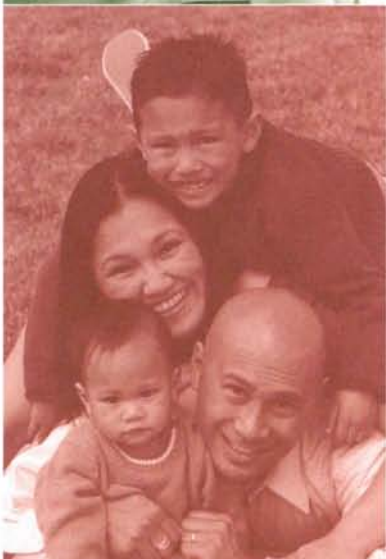**Wilder Research**

Finding permanent families for teens under state guardianship

Final report for The Homecoming Project

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Finding permanent families for teens under state guardianship

Final report for The Homecoming Project

December 2008

Contents

Contents (continued)

Figures

Figures (continued)

Figures (continued)

Figures (continued)

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Homecoming Project staff for their assistance with and support of the evaluation activities including Jen Braun, Erica Dahlquist, Lakeisha Daniels, Paul Dunham, Erica Gerrity, Amirthini Keefe, Wilhelmina Moos, Amy Snyder, and Jim Paquette. In particular, Michelle Chalmers partnered in developing the evaluation plan and instruments. She also co-wrote, with Wilder staff, "Finding adoptive families for teens: Practice tips from the Homecoming Project for working with teens under state guardianship," which serves as a companion to this report and describes best practices in implementation of the project. In addition, Melissa Sherlock from the Minnesota Department of Human Services was integral in developing and reviewing evaluation activities and reports. We would also like to thank county social worker staff for their assistance in facilitating access to youth in care.

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Mark Anton
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Ryan McArdle
Greg Owen
Margaret Peterson
Sheila Romero
Wayne Ramsden
Dan Swanson
Karen Swenson

Finally, we would like to thank the Homecoming youth and the 121 comparison group youth who participated in our Survey of Youth in Care without whom this study would not be possible.

Summary

Funded from 2003 to 2008 as a demonstration project under a federal Adoption Opportunities and Activities Grant, The Homecoming Project provided an opportunity to expand efforts to recruit permanent families for teenagers with the overall goal of increasing the number of adoptions of adolescents under state guardianship in Minnesota. The target population was adolescents ages 13 to 17 (and their siblings of any age when they are to be adopted together) whose parents' rights had been terminated by the courts at least one year prior to referral to The Homecoming Project, and who had a permanency plan of adoption, but no family identified.

In addition to seeking adoptive families, the project also had the explicit goal of strengthening participating youth's connections to caring adults and the larger community. Without replacing existing recruitment methods, it provided additional services. These services were grounded in a youth development philosophy that placed the youth at the center of the recruitment activities, to the extent that the youth was capable and wished to participate. Beginning with adults already familiar with the youth, the project engaged in child-specific and child-centered recruitment efforts based on actively identifying and building on each youth's strengths and potential.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services collaborated with the Minnesota Adoption Resource Network, a private non-profit agency, on the project. Wilder Research conducted the process and outcome evaluation. In addition to collecting extensive data on youth participating in Homecoming Project services, Wilder staff collected data on a comparison group of youth who met the same eligibility criteria, but who were not receiving project services.

Description of youth served by The Homecoming Project

Over half (52%) of Homecoming youth served are male. Six out of 10 youth served are youth of color. One-quarter are African American.

At intake, most youth were 13 or 14 years old. The project received referrals for youth participants from county social workers. Sixty-two percent of referrals came from the 7-county metro area surrounding Minneapolis/St. Paul.

According to intake information collected about them, Homecoming youth faced many challenges. Nearly all (at least 90%) had been abused or neglected. Nearly all (94%) had at least one mental health diagnosis at intake. Over half (55%) were reading below grade level. Nearly one-third (29%) had been charged with status or delinquency offenses. On

average, youth had been placed in out-of-home care at age seven. Youth had lived in multiple placements.

When asked about their satisfaction with the quality of care they received from the foster care system, less than half (45%) of Homecoming youth stated they were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied." Thirteen percent of the youth expressed dissatisfaction with the system.

Project implementation

Much was learned from implementing The Homecoming Project over the course of five years. The project spent a considerable amount of time connecting with youth, caregivers, county social workers, and potential adoptive families building relationships, problem solving, and taking steps toward permanency. In addition, the project was extremely successful in gaining media exposure. A highlight was the completion of a National Public Radio documentary which featured two of the project youth as well as Homecoming staff. This documentary, *Wanted Parents*, included several taped segments as well as a live interview with the youth, the adoptive family, and Homecoming staff.

Characteristics of successful cases

An analysis of "dosage" forms completed by Homecoming staff quarterly for each of the youth on their caseload showed interesting differences between youth who were eventually adopted and those who were not, as follows:

- Youth who were adopted by the end of the project had been more consistently rated at the highest level of cooperation ("enthusiastic and engaged") than were youth of comparable program tenure who were not adopted: 66 percent of quarters for adopted youth, 41 percent of quarters for non-adopted youth.

- In 85 percent of quarters for the adopted group, but only 68 percent of quarters for the non-adoptive group, caregivers were rated as *at least* "usually cooperative."

- The level of cooperation of key stakeholders – youth themselves, county workers, foster parents, and facility staff – also played an important role in facilitating or impeding the ability of recruitment specialists to work with youth on permanence options.

- The most consistent predictor of a successful adoption, after controlling for the influence of other factors, was the percent of quarters in which the caregiver was enthusiastic and engaged. Even after controlling for youth motivation and engagement, county and facility levels of cooperation, youth characteristics, youth

behavior, and youth's moving among placements, youth whose caregiver was enthusiastic and engaged with the project were 5 to 8 times more likely to be adopted than youth whose caregivers were less cooperative.

Feedback from key youth, care providers, and county social workers at midpoint

As part of the evaluation, key stakeholders (youth, care providers, and county social workers) were asked to give feedback midway through the project funding period.

■ 65percent of the youth met with their recruitment specialist at least once per week or every two weeks.

■ Youth were asked to rate how they felt about the balance of time spent together with their recruitment specialists. Most of the youth (94%) felt there was the "right balance of work and fun." As one youth stated, "I was able to use my voice to show what I needed and what I felt."

■ When asked to explain in their own words the most helpful aspect of the project, a third of care providers spoke about the recruitment specialist's connection with the youth.

■ Three-fourths of social workers rated the support components of the Homecoming Project as "good" or higher.

■ Social workers found that working with the recruitment specialist helped provide the youth with needed attention (36%), created smaller caseloads (29%), and allowed for more sharing of the work (e.g. rides, visits; 21%).

Outcome findings

Permanency for over half of Homecoming youth served

An analysis of project records and administrative data shows that 51 percent of youth served achieved permanency through The Homecoming Project. Thirty-one percent were adopted, 8 percent were in intact pre-adoptive placements, and 12 percent had established permanent connections to families.

Differences in outcomes between Homecoming youth and a comparison group of youth meeting the same criteria

An analysis of Administrative outcomes between The Homecoming youth (100 youth) and the comparison group (165 youth) showed some differences between the two groups:

- Overall, 39 percent of Homecoming youth, compared to 24 percent of comparison group youth, were in an adoptive home or intact pre-adoptive placement (this difference was statistically significant).

- 31 percent of Homecoming youth were adopted compared to 21 percent of comparison group youth.

- 8 percent of Homecoming youth compared to 4 percent of comparison group youth, were in pre-adoptive placements.

- In addition, by the end of the project, 12 percent of Homecoming youth had a *permanent connection* to a family (but no legal adoption); five of these youth were over the age of 18. There is no information available about permanent connections for the comparison group youth.

Similarly, if we only examine those Homecoming and comparison group youth who participated in the Survey of Youth in Care, 38 percent of Homecoming youth were adopted compared to 22 percent of comparison youth. However, this smaller sample of Homecoming youth (referred in the first two years of the study) had significantly higher adoption rates ($p<.05$).

When we examine other outcomes related to youth permanency – particularly those related to youth not achieving adoptive or pre-adoptive placements – there are some significant differences between Homecoming youth and the comparison group.

- Comparison group youth were significantly more likely to sign an affidavit requesting that they not have adoption recruitment efforts, to be ordered into long-term foster care by the courts, and to age out of foster care. These differences were statistically significant (more than can be attributed to chance).

