

The Placement Genogram as a Tool for Establishing Permanent Connections

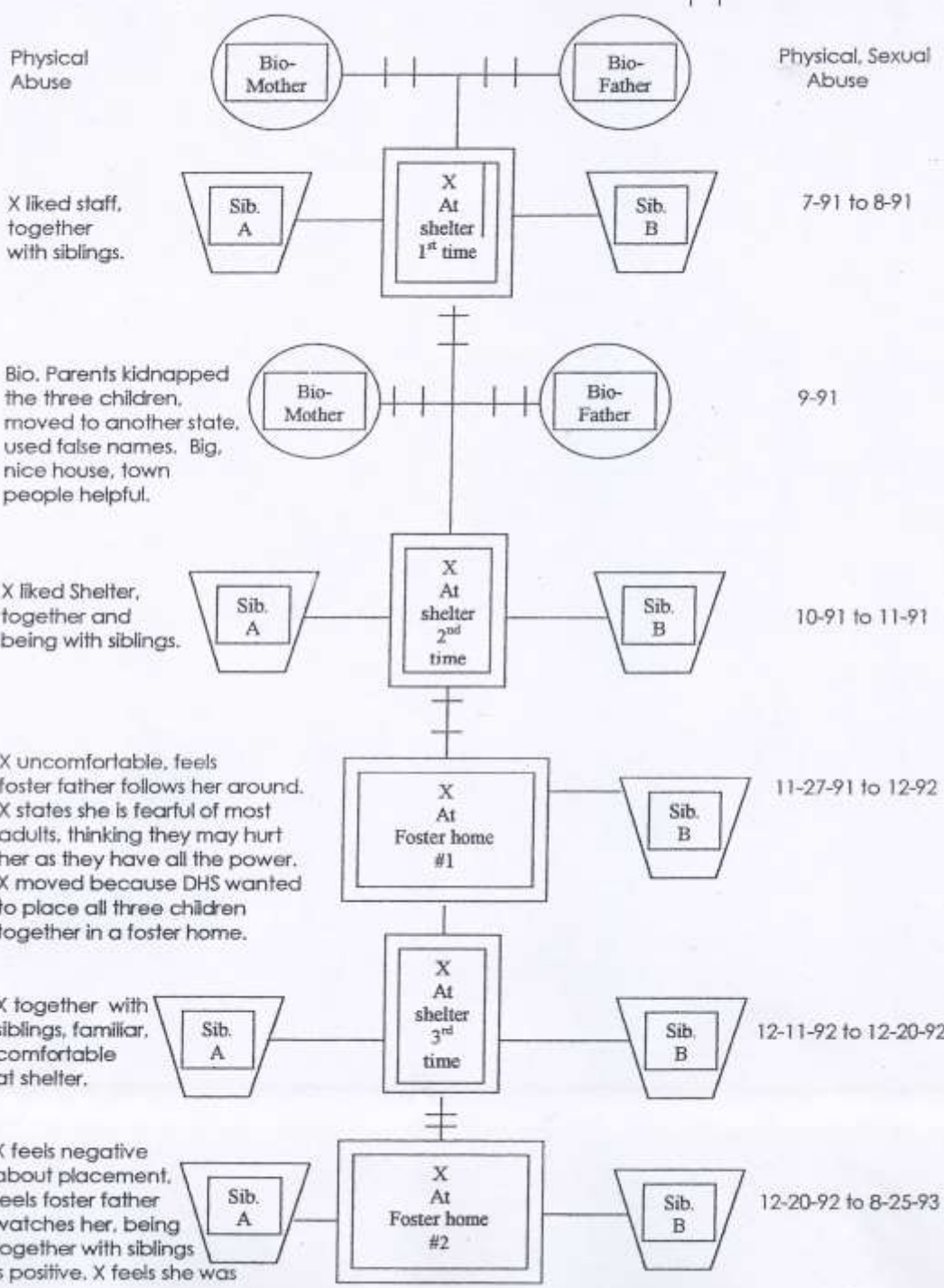
The family genogram is a widely accepted assessment tool in child welfare cases (Hartman, 1978; Hartman and Laird, 1983). The visual representation of the family helps workers and families identify intergenerational themes, patterns, roles, losses and family strengths. A *placement genogram* works in many of the same ways for children in placement – using the case record and information from the child and other adults, including the child’s family members, the worker constructs a visual picture of the youth’s experience in placement. The placement genogram highlights the influence of significant others in the child’s life. Understanding the child’s experiences in placement – positive and negative – may help the worker:

