

Challenges and Successful Practices for Transitioning Youth From Congregate Care

Host

Children's Bureau

Moderator

Melinda Baldwin

Children's Bureau

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Today's Objectives

To promote and support a youth-and family-focused, permanency-driven approach that highlights:

- The importance of initial and ongoing individual assessments in congregate care settings
- The importance of providing appropriate services to support youth in congregate care
- Effective engagement strategies that involve the youth, caregivers, and the State agency in the transition process
- Strengths and challenges of moving towards a permanency-driven approach
- Helpful resources, lessons learned that will support those working with this population

Today's Presenters

Taffy Compain, National Foster Care Specialist at the Children's Bureau

Melinda Baldwin, Child Welfare Staff Development Specialist at the Children's Bureau

Hephzibah Children's Association

- Tom Zimm

Plummer Home

- Chris, Youth
- Ray Pillidge from Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF)
- James Lister, Executive Director, Plummer Home
- Lauren Frey, 3P Consulting LLC
- RJ and K., Youth and Caregiver

2015 National Foster Care Month Initiative

- A collaborative effort of the Children's Bureau, Child Welfare Information Gateway, and partnerships with Federal, State, and local agencies, organizations, associations, and system-involved youth and families.
- Provides a website that offers targeted information for youth, caregivers, professionals, and the community that focus on supporting and achieving permanency for children and youth involved in foster care.

National Foster Care Month 2015

GET TO KNOW THE MANY FACES OF FOSTER CARE



May is National Foster Care Month, a time to recognize that we each can play a part in enhancing the lives of children and youth in foster care. Find resources and information to help ensure that their future is bright.

[Learn more](#)