Category	Homecoming youth	Comparison youth
Adoption finalization	(N=31) 31%	(N=35) 21%
Pre-adoptive placement (intact)	(N=8) 8%	(N=5) 3%
Legal permanence total	(N=39) 39%	(N=40) 24%
Long-term foster care court ordered and not adopted or in pre-adoptive placement	(N=14) 14%	(N=70) 42%
Aged out of foster care	(N=24) 24%	(N=82) 50%
Child (over age 14) signed affidavit (to not have a plan of adoption)	(N=10) 10%	(N=32) 20%

■ Homecoming youth (N=100)   □ Comparison youth (N=165)
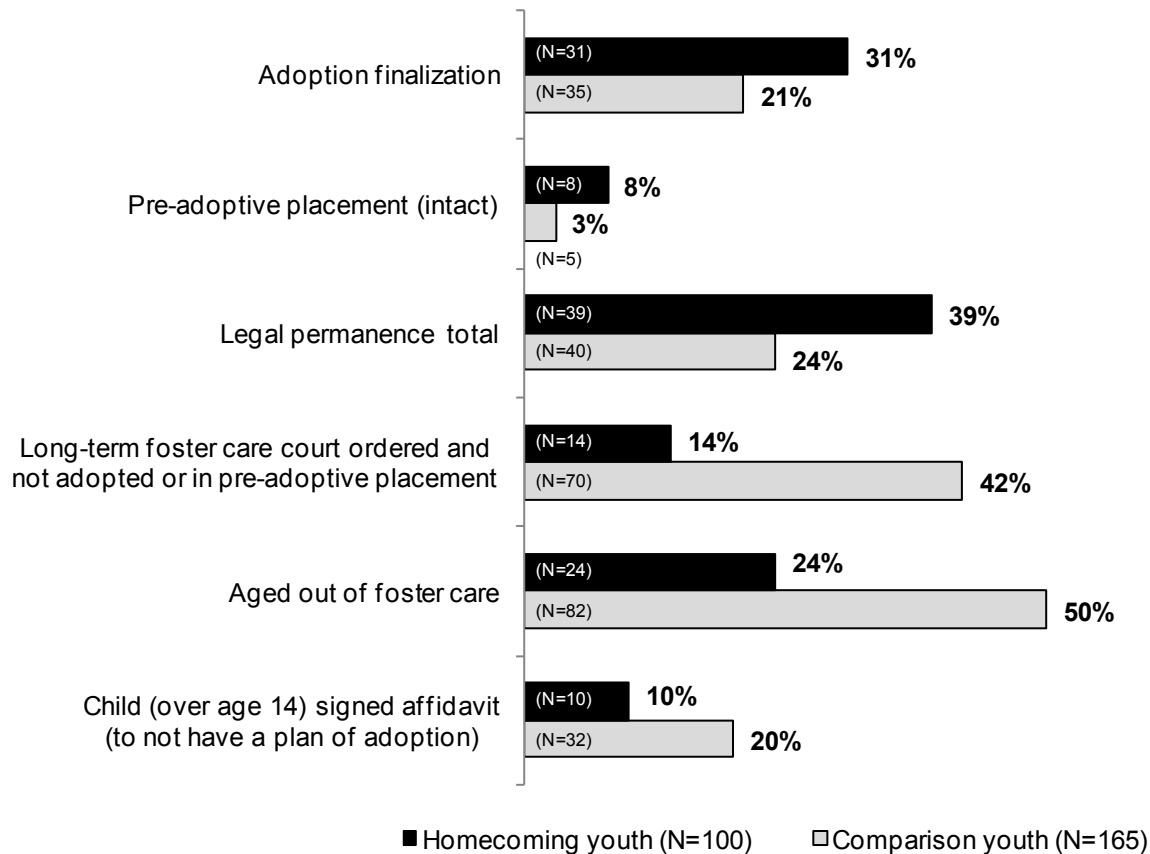
Results of telephone Survey of Youth in Care

Results of the telephone interviews of youth in care show that Homecoming youth gave responses very similar to those from the group of comparison youth at baseline. This allowed us to compare the two groups over time to see if differences in outcomes might be attributed to the efforts of The Homecoming Project. Nonetheless, one difference between the two groups should be noted: to be referred to The Homecoming Project, it was required that each youth had no identified adoptive resource; this information was not known for the comparison group of youth (some may have had an identified adoptive resource).

■ Of the 165 comparison youth selected and eligible for the study, 116 were interviewed at baseline (70%). Of these, 81 percent were interviewed after approximately 2-years, and 63 percent were interviewed a year later.

■ Of the 62 Homecoming youth eligible for the study (entering the program during the first two years of the project or interviewed at baseline as part of the comparison group and later served by the project), 53 were interviewed at baseline (85%). Of these, 81 percent were interviewed after approximately 2 years, and 77 percent were interviewed a year later

Results of analysis of the three youth development outcomes selected at project implementation

In addition to the recruitment of permanent families for youth served, The Homecoming Project was also designed to focus on seven youth development goals in their work with youth. These goals have been shown in the literature to serve as protective factors and lead to healthy adult lives. For the purposes of the evaluation, three of these youth development goals were prioritized. These included the youth's: feelings of autonomy and control over his/her future; sense of belonging; and connection with a caring adult. The Survey of Youth in Care was designed to measure these outcomes as well as collect some other outcome data such as youth permanency, housing, education, and employment. Items were clustered during analyses to assess a single factor: youth autonomy. Researchers looked at variations between responses at baseline and follow-up for the two groups.

Youth autonomy. Autonomy can be defined as an individual's perception about the underlying main causes of events in his/her life (internal or external).

■ At baseline as well as at follow-up, there were no significant differences between Homecoming youth and comparison group youth on their average responses.

■ If we examine changes in scores over time, between baseline and follow-up, participants in both groups demonstrated an increased sense of control and autonomy. This difference was statistically significant for both groups ($p<.01$).

■ However, in relationship to the comparison group, Homecoming youths' sense of autonomy showed a greater amount of improvement over time ($F = 4.93, p < .05$).

Youth sense of belonging. Youth relationships and sense of belonging is an important factor in stimulating youth anticipation of the consequences of behavior. Having a sense of belonging motivates young people to show respect and concern, as well as making them more receptive to guidance from other community members, both of which have implication for positive youth development.

■ At baseline as well as at follow-up, there were no significant differences between Homecoming youth and comparison group youth on their average responses.

■ If we examine changes in scores over time, between baseline and follow-up, participants in *both* groups demonstrated an increased sense of belonging. This difference was statistically significant for both groups (*$p<.001$*).

■ Homecoming youth and comparison group youth showed *similar* amounts of improvement over time (not a statistically significant difference).

Connections with caring adults

- At baseline as well as at follow-up, there were no significant differences between Homecoming youth and comparison group youth on their average responses on a scale measuring their connections with caring adults.

- Over time, participants in both groups had lower ratings with regard to connections with caring adults. That said, the amount of decline between baseline and follow-up was only statistically significant for the comparison group ($p < .01$).

Little change for Homecoming youth in their level of functioning over time (CAFAS scores)

When examining the scores over time on a standardized assessment, the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Tool, it is interesting to note the following:

- Homecoming youth exhibited similar functioning over time. It is also interesting to note that Homecoming youth, on average, exhibited minimal to mild levels of impairment.

- Although not statistically significant, there was a downward trend or leveling off in the overall severity level of youth served between baseline, midpoint, and follow-up in four of the eight subscales. These include youths' behavior toward others and their school, home, and community role performance levels.

Results of family survey

Eighteen families who worked with The Homecoming Project in some capacity completed a survey to gather information about their experiences with the project. Families were at different stages of the adoption process when they first came into contact with The Homecoming Project. Perhaps surprisingly, 44 percent were still in the beginning stages ("still thinking about it"). This may indicate that the project was able to recruit families who may not have pursued adoption further without the project's involvement.

Families who inquired about Homecoming Youth were asked in what ways their experience working with The Homecoming Project differed from inquiries they had made about other youth. Their responses were grouped into themes, and are identified below:

- Homecoming staff were more responsive/proactive

- More communication in working with The Homecoming Project staff

- Homecoming staff provided more information/background about the youth

Parents who were involved with a placement or potential placement of youth from the project were also asked a number of questions regarding their experiences with project staff throughout the process. In general, most respondents had positive reviews of Homecoming staff with regard to their effectiveness, support, and rapport with youth and families. In particular:

■ Many respondents felt Homecoming Project staff did an outstanding job throughout the adoption process, particularly with regard to working around the family's schedule to coordinate meetings, working with home study workers, and supporting the youth and family after the youth moved into the home.

■ All families surveyed saw Homecoming staff as very good or outstanding partners with county workers.

Results of adoption workers' stakeholder survey

Roughly half of the adoption workers surveyed (baseline and follow-up) had been in the field five years or more. Seven out of 10 work in the 7-county Twin Cities Metro area, with a majority working for county agencies.

Between 81-89 percent of adoption workers surveyed had, in the prior year, been directly involved in a case which had resulted in a finalized adoption. A majority of workers reported that they had helped place *teens* in an adoptive family.

Workers were asked whether they had ever worked directly with a teen to get his/her ideas about prospective persons willing to adopt him/her. They were also asked to share their opinions regarding teen permanency options. There were a number of statistically significant changes between the baseline surveys and the follow-up surveys in the following areas:

■ At baseline, when asked if they thought their perspectives about permanency options for teens changed, 25 percent of adoption workers responded "yes." At follow-up in 2005, 64 percent of workers responded "yes." At follow-up in 2008, 44 percent responded "yes."

■ During the baseline survey, 97 percent of workers agreed with the statement "Teenagers in the foster care system can be effective partners." At both follow-up periods, 100 percent agreed.