- 1) appreciate the resilience of the young person, and understand the cost of multiple losses;
- 2) better understand the reasons for placement disruption;
- 3) identify patterns, leading to new ideas about interventions, appropriate placements, and supports for the young person; and
- 4) uncover important people from the youth’s past who might be engaged in the youth-centered team or as a “permanent connection” for the young person as they transition from foster care into adulthood.

An example of an actual placement genogram from the pilot project “Permanency for Teens” follows.

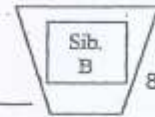
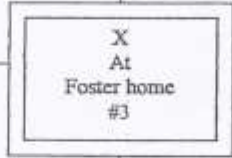
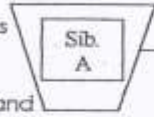
Placement Genogram

KEY
 ||||| good relationship
 - - - - - poor relationship



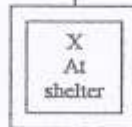
moved because she complained to a worker regarding her uncomfortable feelings about the foster father.

X finally feels it is "OK" to hug foster parents who are older and safe. X was promiscuous during placement and ran away with a boy even though this was the best placement. X moved because of negative behavior at foster home number 3.



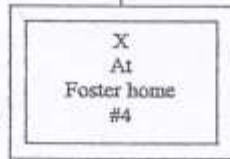
8-25-93 to 8-25-93

X feels secure with female shelter staff; insecure with male staff. Sibling A goes to independent living and Sibling B placed in a foster/adoptive home.



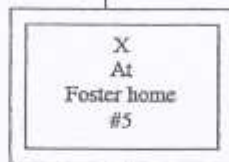
4-24-95 to 5-30-98

X states this is the first family who wants to adopt her, has six children, and is a positive placement. Family moves out of state and X unable to go because family is moving to Arizona.



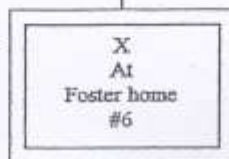
8-8-95 to 11-17-95

Placement has four children; X comfortable with adults; foster family wants to adopt her but foster father drinks and makes inappropriate sexual remarks to X; X tells counselor and DHS moves her. X regrets telling, very depressed as she wanted family number 5 to adopt her.



11-17-98 to 7-96

Current foster parent possess a positive attitude on life; supportive. Foster mother wants to adopt X but X feels X is too old. X has ongoing relationships with siblings.



8-96 to present

cb-Placement Genogram-050498.doc

Remembered People Chart¹

<i>Age</i>						
<i>Where I lived</i>						
<i>Who I remember especially well</i>						
<i>What I'd like to do about them</i>						

¹ Adolescents & Families For Life, R.G.Lewis & M.S.Heffernan

People Support for Making the Transition to Adulthood (taken from Permanency Pact)

Material

- Short-term housing, home for the holidays
- Emergency place to stay
- Place to do laundry
- Food/occasional meals
- Employment opportunity
- Transportation
- Phone or computer to use
- Place to store valuables
- Purchase special clothing, shop together, wardrobe advice
- Help on “moving days”
- Help fixing up an apartment or car
- Emergency cash
- Co-signer

Emotional/Motivational

- Care packages at college
- “Cheerleader”
- Invitation to join recreational activities
- Relationship/marriage/parenting counseling
- Accompany the youth on a medical appointment
- Spiritual support
- Sharing cultural experience
- Regular “check in”
- Help/support for drug alcohol addiction/recovery
- Mental health support
- “Person to contact in case of an emergency”
- Inclusion in social circle/community activities