Home

Resources

Real-Life Stories

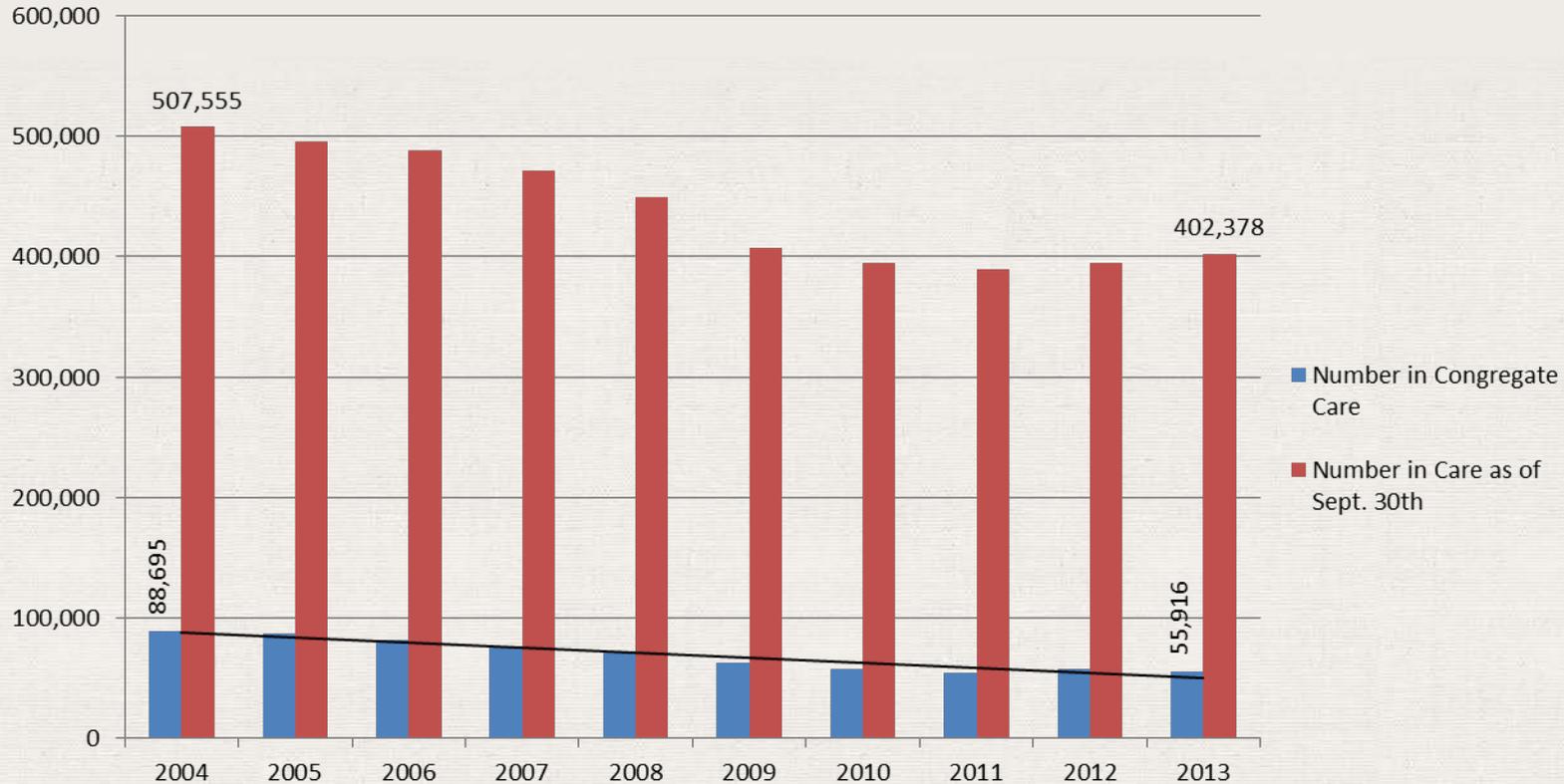
Promote

More

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth>

A National Perspective on Congregate Care

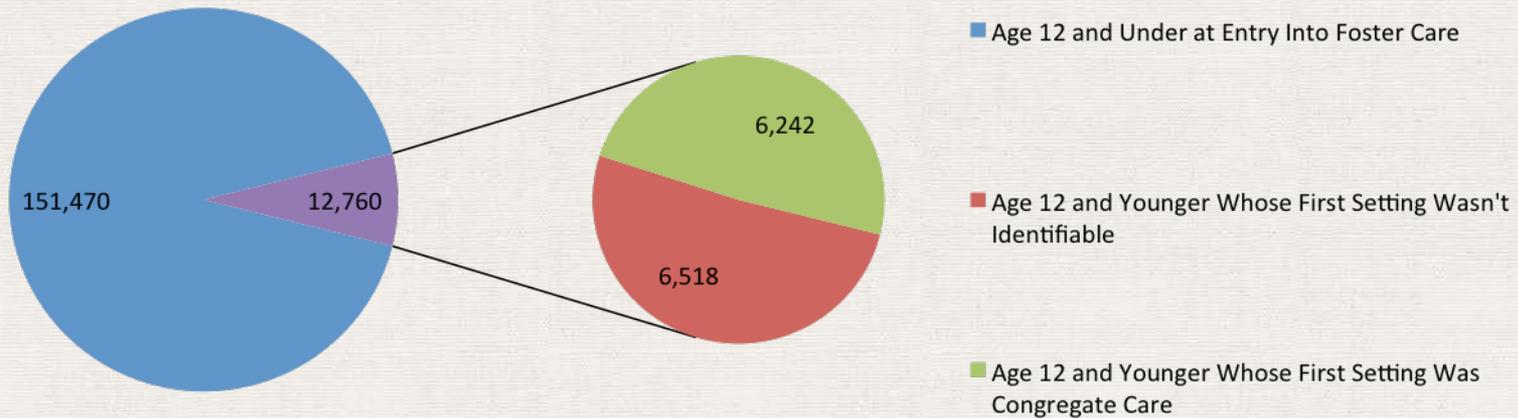
Trends in the Congregate Care Population



Congregate care use is decreasing at a greater rate (37%) than the overall foster care population (21%).

