- If a youth's goals have not changed after multiple reassessments, engage the youth in revisiting or revising them.

9. Additional Program Materials

Find program materials that
support implementation here:

SCAN HERE



CLICK HERE



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This project is supported by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$5,000,000 with 100 percent funded by ACF/HHS.

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