Strategic

- Employment recommendation, special consideration, coaching with a job interview, job search assistance, career counseling
- Personal reference
- Housing hunt
- Mentor
- Educational assistance
- Help with legal troubles
- Cooking and cleaning lessons, organization of household clutter
- Bill and money management assistance
- Help with reading forms, documents and complex mail
- Advice – about car repair, landlord problems, community resources, etc.
- Civic commitments – registering to vote for the first time, volunteering together, etc.
- Advocacy with systems – help youth organize thoughts, write a letter, or accompany them and speak for them if necessary
- Home safety check, discuss health issues (reminder to get regular checkups)

“Building Blocks” for Forging Permanent Connections

1. Asking for and receiving help

Youth:

- Youth can identify needs
- Youth can recognize that he or she would benefit from the help of another person in figuring out what would meet those needs or help meet the needs
- Youth feels worthy to ask for and receive help
- Youth can identify persons that he/she believes would be inclined to respond to a request for help if they are able
 - Has contact with these person
 - Has reason to belief that this person possesses the ability to help
 - Trusts that person enough to ask (usually means has had some experience of having needs met by this person or others)
- Youth knows *how* to ask for help
- Youth understands that some form of reciprocity is important at least some of the time (saying thank you, offering a listening ear, offering concern, occasionally offering to help the adult or responding to the adult’s requests for help)

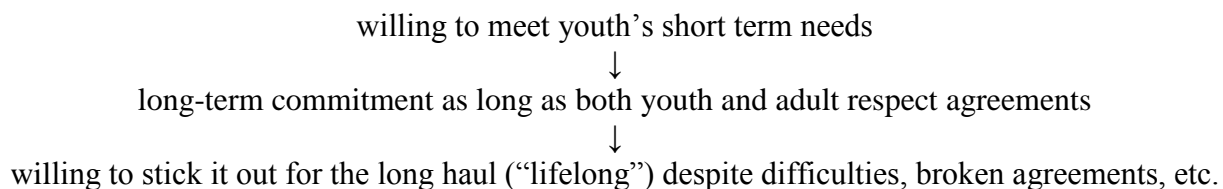
Adult:

- Reasonably available and dependable
- Enjoys providing support to a young person
- If strategic support is called for, is able to help the young person problem-solve and make their own decisions
- Clearly communicates limits, if applicable
- Reasonably tolerant and/or forgiving of youth’s mistakes
- Often works best if adult doesn’t expect too much in return

2. Developing a trust relationship

- Dependable assistance asked for, offered and accepted
- Promises kept, or if broken, amends are made
- Relationship will be “tested” by youth, both youth and adult may need support
- Mutually satisfying relationships built through shared experiences

Length/Strength of Adult’s Commitment



Supervising for Permanent Connections

- ✚ Teach staff about the importance of permanent connections for youth
- ✚ Set expectations for permanent connections as an essential part of permanency and transition planning
- ✚ Coach staff in how to maintain and re-establish connections
- ✚ Developing a youth-centered team approach to building permanent connections

Support workers in....

- listening to youth—they are the best source of information
- thoroughly reviewing case file to identify connections from the past (but don't rely exclusively on this)
- searching for lost relatives using locator services
- making contacts with significant adults
- reconnecting youth with birth family
- helping youth through joys and disappointments of reconnections

Supervisor's strategies: (what if...?)

✚ Worker reports that the youth has no connections:

- Encourage worker to talk to youth about:
 - Who the youth calls or goes to
 - Previous placements
 - Family and kin relationships
- Encourage worker to talk with foster parents and providers about:
 - who the youth calls or goes to, who calls the youth
- Talk with worker about:
 - who has shown up for meetings, court hearings
 - who has called about or visited the youth
- Don't forget the paternal side of the family

✚ The worker reports feeling uncomfortable talking with youth about permanent connections:

- Talk about emotional needs of adolescents as they move toward adulthood; normalize the need for connectedness
- Provide opportunities for further training
- Provide opportunities for worker to observe a more experienced worker, or co-facilitate meetings with youth to model good practice