Children Age 12 and Younger:

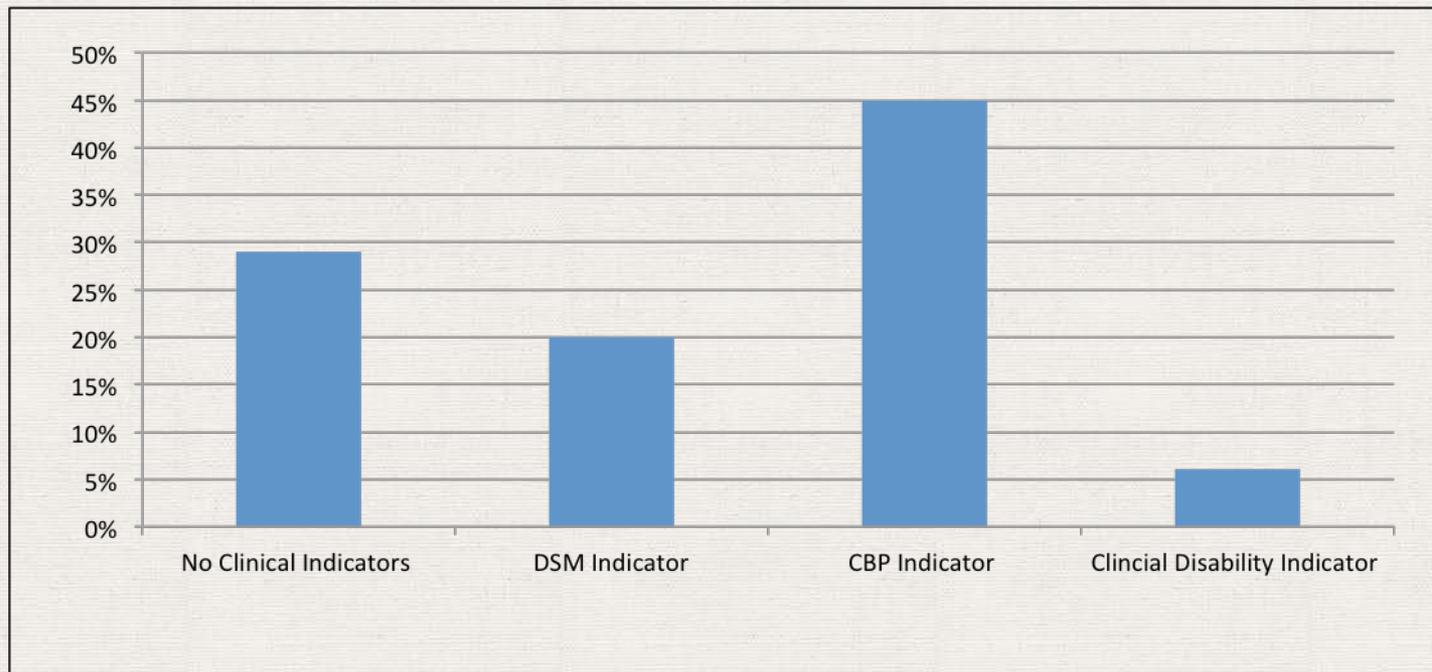
First Time Entry Cohort FY 2008
Distribution of Known First Setting
Age 12 and Younger at Entry
n=151,470



- Children 12 and younger comprise 31% of total number of children
- 21 states have percentages above the national average of 31%

Children 13 and Older - Subgroups

Of the Children in the 2008 Cohort Who Were Age 13 and Older at the Time of Entry and Experienced Congregate Care—Percent Distribution by Subgroup Types



Salient Findings

- Older children in congregate care are almost three times as likely to have a DSM diagnosis, and six times more likely to have a “child behavior problem” designation compared to children in other settings.
- On average, these children spent 8 months in congregate care settings compared to 11 months for children in other settings.
- The overall time in foster care was longer for children who spent some time in congregate care, with an average of 27 months compared to 21 months total time in foster care.
- In the majority of states, the congregate care population as a proportion of each state’s total in-care foster care population has also decreased, but there is wide variation between states

Challenges and Recommendations

- Challenges we heard from States
 - Budget constraints
 - Staff turnover
 - Workforce development and training
 - Leadership practices
 - Supply of alternative placements
- Recommendations – Tiered Approach
 - First:
 - Divert children that can be placed in family settings with a small amount of effort.
 - Second:
 - Design and implement more flexible and trauma-informed treatment programs that can better serve children with multiple, higher-end needs.
 - Third
 - Systematically evaluate congregate care programs.
 - Implement evidence-informed programming wherever possible.