■ A significant difference occurred between baseline and the 2008 follow-up for the statement, "It is harder to find placement for teens today than it was five years ago." Twenty-eight percent of respondents agreed with this statement at baseline compared to only 11 percent at the 2008 follow-up.

These statistically significant changes show that workers perceptions about the possibility of partnering with teens to achieve permanency may have increased during the project. Many of the workers had worked with Homecoming staff regarding a case or had seen presentations done by Homecoming staff. This collaboration may have helped bring about these changes in perceptions.

Conclusions

Between 1998 and 2002, the number of teenagers under state guardianship in Minnesota grew by 70 percent. This dramatic change prompted the state of Minnesota and its partners to seek out new methods to increase the likelihood that older teens would be able to find permanent family connections.

The Homecoming Project began serving youth under state guardianship in early 2004. Over the course of nearly five years, 100 youth, including their siblings when requested, were referred to The Homecoming Project. Youth received extensive one-on-one individualized recruitment services. Prior to enrollment in the project, these youth had typically been in placement for five years and had experienced 10 or more placements. At the time of program entry, most were in foster homes or group homes, and over a quarter had lived in more restrictive facilities in the six months prior to enrollment. More than 9 out of 10 had mental health issues, and three-quarters had been physically abused. Remarkably, 76 percent had been in contact with a number of their birth family in the year preceding enrollment in the program.

At the end of the project, over half of the youth served achieved permanency: 31 percent were adopted, 8 percent were in pre-adoptive homes, and 12 percent had permanent life-long connections with families. These adoption rates are about five times the rate of adoption of teenagers for the state at baseline. Moreover, when compared to a similar group of youth under state guardianship, Homecoming youth were significantly *less* likely to have been ordered into long-term foster care by the courts, to sign an affidavit saying that they did not want to be adopted, and to age out of care.

In addition to differences in adoption and long-term foster care rates, youth who participated in the Homecoming Project also showed greater improvements in critical areas of youth development. In relationship to the comparison group, Homecoming youth's sense of autonomy as well as their sense of belonging showed a greater amount of improvement over time. These differences were statistically significant.

These positive results can be primarily attributed to the project's focus on what might be called the *authentic* engagement of youth. By using recruitment specialists who made young people a partner in the search for permanency, workers were able to leverage each

young person's stake in his or her own future. Through the responses of both young people and families it was clear that each felt engaged at a deep level, respected in their role, and given an opportunity to be more thoroughly aware of both the risks and rewards inherent in adoption.

This form of child-specific recruitment and engagement appears to be critical in achieving greater levels of permanency for youth under state guardianship. Of perhaps equal importance was the balance of both fun and work in the way recruitment specialists connected with young people. Families who inquired about Homecoming youth were also more deeply engaged and reported that in comparison to other adoption related experiences they had had, Homecoming staff were more responsive, communicated more often, and provided more information and background about each youth.

The benefits of the project appear to extend beyond the individual youth and families served. In particular, project staff were successful in gaining public attention and an increased systemic emphasis on teen adoption and the permanency needs of youth aging out of care. This is exhibited by the statistically significant decreases over time in perceptions of adoption workers about the degree of difficulty in finding adoptive homes for teens. It is also apparent through the multiple requests received by project staff for information and speaking engagements as well as the multi-part radio documentary *Wanted: Parents* completed by American Radio Works.

The Homecoming Project navigated a complicated system that at times appeared to work against providing permanency for teens. There were multiple barriers including gaining access to teens – who were often in restricted settings or in placements in all corners of the state. In addition, there was extensive work involved in pressing the need for permanency with multiple professionals involved in the lives of these teens. There were misperceptions about the ability of teens to get adopted – especially considering the severity of the needs of the youth served by the project.

In the end, the project was able to promote and secure permanency for 51 youth served, and to change perceptions of adoption workers and other key stakeholders throughout the state. This project demonstrates that an environment of richer engagement and communication, one that emphasizes the potential youth have to be part of a planning team with a recruitment specialist, may be able to help youth who previously had little potential for adoption, to establish a different view of their own future; one in which they are part of a family.

Implications of results and issues to consider

The Homecoming Project provides some insights into what contributes to the relatively low number of teens achieving permanency through adoption as well as practical tips for increasing teen permanency. Minnesota's challenges likely mirror those of other states and appear to be consistent with the literature on older youth permanency. These challenges include myths within the child welfare field and among individual workers about the adoptability of teenagers and their ability to participate in their own case planning; variation in the application of rules, statutes, and best practices across agencies and regions of the state; and other systemic barriers that might impede adoption workers from even considering adoption as an option for older youth.

Recommendations to administrators of future projects

Throughout the course of their work on the project, Homecoming staff identified seven basic beliefs that should be shared by all adults involved in the case in order for permanency efforts to be successful. Project staff recommend that these beliefs be a core component in the development of any new program models focused on teen adoption, and part of any staff training for individuals doing this work:

- All youth and families have dignity and the right to participate in decisions made regarding their lives.

- Teens should be involved in their own permanency planning.

- Teens have a basic right to a safe, committed family.

- Teens are adoptable, and there are families who have the skills and desire to adopt teens.

- Teens are capable of navigating complex relationships. They can have positive relationships with both their birth family and adoptive family, if the adults support them.

- Change, including new approaches and new people, can be a good thing.

- Permanency is not a placement or an event. Permanency efforts require workers to take a long-term perspective on the youth's life.

Recommendations to project funders

It is clear anecdotally and from the research that many youth under state guardianship may find the idea of adoption to be unappealing or even frightening at first. However, staff from The Homecoming Project found that over time and with appropriate one-to-one engagement, youth often change their minds and determine that they are in fact interested in pursuing adoption. This study provides further evidence for that assumption. There was a statistically significant difference between the number of project youth and comparison group youth who signed a legal document (affidavit) stating that they do not want to pursue adoption – more project youth chose not to sign the document because they wanted to pursue adoption. This indicates that when youth are provided with appropriate information, support and encouragement, most want to be adopted. Permanency options must be kept open for teens who have faced multiple challenges and may need time to consider the right family. In fact, in Minnesota, policy makers have responded to the need to keep permanency options open for teens. A change in stature was instituted, effective July 2007, barring young teens from the option of the affidavit stating they do not want to be adopted.

In addition, given the other positive outcomes exhibited so far, it seems logical to continue to fund these types of efforts.

Recommendations to the general field

The primary purpose of this project was to help a greater number of teens under state guardianship establish and maintain permanent connections to caring adults, ideally through adoption. This goal was based on a premise that adoption is a better path for teens in guardianship. There is little research on the long-term outcomes of youth who are adopted as teens. On the other hand, it is well established that youth who age out of foster care are significantly more likely than other youth to face life challenges related to their physical and emotional well-being. While it makes intuitive sense that long-term outcomes for adopted teens would be better than outcomes of similar teens who did not join a permanent family, there is no research available to substantiate that assumption. This evaluation began that process by following a group of youth in care for three years, some of whom became adopted and others who did not. However, it would make a substantial contribution to the field to continue this and similar studies to measure similarities and differences in the long-term outcomes of these populations.

Background

The Homecoming Project was a Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) project to increase the number of adoptions of adolescents under state guardianship in Minnesota. The Minnesota Department of Human Services contracted with the Minnesota Adoption Resource Network (MARN) to provide these services. Funded from 2003 to 2008 as a demonstration project under a federal Adoption Opportunities Activities Grant, The Homecoming Project provided an opportunity to expand efforts to recruit permanent families for teenagers.

The project targeted adolescents, age 13 to 17, who have historically had a difficult time being placed in adoptive homes, due to their distinct cognitive, developmental, and emotional differences from younger children. In addition to the age requirement, adolescents needed to also meet the following criteria to be referred to the program: youth were under state guardianship; termination of parental rights had been court ordered more than one year before referral to the program; youth had a permanency plan of adoption; and youth had no identified adoptive resource.

In addition, the project made significant efforts toward the goal of strengthening participating youths' connection to caring adults and the larger community. The project did not replace any of the traditional recruitment methods already in current use. Instead, it provided an extra method to expand efforts to locate permanent families for youth. In addition to social workers' efforts on behalf of children, The Homecoming Project also depended on active participation by youth. The youth was a participating partner who was fully engaged in developing his or her own permanency plan.

The Homecoming Project was grounded in the principles of positive youth development, and focused on eight basic needs identified in research literature relating to positive youth development including:

- Sense of safety and structure;

- Experience active participation, group membership, and belonging;

- Develop self worth through meaningful contribution;

- Experiment to discover self, gain autonomy, and gain control over one's life;

- Develop significant quality relationships with peers and at least one adult;

- Discuss conflicting values and form their own;

- Feel pride of competence and mastery; and

- Expand capacity to enjoy life and to know success is possible.

Wilder Research conducted the process and outcome evaluation of the demonstration project. In addition to collecting data on youth participating in Homecoming services, Wilder Research staff collected information on a comparison group of youth who met the same eligibility criteria, but who were not receiving project services.