✚ Permanent connections are identified but not active in case plan:

- Talk with worker about how the youth is involved with permanent connections
- Encourage worker to talk with youth about the role of permanent connections during transition
- Suggest using the Permanency Pact as a way to open the conversation with youth

✚ Transition plan contains no permanent connections:

- Support conversations about permanent connections in transition meetings and the written plan
 - Introduce the "Permanency Pact" at a transition committee meeting to give participants ideas of how permanent connections can be helpful for youth in transition

Practices to Improve Placement Stability

- ✦ Provide substantial support in first 6 months of placement—the most vulnerable time for disruption
- ✦ Increase visits and therapeutic support to adolescents in foster care due to their greater vulnerability for disruption
- ✦ Use group care strategically to provide initial stability for youth who experience multiple disruptions
- ✦ Recruit foster parents who are accepting of/experienced with adolescents and teens
- ✦ Provide more professional support and respite for foster parents; more foster parent to foster parent support
- ✦ Workers emphasize the importance of stability and urge caregiver patience
- ✦ Maintain permanent connections – this supports placement stability by attending to youths’ ongoing need for ongoing emotional connectedness
- ✦ When placement changes have to be made, physical location may change, but emotional connections can be sustained
- ✦ Participation of youth in placement decisions, changes
 - “About Me”
 - “My Foster Care Plan”
- ✦ Preparation of youth for placement
 - “Foster Home Intro”
 - Foster Club: <http://www.fyi3.com/fyi3>

Foster Club Resources:

<http://www.fyi3.com/fyi3>

Forms on line: <http://www.fyi3.com/fyi3/Involved/advocacy/fyiforms.cfm>

- About Me
- Foster Family Intro
- My Foster Care Plan

Permanency Pact

Initiating the Permanency Conversation with Youth*

- ❖ Put the youth in charge of the process. Emphasize that:
 - “This might feel like a new way of working together”
 - “It works best if you’re at the planning table, if we can work together to find the best direction for your future”
 - “This might feel like a new way of working together”
 - “ I work with you, to help you make a plan that will address your needs and wants; it’s about you and your future.”

- ❖ Minimize stigma; let them know that you work with “lots of youth in similar situations”
 - “I’m working with another young man/woman who...”
 - “I’m working with 5 other adolescents right now to help plan their futures”

- ❖ Stay purposefully flexible about the permanency outcome
 - Instead of saying “adoption”, “guardianship”, or “family”, say “adult connection”, “support person”, “someone to count on”, or other words that signify permanence without implying a traditional family relationship
 - “Have you thought about who you’d like to spend time with as you get older?”

- ❖ Give examples of instances when these connections might be used:
 - Celebrating holidays and special times, getting a driver’s license, graduating, getting married, co-signing a loan, etc.

- ❖ Suggest possible adult connections: a relative, teacher, coach, anyone who has made a positive impact or impression on the youth
 - “I’m sure there are people in your past or present who you like or feel a connection to...”
 - “I’m here to help you reconnect, or make the connection more secure.”

- ❖ Be future-oriented, don’t worry about the limitations of the past
 - “When you think about yourself five years from now, what are your hopes?”
 - “If you could design a plan or draw a picture for your future, what would it look like, and who would be in it?”

- ❖ Give general timeframes for the process
 - “It’s not going to happen overnight.”
 - “It will take a few months to get to know you, to meet the people you’d like to have in your life, and to make a good plan”

- ❖ Be flexible in your approach; you may not get to gathering names or concretely talking about the future in your initial conversation. All that needs to get done in the first meeting is to plant the seed and begin to establish your connection with the youth.
- ❖ Exhibit a positive, comfortable demeanor; it's a no-pressure informational conversation
- ❖ Try to provide a warm, comfortable setting. If the first meeting is at a program or residence, try to meet one-on-one with the youth, without program staff. Subsequent meeting can occur off grounds, or outside
- ❖ Food is always good!