Hephzibah Children's Association

TOM ZIMM

HEPHZIBAH CHILDREN'S HOME

Current Population

- Male and female children between the ages of 3 and 12
- Exposure to trauma, abuse, neglect, and separation from family
- Significant unsafe behaviors resulting in psychiatric hospitalization
- Separation from family of origin and multiple out-of-home placements

Intake Process

- All referrals come from the Illinois Department of Child and Family Services (IDCFS).
- IDCFS completes an assessment based on existing placement:
 - A clinical intervention for placement preservation (CIPP) is conducted for children in a foster home.
 - A psychiatric hospital clinical summary and discharge plan is developed for children placed in a psychiatric hospital.
 - 81% of placements came through this assessment method in FY14.

Therapeutic Services

- Individual therapy
 - Trauma-focused cognitive behavior therapy
 - Art therapy
 - Outside specialist (hospital or existing provider)
- Group therapy
 - Art groups
 - Paws for Strength pet therapy
- Psychiatric evaluation and monthly consultations
 - Medication monitoring

Family Services

- Regular visitation supervised and supported by a master's level social worker
- Sibling therapy (when needed)
- Referrals to parenting assessments and bonding assessments
- Case management to promote regular contact and continuity of care
- Provide report to the juvenile court and regular contact with the child's lawyer guardian ad litem (GAL)

Education Services

- Diagnostic school placement
 - Based on existing individualized education plan (IEP) or through completion of a case study and IEP
 - Educational coordinator advocates, through collaborating with clinical social workers at Hephzibah Children's Association and the school.
- Tutoring and support
 - “homework helpers”

Challenges: Transitioning Youth From Congregate Care

- Child behavioral/emotional needs
- Child risk behaviors
- Attachment templates impacted by abuse, neglect, trauma, grief, separation, and loss
- Multiple prior failed placements
- Limited biological connections
- Limited specialized foster homes

Readiness for a Foster Home

- Correct school placement
 - Completed case study and completed IEP (when needed)
 - Services recommended on the IEP are provided
 - Decrease in crisis/risk behaviors in the school setting
- Decrease in unusual incidents
- Engagement in therapeutic services
- Decrease in symptoms related to traumatic stress

Transition to a Foster Home

- Clinical staffing determines that the child is ready for a foster home
- Child participates in Movin' On
 - Therapeutic group designed to ready children for the transition to a foster home

Movin' On

- Target population
 - Children nearing discharge
 - Significant decrease in behavioral and emotional needs*
 - Significant decrease in risk behaviors*
 - Demonstrated capacity for connections with caregiver, school personnel, mentors, etc.
 - Demonstrated increase in use of adaptive coping strategies to manage internal stress and navigate relationships

*As measured by the CANS

Week 1: Makin' it Safe

- Establish structure, routines, and rituals that promote safety within the group.
- Encourage child to identify concerns and fears.
- Identify strategies to support child in managing fears:
 - Using coping strategies
 - Using supportive adults
- Discussion about safety in a home setting

Week 2: Makin' it Mine

- Describe what life will be like in a foster home.
- Provide time for questions and answers.
- Address concerns about the change in daily living expectations compared to group care.
- Create a “cardboard houses”:
 - Promotes child visualization of their own family home
 - Includes materials that symbolize safety, love, nurturing, and support

Week 3: Makin' It Work

- Describe transitions, rules, expectations, and relationships that commonly occur in a home.
- Identify child's current understanding and strategies of managing tasks and relationships.
- Reinforce the supportive nature of the caregiving relationship.
 - Support the child, using the caregiver for help.

Week 4: Makin' the Move

- Review the things the child has learned at Hephzibah:
 - Review gains made, skills learned, etc.
 - Identify personal strengths and resources.
- Create a house:
 - Each child decorates the inside and outside to build a unified home:
 - Inside, include memories of people, places, things, and feeling of life at Hephzibah.
 - Outside, represent their hopes and dreams for their future placement once they leave Hephzibah.

Movin' On II

- Target population:
 - Previous graduates of Movin' On
 - Children placed in the long-term residence program
- Schedule and agenda: 3 weeks

Week 1: All About Me

- Children identify what is important to them:
 - Identify goals.
 - Identify care givers that they can talk to.
 - Identify coping skills that have worked for them.
 - Identify personal interests.

- *Create a “me-shirt” to share something about who they are.

Week 2: Meet Successful Foster Parents and Their Children

- Children develop a list of questions to bring to the group.
- Previous residents of Hephzibah and their foster parents join the group:
 - Promote a safe space for honest discussions.
 - Current residence ask questions and receive feedback from children who've experienced a transition to a foster home.
 - Foster parents explain what it's like to be in a home (expectations, routines, responsibilities).