Overview of the population and the problem that the project was designed to address

According to the National Foster Care and Adoption Reporting System (AFCARS), on September 30, 2006, there were an estimated 510,000 children in foster care. Of those, over 117,000 were "waiting children" – children who have a goal of adoption and whose parents' rights have been terminated. The actual number of waiting children is likely higher, as children who are 16 years old or older, and who have a permanency goal of emancipation, are excluded (AFCARS, 2008).

There is little research on the long-term outcomes of youth who are adopted as teens. However, it is well-established that youth who reach adulthood while in foster care are significantly more likely than other youth to face life challenges related to their physical and emotional well-being.

Nationally, over 26,000 youth aged out of foster care in 2006 (AFCARS Report, 2008). One of the largest studies of this population conducted by the Chapin Hall Center for Children (Courtney and Dworsky, 2007) found that:

- 18 percent of the youth interviewed were homeless at least once since exiting foster care, and more than half of those youth were homeless more than once.

- 71 percent of the young women in the study had been pregnant, and 62 percent of those young women had been pregnant more than once.

- 77 percent of the young men, and 54 percent of the young women, had been arrested at some point in their lives.

Prior to this grant, Minnesota experienced success in finding families to adopt children under state guardianship who are 12 years of age and younger through traditional recruitment efforts, but was not as successful in finding adoptive families for children ages 13 and older. The Minnesota Department of Human Services data (see Figure 1) reported a growing number of older children since 1998 were waiting in foster care for an

adoptive family. A child under state guardianship was typically older, a child of color, a member of a sibling group, and/or identified with special needs.

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1. **Before project: Number of teenagers under state guardianship, by age and year**

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Age 13	27	26	39	34	45	38
Age 14	13	24	24	42	34	43
Age 15	10	13	19	19	31	29
Age 16	16	10	9	15	13	23
Age 17	15	17	10	9	14	12
Total	81	90	101	119	137	145

Data shows that the percentage of teenagers adopted averaged about 6 percent of all adoptions in Minnesota between 1998 and 2002 (see Figure 2).

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2. **Before project: Number and percent of adoptions of teenagers under state guardianship, by year**

Year	Total adoptions	Adoptions, ages 13-17	For ages 13-17, percent of total adoptions
1998	524	32	6%
1999	627	29	4.5%
2000	634	41	6.5%
2001	542	32	6%
2002	615	44	7%

Minnesota's child welfare system is a state-supervised, county-administered system in 87 counties. If termination of parental rights is ordered, guardianship of the children is generally transferred to the commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Human Services. In spring 2001, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, conducted a child welfare review of Minnesota. The onsite review found that Minnesota needed improvement regarding evaluation of alternative permanency options for youth beyond long-term foster care. In 2003, when this Adoption Opportunities grant application was written, 339 children under state guardianship had been court-ordered into long-term foster care in Minnesota.

In the traditional service-delivery system, youth are served by the county, the Department of Human Services, and other public and private agencies supporting waiting children and adoptive families.

Counties manage:

- Case management, including daily care responsibility for children

- Foster care and adoptive placement decisions

- Foster care payment – from placement to finalization.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services:

- Provides consultation, technical assistance, and training on adoption-related issues

- Issues non-delegated consents

- Processes paperwork required to legally finalize adoptions

- Contracts with private adoption agencies and non-profits to provide adoption services to assist counties

- Administers adoption assistance after finalization

Under grant contract with the Minnesota Department of Human Services, other private agencies provide:

- Registration of waiting children and families

- Information and referrals to families interested in adoption

- Follow-up on state ward reports to identify and resolve barriers to adoption

- Training for adoptive parents and professionals

- Post-adoption services

- Public education and advocacy about adoption

- Support and counseling services

In 2003, Department of Human Services staff identified a need for child-specific recruitment efforts for waiting adolescents and for opportunities for youth to participate actively in their own permanency planning. The Homecoming Project aimed to address

these needs and provide services that enhanced already existing services to create a comprehensive blanket of adoption services.

Minnesota continues to take steps to find adoptive placements for children older than 13 years of age and to develop strategies to reduce the use of long-term foster care as a permanency option. This program was an important tool to establish adoption as a viable, and more favorable, permanency option for Minnesota's waiting children for whom finding adoptive families has been traditionally difficult.

Overview of program model

The Homecoming Project model was a child-specific recruitment model that actively engaged young people in the adoption process. As opposed to a system-focused adoption strategy, The Homecoming Project aimed to address the needs of many parties involved in the process including youth, The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist (also referred to as the permanency specialists), social workers, prospective adoptive parents, and adoption resource agencies. Throughout the process, youth were supported in making well-informed decisions about adoption and in developing a network of ongoing support. The model includes four major program focuses: 1) Youth involvement, development, preparation, and transition to a permanent home; 2) general consultation to counties, agencies, and families; 3) recruitment of prospective families; and 4) promoting teamwork between all professionals involved with the youth. These focuses, and their components, are described in more detail below.

Youth involvement, development, preparation, and transition to a permanent home

The Homecoming Project model encouraged youth engagement throughout the permanency process, beginning with the youth's expectations about adoption and other aspects of permanent connections with adults in their lives. The Homecoming Project staff members talked with teens extensively about the idea of family and permanency, to ensure that youth clearly understood the difference between long term foster care and adoption. Youth also participated in decisions, such as developing recruitment strategies and materials, which in turn helped them begin to see themselves as competent individuals worthy of a family home.

As youth progressed in the adoption stages, The Homecoming Project staff members worked intensively with youth to ensure a smooth transition. With the consent of each youth's county workers, Homecoming Project staff members helped youth process information regarding their individual history, family, and life story though various activities including developing family trees, photo tours of places they have lived, and life books. These activities helped to prepare youth for permanency and identified potential family resources. The Homecoming Project also hosted social activities where youth could connect with other youth waiting to be adopted.

In addition to seeking adoptive families, the project also had the explicit goal of strengthening participating youth's connections to caring adults and the larger community. All work with youth was grounded in a youth development philosophy that placed the youth at the center of the recruitment activities, to the extent that the youth were capable

and wished to participate. Beginning with adults already familiar with the youth, the project engaged in child-specific and child-centered recruitment efforts based on actively identifying and building on each youth's strengths and potential.

General consultation to counties, agencies, families

Homecoming Project staff members worked collaboratively with counties, agencies, and families to help facilitate the adoption process. Since 2003, The Homecoming Project provided consultations and trainings on pre-adoption preparation (with a focus on teen adoption); effective and permanency-friendly foster, treatment, and/or correctional placements for teens; and differences between teen and younger child adoptions. The Homecoming Project also increased awareness of the teen adoption issue by developing a video, *We Interrupt: Teens talk about child-specific recruitment*, and by providing teen adoption trainings to interested parents, agencies, and counties, as a way of increasing the level of awareness and resources among these groups. This increased awareness was a critical component to normalizing the process of finding a permanent home for teens system-wide.

Prospective families recruitment

The Homecoming Project staff members used a variety of strategies to increase the number of families interested in, and prepared for, adopting teens. In addition to reviewing youth files for potential family matches, The Homecoming Project staff worked with the youth to identify other prospective families in their life. The Homecoming Project also reached out to prospective families through targeted community presentations and outreach activities. Interested families were further supported through the recruitment process through one-on-one meetings with The Homecoming Project staff to explore the "type" of youth the families might be able to parent, and to learn more about specific resources on adopting teens.

Professional collaborations

In addition to youth engagement, The Homecoming Project model required the support and assistance of the professional staff working with the youth, such as social workers, guardians ad litem, care providers, etc. The Homecoming Project teen permanency specialists joined these teams of professionals through a referral process. In a successful referral, The Homecoming Project recruiter joined the youth's existing treatment or placement team, and helped to monitor and advise the permanency process. Since The Homecoming Project specialists functioned as a team member, they were included in email and other communications related to permanency. All team members also agreed in advance on the process, how best to involve/inform the youth, and that they would

work together on building the trust necessary to safely facilitate honest discussions between team members during the permanency process.

In general, The Homecoming Project staff worked with the professional team to engage in open, honest, and safe communication with youth about the youth's history, family, and options for permanency. For instance, The Homecoming Project specialist may have advocated that a youth be provided information (letters, photos, video) on more than one family to decide how they would like to proceed and who they would like to meet, rather than being presented only one option. The Homecoming Project specialists engaged with other team members to ensure that the youth's preference was considered throughout the family-finding, matching, and transition processes, whenever possible.

Increasing teen adoptions

Overall, The Homecoming Project model allowed permanency specialists to bring together both professionals and youth to create a youth-focused permanency plan and support system for adoption, transition, and post adoption. With significantly smaller caseloads than most county social workers, The Homecoming Project provided valuable assistance, such as: consulting other involved adults, speaking with prospective parents, responding to crisis, and supporting youth throughout the permanency process. The Homecoming Project's interactive and youth-based model thus ensured that county workers, care providers, prospective families, and youth all had a voice in creating the best possible adoption placement for each youth.

Our Voices Matter

Homecoming recruitment staff encouraged project youth to participate in *Our Voices Matter*, a youth advocacy project which serves the following purposes:

■ It allows youth the chance to connect with others who have similar life experiences of being in the foster care system and in adoptive families.

■ It facilitates youth in the building of their confidence and their leadership skills.