*Source: Life Long Connections: Permanency for Older Youth
National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development, 01/11/06

Guiding Questions - Youth

- “ I’m concerned that when you leave foster care you’ll know you have someone to count on.”
- “Who are the teens you know or have heard about who have left foster care? How would you describe their situations? What do they say they need now?”
- “ My guess is that you will wish you had someone you can really count on at some point later in your life. Can you think of come times that you might wish you had someone to be there for you?”
- Who in your family was affectionate to you?
- Who in your family recognized you as special?
- Was/is there anyone in your family that makes you feel safe?
- Who cared for you when your parents could not? Who paid attention to you, looked out for you, cared about what happened to you?
- With whom have you shared holidays and/or special occasions?
- Who do you like? feel good about? enjoy being with? Admire? look up to? want to be like someday?
- Who believes in you? stands by you? compliments or praises you? appreciates you?
- Who can you count on? Who would you call if you were in trouble? Wanted to share good news? Bad news?
- Who would you call that would listen? Give advice?
- Who are the three people in your life with whom you have had the best relationship?
- Would it help to review where you have lived in the past? to help you recall important adults in your life?
- Who have you felt connected to in the past?
- Who from the past or present that you want to stay connected to? How? Why? Should he or she be part of your planning team?

- How are you feeling about this process? What memories, fears, anxieties is it stirring up?
- What do you want to accomplish in the next year? Five years?
- What does your life look like ten years from now?
- Who do you see yourself still connected to?
- What does “family” look like for you? How do you define “family”?
- Who is in your family? How many?
- Where do they live? How far away or how close?
- How often do you see them? When, where and why?
- Do you live with them? Now, ever? When, why? What role do the people around you play in helping you to accomplish your goals now?
- What do/don’t you need/want from them? What do/don’t they need/want from you?
- How will you feel if you try to find such a relationship and make it work? How will your life be better, more fun, more hopeful, less satisfying, less secure?

Source: Casey Family Services Center for
Effective Child Welfare Practice, 2005

Supervising for Permanent Connections: Case Scenarios

1. Janice, age 15, and her sister, Ashley, age 8, are re-entering foster care. Their first entry was when Janice was 11– the girls were in a foster home for 10 months and were returned home. Now they are coming back into care upon credible evidence that their mother’s boyfriend sexually abused Janice.

You supervise both the assessment and ongoing workers. What steps could the assessment worker take at this early stage of the case to promote permanency and/or permanent connections for Janice should she not be able to return to her mother’s care before her 18th birthday? What should the ongoing worker be doing? How should both workers engage Janice in this process? Are there any tools which would be helpful?

2. Janice and Ashley were placed with a paternal aunt. After three months, the aunt has requested that Janice be moved from her home because she is acting out – breaking curfew, having sex with a boyfriend, constantly verbally challenging the aunt, and generally being a poor example for Ashley and the aunt’s own preteen children.

Your worker has seen Janice and Ashley four times since the girls were placed. She doesn’t seem to have been able to get much conversation going with Janice. She shares the aunt’s opinion that Janice is out of control and is wondering whether Janice should be moved to group care.

What are the permanency concerns in this scenario? What are some reflective questions that you could ask the worker to help her better assess what is going on and what strategies might be pursued? How should the worker engage Janice in this process?

3. Nine months have passed, and Janice and Ashley have continued to live with the aunt. Until recently, Janice has been a good student, performing especially well in speech and English classes. She has been singing in her aunt’s church choir. Recently, however, her grades have started to slip in all subjects. She wants to learn to drive but reports that the aunt is not helping her get ready for the permit test. In the meantime, the aunt’s husband is facing a decision to lose his job or transfer out-of-state with the company. The mother is not making progress toward reunification. Her father was recently released from prison after serving three years for a non-violent offense; Ashley has reported seeing her father at family events. The father has declined several attempts by the worker to set up an interview, claiming conflicts with his work as a machine operator for a landscaping firm. What opportunities and challenges for permanency/permanent connections are in this scenario?

If Janice is must be moved from the aunt’s home, what strategies/tools could the worker employ to enhance Janice’s chances for permanency and/or permanent connections? What work prior to this event might have made this transition easier? How should the worker engage Janice in this process?