Week 3: Movin' On the Game

- Address the rewards, challenges, and possible outcomes upon moving.
- The game supports the children in identifying:
 - Coping strategies, supportive adults, and productive strategies to manage problems
 - Rewards connected with a foster home
 - Challenges some children face in a foster home
 - Possible outcomes of living in a foster home

Planning for Specialized Placement

- The treatment team conducts a broadcast to locate a specialized foster home.
- The team interviews the prospective foster parents to determine appropriateness of the match.
- A meeting takes place to map out the transition:
 - Foster parent(s) visit the child at the group home where the child is comfortable.
 - Gradually, visits are unsupervised and then move to the community.
 - A supervised visit occurs in the home of the foster parent(s).
 - An all-day unsupervised visit occurs in the foster home, moving to unsupervised weekend visits.
 - Discharge occurs, typically taking 6 weeks.

Transition to a Foster Home

- Check-in conference calls:
 - Ensure that identified case manager, therapist, psychiatrist, and mentor services are in place.
 - Ensure that an appropriate educational setting is located.
 - Ensure arrangement of family visitation schedule is in place.

For More Information About Hephzibah Children's Association Contact...

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Hephzibah Children's Home

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Plummer Home

- James Lister, Executive Director
- Lauren Frey, 3P Consulting LLC



Youth Transitioning From Residential: Permanency, Preparedness, Community

Youth Perspective:
Chris



Chris' Story

What are the challenges of being 18 and transitioning from a group home?



How did Plummer's program help you to get ready to transition after age 18?



How important is the family/permanency work at Plummer?



The State of Massachusetts

- Ray Pillidge, Northeast
Regional Director, MA DCF



Massachusetts DCF Data

- On December 31, 2014 there were 8,272 children and youth in foster care in Massachusetts.
- On December 31, 2014 there were 1,976 children and youth in congregate care settings in Massachusetts.
- In 2014, 808 youth aged out of care in Massachusetts
 - (420 were 17.9 to 18 years old, the remainder were 19 to 22).
- 555 of these youth had a goal of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)
- 437 of these youth aged out of foster care
- 221 of these youth aged out of congregate care.

Massachusetts DCF Initiatives

State efforts or initiatives to address the population of transitioning youth.

- Partnership between State and providers:
 - Positive child welfare outcomes are best when provider and State work together.
 - Not as effective when State social worker is pushing permanency and provider gets in the way.
 - Not as effective when provider is pushing permanency and State gets in the way.

Massachusetts DCF Initiatives

Why did DCF feel it was important to financially support an approach that focuses on permanency? Why Plummer Home?

- Outcomes for youth aging are poor.
- Independent living skill development alone is not enough; kids need families.
- Traditional solution is not good enough; need to look at the issue through a non institutional lens.
- We need to think creatively until we get it right.

Overview of Plummer

- Types of programs
- Transformation process
- Model of intervention
- Permanency work
- Assessments: internal and standardized
- Stepdown process

Plummer Programs

- On Point: Diversion for Youth with JJ Involvement
- Intensive Foster Care
- Group Home: Adolescent Males, age 14 - 18
- Pre-Independent Living: Males, age 18 - 21
- PYRAMID: Community-Based Supported Apartments for Youth age 18 - 21

Plummer's First Program Improvements

- Additional staff and staff support
- Tutoring
- Building improvements
- Mentors
- Family vehicles
- Work program
- Music program
- Sports, camping and adventure-based activities
- Chores and allowance

Plummer's First Look at Data

Review of 41 cases of youth discharged in 2009, 2010, and 2011 plus those in residence at Plummer Home in December 2011

- Service plan goals upon referral to Plummer:
 - Almost half had goals of APPLA/Independent Living (IL).
 - Slightly more than 1/3 had goals of reunification.
- Status at discharge from Plummer:
 - Most went to higher or locked levels of care.
 - About 1/3 went AWOL, signed out or left “to stay with a friend”.
 - Less than 15% were discharged to family/kin.

What Did the Data Tell Us?