■ It informs workers, parents, policymakers, and others about better ways to support foster and adopted youth.

■ It serves as a way for gaining exposure to public forums that might yield more adoptive resources.

Evaluation plan

Wilder Research, The Homecoming Project, and DHS staff worked together to develop the evaluation of The Homecoming Project. The evaluation was guided by a logic model that was developed in the summer of 2004 (a copy of the logic model is included in Appendix A).

The evaluation focused on the collection of both process and outcome information. Process-level data collection methods were designed to: 1) describe participants; 2) describe the project model and implementation; 3) describe barriers to implementation; 4) describe other possible influences on outcomes; and to 5) gather feedback from participating youth, caregivers, social workers, and staff.

In addition, the evaluation was designed to collect extensive outcome data about the youth served, including their permanency status, as well as their progress on the development of personal autonomy, sense of belonging, and control over their futures. In order to best understand outcomes over time, Homecoming Project youth participated in three telephone interviews over the course of the five years of the project. A group of youth in care who met the same criteria as youth referred to The Homecoming Project were also interviewed during the same time frame and served as a comparison group. Feedback was also obtained from potential adoptive families that worked with The Homecoming Project.

Systems-level outcomes were collected through surveys over time about the perceptions of adoption workers throughout the state. In addition, the project collected information about the overall impact on adoptions of teenagers in Minnesota.

Methods

The project used the following methods:

1. **The Homecoming Project Access database**, containing demographic and other information about referred youth. This database also included The Homecoming Project Referral form, completed by referring workers.

2. **The Homecoming Project Intake form**, completed by project staff, included descriptive information about youth.

3. **The Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS)**, completed by authorized project staff at baseline, 12-month intervals, and case closing.

4. **The Homecoming Project Closing Information form**, completed by project staff to measure youth status and progress in various outcome areas at case closing.

5. **The Homecoming Project Dosage (Services Tracking) form**, completed by project staff to measure implementation issues at the case level.

6. **Stakeholder feedback surveys**, completed by project youth periodically starting in spring of 2005. Also, in November of 2005, these surveys were completed by caregivers and social workers.

7. **The Homecoming Project Family survey**, a self-administered survey regarding teen adoption that is completed by families who have worked with The Homecoming Project. Implementation of this survey began in the fall of 2007.

8. **Staff feedback interviews**, key informant interviews conducted by Wilder staff with project staff and the Department of Human Services project director/grant contract manager. An interview was also conducted with a county social worker for a youth participating in the project. These interviews were conducted in 2005 and 2006.

9. **Adoption workers survey completed at baseline** (2003), after one year (2004), and at the end of the project (2008) by Minnesota public and private adoption workers, to document "business as usual" practices and attitudes related to the adoption of teens.

10. **Survey of Youth-In-Care, 2-year Follow-up Survey of Youth-In-Care, and 3-year (final) Follow-up Survey of Youth-In-Care**, completed by Wilder Research staff, via telephone interview with youth throughout Minnesota who met criteria for inclusion in the project. These were surveys that focused on youth development issues, including the youth's: sense of belonging; connection with a caring adult; and feelings of autonomy and control over his/her future. The surveys also collected some client outcome data such as youth permanency, housing, education, and employment.

11. **Administrative data about outcomes of Homecoming youth and comparison group youth found in statewide databases administered by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.** At the end of the study (November 2008), researchers worked to analyze information about adoption, long-term foster care, and aging out of care outcomes through the assistance of Department of Human Services staff.

Data included in this report

Because there was a tremendous amount of information collected about the project, its implementation, project youth characteristics, and outcomes, this report focuses on summarizing implementation and on more fully describing youth served and subsequent outcomes. Midway through the project, Wilder Research staff completed a report that focused on qualitative data about program implementation. This report, *"Breaking new ground in teen adoption: Lessons learned in the first two years of the Homecoming Project,"* is included in the Appendix. In addition, Homecoming staff partnered with Wilder Research to complete a report describing the lessons learned from program implementation. This report, *"Finding adoptive families for teens: Practice tips from the Homecoming Project for working with teens under state guardianship,"* was completed in the fall of 2008 is also included in the Appendix. It is expected that this manual will be a useful and practical resource for adoption professionals as well as for others interested in issues related to teen adoption.

Problems encountered in the implementation of the evaluation

There were no significant problems encountered in the implementation of the evaluation. In fact, this project was very successful in teaming together state planning staff, project staff, and researchers to design the evaluation plan. Wilder Research staff were involved in proposal design which included planning for a comparison group to better understand project impact. The Homecoming Project coordinator, the Minnesota Department of Human Services project director and grant manager, and Wilder Researchers worked together on an ongoing basis to refine evaluation questions, problem solve barriers encountered by project staff, and plan next steps. This group also attended the Children's Bureau grantee conference each year – which allowed time for additional collaboration and reflection.

There were two unexpected aspects of the evaluation design. First, because the project included a follow-up of youth in care, researchers contacted social workers in counties throughout the state to gain access to youth. During the baseline stage, research staff had more up-to-date information – about the placement and legal status of youth in care – than did the state database which had been used to draw the sample. Also, the amount of contact by research staff (three times over four years) may have influenced county workers to focus on the placement and status of youth.

Second, we expected that youth would be extremely difficult to locate and to gain cooperation in the longitudinal study. Midway through the project, one expert interviewer was assigned to conduct the interviewers. This interviewer established trust and rapport with county workers, caregivers, and youth – which in turn contributed to the high degree of success and excellent response rate for this kind of study.

Background characteristics of Homecoming youth

Wilder Research analyzed data provided through the end of the project by Homecoming Project staff. Homecoming staff were asked to complete an intake form for each youth served that provides extensive background information about youth served.

As stated previously, the criteria for referral and inclusion into The Homecoming Project were the following:

- Youth between the ages of 13 and 17

- Youth under state guardianship

- Termination of parental rights had been court ordered more than one year before

- Youth with a permanency plan of adoption

- Youth with no identified adoptive resource

In addition, the project served a number of siblings of youth who had met the above criteria. These siblings were included in the data collection and analysis.

It is important to note that Minnesota's child welfare system is a state-supervised, county-administered system. There are 87 counties who have responsibility for children in foster care. The counties' responsibilities include:

- Case management, including daily care responsibility for children

- Foster care and adoptive placement decisions

- Foster care payment from placement to finalization

The project received referrals for youth participants from county social workers. Sixty-two percent of referrals came from the 7-county metro area surrounding Minneapolis/ St. Paul. The figure below shows the number of youth who were referred, by county.

3. Number of youth referred to project, by county

N=100	Number
Minneapolis/St. Paul Metropolitan counties	
Hennepin	24
Anoka	14
Ramsey	13
Dakota	5
Scott	3
Washington	3
Greater Minnesota counties	
Chisago	5
Clay	4
Pine	4
Mower	3
Beltrami	2
Cass	2
Marshall	2
Olmsted	2
Otter Tail	2
Stearns	2
Becker	1
Cottonwood	1
Jackson	1
Kannebec	1
Lincoln/Lyon/Murray	1
McLeod	1
Morrison	1
Stevens	1
Todd	1
Wright	1

Demographics

Over half (52%) of Homecoming youth served are male. Nearly three-fifths were 13 or 14 years old at intake. The average age at intake was 13.6. Six out of 10 youth served are youth of color. One-quarter are African American.

Eighty-seven percent indicated they were heterosexual, 4 percent were bisexual, while 10 percent were unsure about their sexual orientation. One individual had a child at age 17. All youth with information available were United States citizens and spoke English as their primary language.

4. Homecoming youth characteristics – Gender

N=100	Number	Percent
Male	52	52%
Female	48	48%

Source: *Homecoming Project reports.*

5. Homecoming youth characteristics – Race/Ethnicity

N=100	Number	Percent
Caucasian	39	39%
African American	25	25%
Multi-racial	19	19%
Hispanic/Latino	8	8%
American Indian	8	8%
Other/Ethiopian	1	1%

Source: *Homecoming Project reports.*

Project staff collected information about many other aspects of Homecoming youth at intake. Intake forms were completed about 79 youth served. It should be noted that throughout this report, the number of cases in each table varies because of missing or unknown information. Percentages are reported based on the number (N) noted in each table.

