

# Founder of the Family Finding Movement

## Interview: Part II

By Georgette Todd, April 1, 2014

Today, we continue with Part Two of the Q&A with Kevin Campbell, founder of the Family Finding model. Did you miss Part One? [Click here to read!](#)

*Q. Do you think the Family Finding effort is capable of replacing foster care in the future?*

A. At best, foster care, is a temporary safe place for children when there are concerns about serious risks to their safety and well-being. If, after a diligent search for relatives or other close adults, and no one known to the child is immediately available, then a temporary foster care placement may be needed. This use of emergency foster care may always be part of a community's public safety system.

However, the system we have today of placing children out-of-home remains too big and is far too cumbersome. For example in January 2014, The Dave Thomas Foundation released information that for the 10,000 youth who have received child specific recruitment services from Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruiters, youth spent an average of 1,470 days in out-of-home care before a referral for this recruitment was even made.

*Q. Is Family Finding expensive? If so, how can an agency get money to support this effort?*

A. Family Finding becomes expensive when it functions as a parallel system to existing traditional services, i.e. when the case worker, courts, guardians and CASA takes the legacy service approach, while concurrently a specialist tries to give the child or family an alternative form of services. The parallel nature of this process is inherently in conflict with itself, and leaves the family and youth caught in the middle.

We have learned through evaluation and implementation experiences that small-scale pilots are complicated, as they attempt to practice authentic family engagement on a small scale while the larger system works with a belief that youth in foster care have no one, and need the protection of professionals and volunteers to decide their and their families' futures, even existence as a legal family.

Several states, such as Hawaii and New York, have received [federal] waivers, giving them the flexibility to integrate Family Finding and authentic family engagement as their primary approach to services rather than using a series of pilots. Alternatively, the State of Oregon has a child welfare office serving Jackson and Coos Counties that has simply leveraged local partnerships and existing resources to do business differently without big new money, but instead spending existing money differently to get different results.

*Q. How could a non-profit or social service agency begin their Family Finding work?*

A. They should start by exploring how to build Family Finding and authentic family engagement into their existing programs rather than thinking about Family Finding as a new program opportunity or venture. Often agencies think only in terms of growth – serving more people by adding programs. Family Finding is not a program; it is a set of strategies, values and a model

that brings parents, relatives, tribes and community members together to face the emergency of both a child being in the custody of the government and of parents, relatives and tribes who face losing their children permanently.

*Q. How can the average person help support family finding efforts?*

A. The most significant way to support Family Finding is to support Seneca Family of Agencies' commitment to host the National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness. The Institute offers the broadest and most comprehensive list of technical assistance services for the implementation of Family Finding and other family centered approaches available. You can learn more about their work by going to [www.familyfinding.org](http://www.familyfinding.org).

*Q. For many years you've worked closely and on a larger scale in reuniting families. Is there anything else you'd like to add about this issue?*

A. Without an absolute commitment to the importance of a safe, legal parent and affection from other permanent adults for every youth in foster care – from their case worker and their worker's supervisor – children and youth will become separated from critical experiences of love. This separation will grow larger with every case worker change, each new initiative and every temporary placement. This is referred to as prolonged loneliness and it is harmful across the lifespan. Most importantly, it is preventable.

We must consider how every public policy and practice idea may contribute to or work to prevent prolonged loneliness in children. If a practice takes a case worker further away from their critical role in facilitating meeting a child's or youth's absolute need for safe, permanent connections, it is the wrong practice, or at the very least, the wrong time for it.

*Georgette Todd is also the author of "Foster Girl, A Memoir." To submit questions for this weekly column, e-mail Georgette at: [fostergirlwoman@gmail.com](mailto:fostergirlwoman@gmail.com).*

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