- For most youth:
 - No clear goal to exit the system to reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship
 - Inadequate progress toward an exit to family
 - No safe and stable parenting or network of family connections at discharge
- Better programming ≠ Better outcomes

Plummer Challenges Traditional Residential Approach

- Permanency work is not prioritized or measured.
- A committed adult mentor or “connection” is the best we can hope for.
- Youth are given a choice of being parented or not.
- Youth are prepared to live independently of family.

Plummer Transformation

- Sparked by staff frustration with the status quo and guided by a strategic plan for change
- Shifted from a traditional group home to a permanency-focused program:
 - Youth-engaged: with youth voice and about youth needs
 - Family-driven: with family involvement and toward family outcomes

The Plummer Model of Intervention

Permanency

Every youth has a safe and emotionally secure parenting relationship and a life long, legal family



Plummer's Current Data

- August 1, 2013 to April 30, 2015:
 - Average length of stay in Plummer Group Home was 8.1 months.
 - 28 youth discharged from Plummer Group Home:
 - 25% were reunified with birth parents.
 - 25% went to pre-IL with family connections.

Plummer's Current Data

- 18 youth reside in group home and pre-IL:
 - All are receiving permanency services toward reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship concurrently with preparedness and community.
 - 13 have a State permanency goal of APPLA:
 - 3 youth in the group home with a goal of APPLA will be discharged to reunification with birth family in June

What Helped Us Make the Shift?

- Strong vision and strategic planning
- Setting priorities: finances and staff roles
- Solid collaboration with State partners

Plummer Assessments: Standardized and Internal

- Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS)
- Youth Connections Scale (YCS)
- Plummer intervention model rating scale:
 - **Permanency:** *Every youth has a safe and emotionally secure parenting relationship and a life long, legal family.*
 - **Preparedness:** *Every youth has the skills and support to meet his or her physical, emotional, educational and economic needs.*
 - **Community:** *Every youth has a safe place to live, a sense of belonging and a chance to positively contribute to his or her community.*

Plummer Permanency Approach

- Family search and engagement
 - Importance to the youth
 - Immediate, persistent, ongoing
 - Involvement in treatment and teaming
- Youth preparation for permanency
 - Individual time with permanency social worker
 - Group work with peers
 - Family contact/communication prioritized
- Youth-engaged teaming
 - Realistic, individualized permanency plans
 - Measurable benchmarks

Plummer Stepdown Process

- Focus on stepping forward to family, not stepping down
- Priority on parenting rather than placement
- Emphasis on family relationships, even when moving to supported apartment

Youth Transitioning From Residential: Permanency, Preparedness, Community

Youth and Caregiver Perspective:
RJ and K.



RJ and K's Story



What are the challenges of being 18 and transitioning from a group home?



What are the challenges of being 18 and transitioning from a group home?



How did Plummer's program help you to get ready to transition after age 18?

How did Plummer's program help RJ to get ready to transition after age 18?

Why was the permanency work important?



For More Information About Plummer Home For Boys Contact...

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Questions?

Please use the Live Chat feature if
you have questions for the Panelists

Available Resources

National Foster Care Month 2015:

Get to Know the Many Faces of Foster Care

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/fostercaremonth>

A National Look at the Use of Congregate Care in Child Welfare U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau (2015)

Available at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/success-story/congregate-care>

Redefining Residential: Strategic Intervention to Advance Youth Permanency (2015)

Available at: http://www.aacrc-dc.org/page/aacrc_position_paper_thirteenth_series_strategic_interventions_advance_youth_permanency



Webinar Series

The Children's Bureau, in partnership with Child Welfare Information Gateway and the Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative, is pleased to offer this webinar as a part of a series on achieving permanency for children and youth in foster care.

Audio recordings of both webinars, as well as materials and additional resources, will be available on the National Foster Care Month website in the coming weeks.

This year's series:

“Supporting Permanency for LGBTQ Youth in Foster Care”

Thursday, May 14, 2015

“Challenges and Successful Practices for Transitioning Youth From Congregate Care”

Thursday, May 21, 2015



Evaluation Survey

Thank you for attending the webinar. We look forward to receiving your feedback.

<http://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/2127151/2015-National-Foster-Care-Month-Webinar-Survey-Successes-and-Challenges-of-Transitioning-Youth-From-Congregate-Care>

Contact Information for the Children's Bureau's National Foster Care Month Initiative

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