6. Other Homecoming participant characteristics

	Number	Percent
Age (N=61)*		
10 years	2	3%
11 years	-	-
12 years	9	15%
13 years	19	31%
14 years	17	28%
15 years	6	10%
16 years	7	11%
17 years	1	2%
Mean age	13.6	
Sexual orientation (N=74)		
Heterosexual/Straight	64	87%
Gay/Lesbian	-	-
Bisexual	3	4%
Unsure	7	10%
Number with children (N=79)		
1	1	1%
Age at first birth of child		
17	1	1%

Source: *Homecoming Project Intake form*

Note: *Throughout this report, the number of cases in each table varies because of missing or unknown information. Percentages are reported based on the number (N) noted in each table. Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

Educational history

Over half (56%) of the youth were in the 8th or 9th grade at intake. Nearly all youth (98%) were enrolled in and were regularly attending school (only one youth had indicated not being enrolled; one had not indicated the status). Of these:

- 58 percent were receiving mainstream education

- 18 percent were receiving an alternative form of schooling

- 19 percent were in a treatment facility

7. Educational history

N=79	Number	Percent
Grade in school		
5th grade	4	5%
6th grade	2	3%
7th grade	6	8%
8th grade	23	29%
9th grade	21	27%
10th grade	10	13%
11th grade	8	10%
12th grade	2	3%
Unknown/not reported	3	4%
Mean grade	*9th*	
Currently enrolled and regularly attending		
Yes	77	98%
No	1	1%
Attendance unknown/not reported	1	1%
Type of school		
Mainstream	46	58%
Alternative	14	18%
Treatment facility	15	19%
Other (Emotional Behavioral Disorder special education setting)	2	3%
Unknown/not reported	2	3%

Source: *Homecoming Project Intake form*

Note: *Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

Special education needs

Many of the youth (84%) were receiving some sort of special education through their schools. Those who required special education needed support for the following:

■ Nearly two-thirds (63%) needed support for Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD)

■ Nearly one-third (30%) needed support for a learning disability

■ Nearly one-quarter (22%) needed assistance for a developmental disability

■ One youth (each) needed special education for being deaf or hard of hearing, for physical disability, or for speech or language

The levels of support also differed among the youth who needed it:

- 22 percent of participants needed only some support

- 16 percent needed less than a half-day of pull-out from their regular classes for special education

- 12 percent needed more than a half-day, but less than a full-day of special education support

- 27 percent needed a full day pull-out program

8. Special education requirements

N=79	Number	Percent
Receiving special education		
Yes	66	84%
No	13	17%
Special education needs[*]		
Emotional Behavior Disorder (EBD)	50	63%
Learning disability	24	30%
Developmental disability	17	22%
Physical disability	1	1%
Deaf/hard of hearing	1	1%
Speech/Language	1	1%
Other (not specified)	3	4%
Level of support		
Mainstream with some support	17	22%
Less than one-half day pull-out	13	16%
One-half day to less than full pull-out	8	12%
Full day pull-out	21	27%
Unknown/not reported	7	9%

Source: Homecoming Project Intake form

Note: *Participants could have more than one type of disability. Therefore, percentages do not total 100.*

Other educational history

Additional information was collected about indicators of school attendance or performance in the prior three months:

■ Over half of youth (55%) were reading below their grade levels

■ 30 percent had recently been suspended or expelled

■ 81 percent had <u>not</u> been truant in the previous three months

Homecoming workers asked each youth whether school had been meeting their needs. A majority (89%) indicated that their needs had been met.

9.   Other educational history

N=79*	Number "Yes"	Percent
Any current issues (within the last 3 months) in school with…?		
Truancy	15	19%
Reading below grade level	42	53%
Suspensions/expulsions	24	30%
School meets the youth's needs	70	89%
Youth has completed a job training program	5	6%

Source: *Homecoming Project Intake form*

Employment history

Seven youth were employed and worked between five and eight hours per week at the time the intake forms were filled out. The mean number of hours worked in an average week was 6.6.

Where youth grew up

Of the 76 youth with information about where they had lived most of their lives, only two had lived in another state. Seventy-four youth had lived in Minnesota for all or most of their lives. Of these Minnesota youth:

■ Twenty-seven youth (36%) had grown up in the 7-county Metro area outside of Minneapolis or Saint Paul (including Hennepin, Ramsey, Dakota, Washington, Anoka, Carver, and Scott counties)

- Twenty-four youth (32%) had grown up in greater Minnesota

- Thirteen (18%) had grown up in Minneapolis

- Ten youth (14%) had lived most of their lives in Saint Paul

Placement history

On average, youth had been first placed out-of-home at age 7.

- The average cumulative length of time that youth had spent in out-of-home care was 5.1 years.

- The average number of placements was 10.

10. Length of time in out-of-home care

N=79	Number	Percent
Number of years		
<2	2	3%
2 to <5	38	48%
5 to <8	20	25%
8 to <12	7	9%
12 +	3	4%
Unknown/not reported	9	11%
Mean length of time	5.1 years	
Number of placements		
2 to 6	31	39%
7 to 15	29	37%
16 to 25	8	10%
26 to 37	5	6%
Unknown/not reported	6	8%
Mean number of placements	10.1 times	
Age at first placement		
<1 year	6	8%
1 to 2 years	4	5%
3 to 6 years	19	24%
7 to 9 years	21	27%
10 to 12 years	21	27%
13+ years	2	3%
Unknown/not reported	6	8%
Mean age at first placement	7.2 years	

Source: Homecoming Project Intake form

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Types of placements

At intake, the Homecoming worker collected information about the types of placements for each youth. Information was also collected about whether any of these placements had been in the prior six months and the number of times in those placements. The following figures show that youth had lived in a wide range of placements, including homeless shelters:

11. Types of placement

"Have you ever lived in…" N=79	IF YES, ASK 33B AND C		33B. In the last 6 months?		33C. Approximate number of times in your life?	Mean
	Number	Percent	Yes	Percent	Number	
A foster home?	77	98%	54	68%	1 to 14	4.4
An emergency shelter?	48	61%	8	10%	1 to 16	4.0
A Residential Treatment Center?	40	51%	17	22%	1 to 7	2.7
A group home?	33	42%	12	15%	1 to 5	1.9
Juvenile detention (at least one night?)	26	33%	6	8%	1 to 4	2.2
A hospital for psychiatric help?	24	30%	2	3%	1 to 4	1.9
Juvenile corrections facility?	15	19%	5	6%	1 to 5	-
Homeless (in car or on the streets)?	15	19%	-	-	-	-
A battered women's shelter?	7	9%	-	-	1	-
Transitional housing?	2	3%	1	1%	2	-
A drug or alcohol treatment facility?	1	1%	-	-	2	-
Some type of halfway house?	3	4%	-	-	1 to 2	-
Detox (at least overnight)?	1	1%	-	-	-	-

Source: *Homecoming Project Intake form*

Youth were then asked: "Have you ever run away from foster care, a group home, treatment center, or other placement?" Approximately 53 percent said they had run away before, while 38 percent had never run away.

Youth were also asked, "How long has it been since you have had contact with any of your birth family or relatives?"

■ 43 percent had contact less than a month prior

■ 29 percent had contact over a month, but under a year prior

- Nearly one-quarter (24%) had contact more than a year prior

When asked a question about an adult-youth connection, 77 percent of youth mentioned they had an adult in their lives at that time who they trusted and had regular contact with.

Quality of care

Finally, youth were asked about their satisfaction with the quality of care they had received from the foster care system. Less than half (45%) were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied." Forty-one percent were neutral (neither "satisfied" nor "dissatisfied" with the foster care system). Only 13 percent of youth at that time expressed dissatisfaction with the system (see Figure 12).

12. Quality of care

"How satisfied are you with the quality of care that you have received in the foster care system?"	N	Percentage of youth responding:					Mean
		Very satisfied (1)	Satisfied (2)	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied (3)	Dissatisfied (4)	Very dissatisfied (5)	
Would you say ("Very satisfied," "Satisfied," etc.)?	75	13%	32%	41%	9%	4%	2.6

Source: *Homecoming Project Intake form*

Reasons youth originally left home

Homecoming workers gathered information about reasons why the youth had first left home, if it was readily available from each youth's file. Figure 13 shows that one of the main reasons youth were placed outside of their homes was due to neglect (90% of youth had experienced neglect). Emotional abuse and drug or alcohol abuse by a parent or household member tied as the second most common reason (73%). Neglect and emotional abuse may have been related to drug or alcohol abuse by the parent.

13. Reasons youth originally were placed outside of their home

When youth first left home or was placed outside of the home, was it because (of)…? (N=79)	Yes	No	Unknown
Neglect?	90%	3%	8%
Emotional abuse?	73%	10%	17%
Drug or alcohol abuse by a parent or household member?	73%	14%	13%
Physical abuse?	68%	14%	18%
Mental illness of parent?	62%	15%	23%
Domestic violence in the home?	60%	18%	23%
Sexual abuse?	47%	14%	39%
Abandonment?	41%	38%	22%
Homelessness/parents unable to house child?	24%	56%	20%
Mental illness of youth?	19%	68%	13%
Parents incarcerated?	19%	65%	17%
Youth was kicked out or told to go, or an adult in the household would not tolerate youth being around?	13%	65%	23%
Death or serious physical illness of parent?	6%	85%	9%
Any other reasons?	6%	65%	29%

Source: *Homecoming Project Intake form*

Note: *Youth may have experienced more than one reason that led to their first out of home placement. Therefore, totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding as well as multiple reasons.*

History of abuse, neglect, and health issues

Information was collected about youths' histories of abuse, neglect, mental health, and physical health conditions. Homecoming workers also collected information about their past or what was, at that time, their current drug or alcohol use and involvement in the legal system.