4. Janice is now 17; her parents' rights have been terminated. She has had a total of 3 placements – first with her aunt, then after the aunt moved away, a short stay with another paternal relative in the same school district, and now in a non-related foster home who has indicated a willingness to adopt. The worker asked Janice if she would be willing to consider adoption and Janice said “No”. She turns 18 in April (2 months before the end of her senior year) and has indicated that she wants to be “out of the DHS system”. The worker has not pushed Janice to consider adoption; you sense that the worker may not “believe” in adoption for older youth.

What reflective questions might you ask the worker to help her think about the possibility of adoption for Janice? What additional strategies/tools should the worker implement to help Janice establish permanency and/or permanent connections? How should the worker engage Janice in this process?

5. Janice is 17 ½ and is moving into a supervised apartment living. Even though parental rights have been terminated, Janice has remained in contact with both her mother and her father (through informal family and church contacts). When the worker asked Janice if she had any concerns about the move, Janice reported that her mother has made several remarks about how nice it will be when Janice has her own place, in case the mother ever needs a place to crash or to get away from her boyfriend “until things cool off”. Her father is currently homeless. What steps can the worker take to assure Janice's safety and permanency?

Trainer's Guide:

Supervising for Permanent Connections: Case Scenarios

Janice, age 15, and her sister, Ashley, age 8, are re-entering foster care. Their first entry was when Janice was 11. The girls were in a foster home for 10 months and were returned home. Now they are coming back into care upon credible evidence that their mother's boyfriend sexually abused Janice.

1. You supervise both assessment and ongoing workers. What steps could the assessment worker take at this early stage of the case to promote permanency and/or permanent connections for Janice should she not be able to return to her mother's care before her 18th birthday? What should the ongoing worker be doing? How should both workers engage Janice in this process? Are there any tools which would be helpful?

Steps:

- Keep record of all significant adults in Janice's life and any interest which collateral contacts expressed in keeping contact with her (assessment worker)
- Look for relative placement (assessment worker)
 Involve Janice in pre- or immediate post-removal family team meeting – ask her who she wants to invite, set aside time in meeting to talk about Janice's positive youth development needs and to engage her mother and others in planning for keeping connections, making transitions, etc.
- Place siblings together or, if not possible, facilitate frequent visits

Tools:

- a. Read through case record and take notes about people in Janice's life
- b. Create placement genogram
- c. Use "Remembered People" tool

Engaging Janice:

- With Remembered People tool
- Interview her about present adults in her life, encourage her to write them an invitation to family team meeting
- Prepare her for participation in family team meeting

2. Janice and Ashley were placed with a paternal aunt. After three months, the aunt has requested that Janice be moved from her home because she is acting out -- staying out all night, having sex with a boyfriend, constantly verbally challenging the aunt, and generally being a poor example for Ashley and the aunt's own preteen children.

What are the permanency concerns in this scenario and what steps could the worker take to address them? How should the worker engage Janice in this process?

- Early placement disruptions (within first six months) and being separated from siblings after having been placed with them -- are both associated with subsequent multiple placements – try to avoid moving Janice – talk to Janice and try to get beneath her acting out behavior to see what's motivating it, if appropriate, normalize Janice's behavior in discussions with aunt, talk to both parties about aunt's concerns, appeal to Janice's desire to be a good role for Ashley, refer to counseling if needed. More frequent caseworker visits during this first 6 months. (and make sure Janice has access to contraception and condoms)
- Janice may be testing the aunt's commitment to her – being rejected may set her up for more relationship issues down the road. Talk to Janice. Refer her to counseling if necessary. Seek commitments from the aunt about maintaining this relationship. Ask aunt to participate in counseling with Janice.
- If Janice must be moved, arrange for twice a week dinner or other ongoing contact with the aunt.