14. History of abuse/neglect

N=79	Number	Percent
Physical abuse		
Yes	58	73%
No	7	9%
Unknown/not reported	14	18%
Sexual abuse		
Yes	40	51%
No	11	14%
Unknown/not reported	28	35%
Neglect		
Yes	70	89%
No	6	7%
Unknown/not reported	3	4%

Source: *Homecoming Project Intake form*

Note: *Youth may have experienced more than one type of abuse. Therefore, totals may not equal 100 percent due to multiple responses and rounding.*

Mental and physical health concerns

Nearly all (94%) Homecoming youth had at least one type of mental health diagnosis at intake. The mental health status was unknown for four of the youth.

15. Mental and physical health concerns

N=79	Number	Percent
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD)	23	29%
Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD)	23	29%
Depressive Disorder	17	22%
Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)	16	20%
Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)	16	20%
Bi-polar Disorder	13	16%
Conduct Disorder	13	16%
Adjustment Disorder	11	14%
Mood Disorder	10	13%
Anxiety Disorder	9	11%
Dysthymic Disorder	8	10%

15. Mental and physical health concerns (continued)

N=79	Number	Percent
Type(s) of Mental health diagnosis/diagnoses (continued)		
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)	4	5%
Developmentally Delayed	3	4%
Personality Disorder	3	4%
Behavioral Disorder	2	3%
Impulse Control Disorder	2	3%
Disassociative Disorder	2	3%
Intermittent Explosive Disorder	2	3%
Disruptive Behavior Disorder (DBD)	1	1%
Learning Disorder	1	1%
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)	1	1%
Psychotic Disorder	1	1%
Kleptomania	1	1%
Communication Disorder	1	1%
Chemical/Drug Use	1	1%
Sexual Disorder	1	1%
History of mental illness in youth's biological family		
Yes	55	70%
No	2	3%
Unknown/not reported	22	28%
If "Yes:" Relationship to youth (N=55)		
Mother	39	71%
Other relative(s)	5	9%
Grandparent(s)	2	4%
Entire immediate family	1	2%
Parent (unspecified)	4	7%
Father	7	13%
Sibling	2	4%

Source: *Homecoming Project Intake form*

15. Mental and physical health concerns (continued)

N=79	Number	Percent
Type(s) of physical concern(s)		
Prader-Willi Syndrome	1	1%
Diabetes	1	1%
Head trauma/injury	1	1%
Drug use	1	1%
Seizure Disorder	2	3%
Scoliosis	1	1%
Bicuspid Aortic Valve	1	1%
Hole in the heart	1	1%
Pre-natal exposure to drugs/alcohol	2	3%
Cerebral Palsy	1	1%
Other mental/health concerns		
Witness to domestic violence	50	63%
Developmental disability	24	30%
Attempted suicide (1 to 4 times)	17	22%
Self-abuse/cutting/self-mutilation	20	25%

Source: *Homecoming Project Intake form*

Substance use and delinquency

Fourteen youth had substance (marijuana, inhalants) and/or alcohol abuse in their past Information was unknown for five youth. Six youth were abusing drugs and/or alcohol at intake.

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16. Drug or alcohol abuse for youth and in biological family

	Number	Percent
Drug or alcohol abuse	14	18%
Past types of drug or alcohol abuse (N=14)		
Marijuana	9	
Inhalants	2	
Alcohol	8	
Current types of drug or alcohol abuse (N=6)		
Marijuana	4	
Inhalants	1	
Alcohol	1	
Drug or alcohol dependency in biological family (N=79)		
Yes	64	81%
No	5	6%
Unknown/not reported	10	13%
If "Yes": Relationship to youth (N=64)		
Mother	53	83%
Grandparent(s)	6	9%
Father	23	36%
Parent (unspecified)	5	8%
Sibling	2	3%
Other relative(s)	5	8%

Legal system: arrests and offenses

■ Forty-three percent of youth had a history of having been arrested between one and three times.

■ Twenty-nine percent of youth had been charged one to two times with status or delinquency offenses.

17. Legal system: arrests and offenses

N=79	Number	Percent
Police arrests (N=79)		
Yes (1 to 3 times)	34	43%
No	42	53%
Unknown/not reported	3	4%
Charged with status or delinquency offense		
Yes (1 to 3 times)	23	29%
No	45	57%
Unknown/not reported	11	14%
Most serious offenses named		
Assault	9	
Property destruction	3	
Sexual assault	3	
Auto theft	2	
Running away	2	
Criminal sexual conduct	2	
Terrorist threats	1	
Arson	1	
Unknown/not reported	7	
Does youth have a probation officer?		
Yes	16	20%
No	58	73%
Unknown/not reported	5	6%

Characteristics of Homecoming youth at case closing

Homecoming Project staff kept the majority of cases open until the project ended in September 2008. However, some cases were closed earlier, due to various reasons. See the next section for information about reasons for case closing.

Age at case closing

Due to efforts, when appropriate, to place siblings of teenagers in adoptive homes, The Homecoming Project served a variety of age groups. At project end, the youngest child was 8 and the eldest was 21. Most youth served were older adolescents over age 16.

18.   Homecoming youth characteristics: Age at case closing

N=100	Number	Percent
< 11 years	2	2%
11 years	1	1%
12 years	1	1%
13 years	2	2%
14 years	6	6%
15 years	10	10%
16 years	16	16%
17 years	23	23%
18+ years	39	39%

Source: *Homecoming Project reports*

Information was collected by workers about various changes that took place for Homecoming youth while their case was open with the project.

Placements since referral

On average, youth moved 3.2 times since referral to The Homecoming Project. The number of moves ranged from zero to 12 per youth.

Youth were living in the following situations at case closing.

19. Types of living situations while enrolled in The Homecoming Project and at case closing

Settings (N=62)	At some point since referral	Case closing
Foster home/group home	76%	36%
Temporary shelter/homeless/runaway	39%	5%
Juvenile corrections or detention	39%	
Pre-adoptive home	37%	-
Residential treatment program	34%	
Adoptive family	31%	27%
Institution	18%	15%
Independent	10%	3%
Sexual offender residential treatment	10%	
Halfway house	3%	
Drug or alcohol treatment facility	2%	-
Transitional housing	2%	
Housing for physically disabled	2%	
Permanent committed family	Not collected	5%
Family/kin	Not collected	10%

Source: *2007-2008 Closing Form.*

Education and employment at case closing

Eighty-seven percent of youth were reported enrolled in school. Eighty percent of these students were attending school regularly. The majority of youth attended mainstream schools (50%). Others frequented alternative (14%) and treatment facility (16%) schools.

20. Grade in school at case closing

Grade (N=62)	Number	Percent
5-6	2	4%
7	2	3%
8	5	8%
9	8	13%
10	16	26%
11	19	31%
12	3	5%

Source: *2007-2008 Closing form.*

Truancy was reported among 26 percent of youth in the last three months. Issues in school, like suspensions and expulsions, were reported for 21 percent of truant youth.

Seven youth were employed (11%). These youth worked between 6 and 20 hours per week and held positions between 2 weeks and 2 years. An additional 18 percent of youth had been employed, but were no longer.

Risk behaviors since referral

For the most part, the majority of Homecoming youth (61%) had not exhibited at-risk behavior between referral and case closing. About a fifth of Homecoming youth were rated as at-risk for sexual behavior and runaway behavior. In seven cases, Homecoming workers commented that they felt a youth's needs and risky behavior exceeded their caregivers' resources. This said, since referral to The Homecoming Project, no youth reported getting pregnant or making someone pregnant, but 13 percent had made a suicide attempt.

Since referral to The Homecoming Project, 16 percent of youth were identified as abusing drugs or alcohol. Among these youth, 5 percent were in treatment or recovery.

21. Risk behavior since referral to The Homecoming Project

Behaviors (N=62)	Number	Percent
Suicide attempt	3	5%
Harm to oneself or others (school)	7	11%
Harm to oneself or others (home)	6	10%
Harm to oneself or others (community)	4	7%
Sexual behavior	12	19%
Runaway behavior	11	18%
Psychotic or organic symptoms	5	8%
Substance abuse	10	16%

Source: *2007-2008 Closing form.*

Legal problems between referral and case closing

Since referral to The Homecoming Project, 26 percent of youth had been arrested by police. The number of arrests ranged from one to four. Twenty-four percent of youth had been charged with a status or delinquency offense. Ten youth had probation officers.

Homecoming youth scores using the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS)

In addition to intake information collected about Homecoming youth, project staff completed a Child and Adolescent Functioning Assessment Scale (CAFAS) for youth at intake, at 12-month intervals while the case was open, and at case closing.

The CAFAS is used widely by various agencies that provide services, such as mental health, juvenile justice, child welfare, and education, to children and youth. It is used: 1) to determine the youth's functioning across real-life domains, 2) to guide the service plan, interventions, or treatment protocols needed for the child and for caregivers, and 3) to track whether the youth's functioning improves or deteriorates over time. Other Adoption Opportunities grantees selected the CAFAS to help measure youth functioning. The Homecoming Project chose the tool in order to produce data that would be comparable with similar efforts nationwide.

However, it should be noted that staff were concerned about the focus of the instrument on impairment, rather than on strengths. The instrument was used mainly to describe youth served and to have a standardized way of understanding their progress over time.

At intake, if a CAFAS was completed by another social worker in the previous six-months, then that CAFAS was used as the baseline CAFAS for this study.