3. Until recently, Janice has been a good student, performing especially well in speech and English classes. She has been singing in her aunt's church choir. Her grades have started to slip in all subjects. She wants to learn to drive but reports that the aunt is not helping her get ready for the permit test. In the meantime, the aunt's husband is facing a decision to lose his job or transfer out-of-state with the company. The mother is not making progress toward reunification. Her father was recently released from prison after serving three years for a non-violent offense; Ashley has reported seeing her father at family events. The father has resisted several attempts by the worker to set up an interview, claiming conflicts with his work as a machine operator for a landscaping firm. What opportunities and challenges for permanency/permanent connections are in this scenario?

If Janice is must be moved from the aunt's home, what strategies/tools could the worker employ to enhance Janice's chances for permanency and/or permanent connections? What work prior to this event might have made this transition easier? How should the worker engage Janice in this process?

Opportunities:

a. Building connections:

- As soon as Janice settles into placement with her aunt, read through old case record and talk with Janice about significant adults in her life, using the "Remembered Persons" chart and follow through the steps outlined – connecting her with more adults when she's in a stable placement not only builds permanent connections but also may identify a potential placement if she needs to move.
- Talk to Janice about adults in her life right now: adults in the church choir, speech and English teachers. Would she be interested in having them come to a team meeting?

b. Maintaining connections:

- Investigate the possibility of Janice's father teaching Janice to drive. (He operates machinery for a landscaping firm). Who could help Janice prepare for the written drivers permit test.
- If placement with another significant adult in Janice's life is not possible, try to find a placement in the same school district.

c. Maintaining connections:

Looking for: talking to Janice and her mother about guardianship with the aunt, maintaining connections with the father's side of the family, setting up visits with father, finding out if father has a drivers' license and access to a car to help Janice learn to drive on a permit, connect with teachers at school and adult choir members who might be interested in providing support to Janice, even if she has to move away. If she does have to be moved, try to keep Janice in the same school district and see about transportation to the family church. Have a youth-centered team meeting with Janice, mom, dad, aunt, her husband, the choir director or other adult member of the choir)

4. Janice is now 17; her parents' rights have been terminated. She has had a total of 3 placements – first with her aunt, then a short stay with another paternal relative in the same school district, and now in a non-related foster home who has indicated a willingness to adopt. So far, Janice has refused to even talk about adoption. She turns 18 in April (2 months before the end of her senior year) and has indicated that she wants to be “out of the DHS system”. The worker has not pushed Janice to consider adoption; you sense that the worker may not “believe” in adoption for older youth. Janice has secured her driver's license, her grades have stabilized, she is on track to graduate, and she plans to apply to colleges. What additional strategies/tools should the worker implement to help Janice establish permanency and/or permanent connections? How should the worker engage Janice in this process?

- Probe workers' attitudes about adoption of older youth, describe cases or have them read about some cases where there was a successful adoption of an older youth
- Have worker set up some times to talk with Janice using the tips for “unpacking the no”, i.e., talking with youth about adoption (See handout) Supervisor may want to be present
- If answer is still “no”, direct worker to let foster parents know that youth often change their minds and we hope they remain open to the possibility.
- Encourage worker to set up another youth centered team meeting – who, including foster parents and relatives, can help Janice gain life skills?
- Worker can use permanency pact with the foster parents and others on her team
- Encourage worker to keep talking to Janice about who is important in her life and make opportunities for her to have contact with them. Allow her make her own transportation arrangements if feasible.

5. Janice is 17 ½ and is moving into a supervised apartment living. Even though parental rights have been terminated, Janice has remained in contact with both her mother and her father (through informal family and church contacts). When the worker asked Janice if she had any concerns about the move, Janice reported that her mother has made several remarks about how nice it will be when Janice has her own place, in case the mother ever needs a place to crash or to get away from her boyfriend “until things cool off”. Her father is currently homeless. What steps can the worker take to assure Janice’s safety and permanency?

- Through individual contacts or a youth centered team meeting – involve parents about importance of not jeopardizing Janice’s housing and make referral to father for housing assistance.
- Have someone work with Janice about setting and enforcing boundaries with both of her parents.
- If necessary, go to court and obtain order to parents not to come to Janice’s house.