At least one CAFAS was completed for each of 80 youth (80%). Two sets of analyses were done to examine changes in CAFAS scores over time.

- 58 youth had at least two completed CAFAS scores that were more than six months apart (range of 7 months to 48 months with a mean of 23 months). These 58 pairs were examined for baseline and follow-up changes.

- 31 youth had at least three completed CAFAS scores. These 31 were included in an analysis of baseline, midpoint, and follow-up scores. The length of time between the baseline and third CAFAS ranged from 15 to 48 months with a mean of 32 months.

Youth functional status at baseline and final follow-up: Average subscale scores

Overall, scores showed that youth exhibited "mild" impairment in terms of their school, home, and community role performance levels; their behavior towards others; and moods and emotions. Although still "mild," the highest average scores were in the area of home role performance. Youth were generally rated as "minimal or no" impairment for self-harmful behavior, substance use, and impaired levels of thinking.

Little change in CAFAS scores between baseline and final follow-up

Figure 22 shows the CAFAS analyses of 58 youth at entry and at final follow-up.

- There were no statistically significant changes in seven of the 8 subscale scores or in the total scores for Homecoming youth over time (for two time periods; averaging 23 months).

- The only subscale that showed a statistically significant change over time was substance use ($p<.05$). Although there was a significant increase in severity, average scores still fell within the "minimal or no impairment" category.

This lack of significant change in youth over time may be a positive sign. It is a commonly held belief that teenagers in foster care exhibit increasingly severe behavior and functioning as they get older. However, Homecoming youth maintained similar functioning over time. It is also interesting to note that Homecoming youth, on average, exhibited only minimal to mild levels of impairment.

22. Youth functional status at baseline and final follow-up: subscale scores

Subscale	Average scores of youth/ type of impairment: (N=58)	
	Baseline	Midpoint
School role performance	15.7	15.3
Home role performance	16.6	16.4
Community role performance	10.7	10.0
Behavior toward others	13.6	14.0
Moods and emotions	13.1	14.3
Self-harmful behavior	3.6	4.7
Substance use	1.0	2.6*
Thinking	4.3	5.2
Total score	78.6	82.1

Source: Homecoming CAFAS baseline and final.

Note: The lower the mean score, the milder the impairment: 0=minimal or no impairment, 10=mild impairment, 20=moderate impairment, and 30=severe impairment.

The only scale that showed a statistically significant change over time was substance use (p<.05). Although there was a significant increase in severity, average scores still fall within the "minimal or no impairment" category.

Youth functional status at entry, midpoint, and follow-up: Average subscale scores

An additional analysis was done for those youth who had a CAFAS completed at baseline, midway through the project, and at final follow-up or case closing (31 youth). It was hypothesized that there may be some movement in average youth scores over time – due to the frequent transitions that foster care youth experience. Overall, this analysis of three points in time showed very similar results to the analysis (above) of two points in time. However, the results show that there is movement at midpoint and a tendency to level off at final follow-up.

Little change in CAFAS scores between baseline, midpoint, and follow-up

Figure 23 shows the CAFAS analyses of 31 youth at entry, midpoint, and at final follow-up.

- There were no statistically significant changes in any of the subscale scores or the total scores for Homecoming youth over time (for three time periods; averaging 32 months).

Although not statistically significant, there was a downward trend or leveling off in the overall severity level of youth served between baseline, midpoint, and follow-up in four of the eight subscales. These include youths' behaviors toward others and their school, home, and community role performance levels. Youth scores increased in severity for substance use and impaired levels of thinking, although both scores remained in the "minimal or no" impairment category over time. Youth scores, on average, slightly increased for moods and emotions, but remained in the "mild" level of impairment category. Self-harmful behavior remained relatively constant over time.

23. Youth functional status at baseline, midpoint, and final follow-up: Subscale scores

Average scores of youth/type of impairment: (N=31)

	School role performance	Home role performance	Community role performance	Behavior toward others	Moods and emotions	Self-harmful behavior	Substance use	Thinking
Baseline	16.1	15.5	11.6	14.8	13.9	4.2	1.0	5.2
Midpoint	14.5	15.1	9.4	13.2	13.9	4.5	1.6	6.1
Final	13.9	14.8	9.7	13.2	14.1	4.2	2.9	6.5

■ Baseline   ■ Midpoint   □ Final
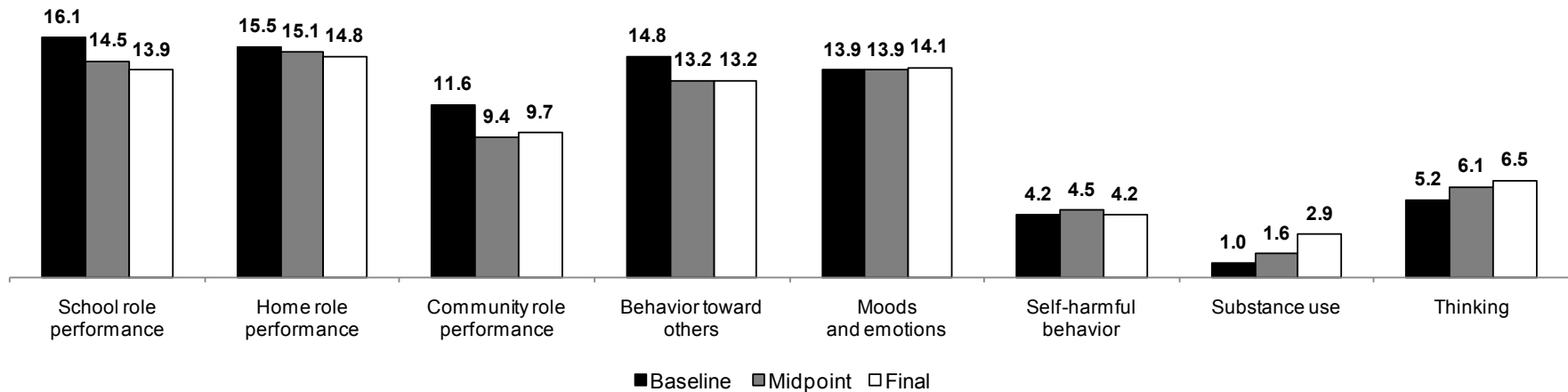
Source: Homecoming CAFAS baseline, midpoint, and final.

Note: The lower the mean score, the milder the impairment: 0=minimal or no impairment, 10=mild impairment, 20=moderate impairment, and 30=severe impairment.

Change in total CAFAS scores at follow-up

Overall, youth received a total score of 82.3 on the CAFAS at baseline, 78.4 at midpoint, and 79.4 at the final CAFAS. According to the CAFAS literature, these scores indicate that these youth, on average, may require, or are receiving, additional services beyond regular outpatient care. The average scores decreased at midpoint and then went up slightly at final follow-up. The differences in scores between intake and final follow-up were not statistically significant.

24. **Total CAFAS scores of Homecoming youth at baseline, midpoint, and final follow-up**

Total CAFAS scores of Homeless youth
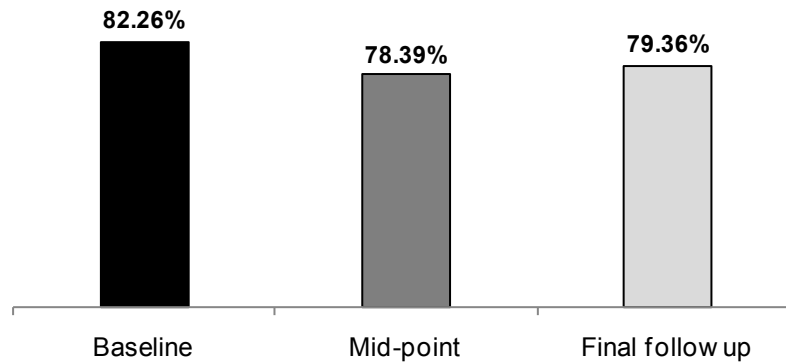
Youth functional status at case closing: Subscale scores

An additional analysis was done for all Homecoming youth who had a CAFAS completed at case closing (N=52). Youth were generally rated as "minimal or no" impairment for self-harmful behavior, substance use, and impaired levels of thinking. Severity levels were slightly higher for moods and emotions and behavior toward others.

25. Youth functional status at closing: subscale scores

Subscale (N=52)	Minimal or none(0)	Mild (10)	Moderate (20)	Severe (30)
School role performance	24%	23%	13%	24%
Home role performance	21%	31%	15%	18%
Community role performance	40%	15%	24%	5%
Behavior toward others	15%	27%	39%	3%
Moods and emotions	13%	37%	23%	11%
Self-harmful behavior	52%	11%	8%	2%
Substance use	61%	11%	11%	-
Thinking	57%	11%	16%	-

Source: *Homecoming CAFAS closing.*

Total scores on the CAFAS at case closing

Homecoming youth received an average total score of 77.5 on the CAFAS, which indicates that many may require additional services beyond outpatient care. However, the severity of their total scores ranged widely at case closing, and fall equally among all categories, as shown in the figure below:

26. At Homecoming case closing, levels of need based on total CAFAS scores
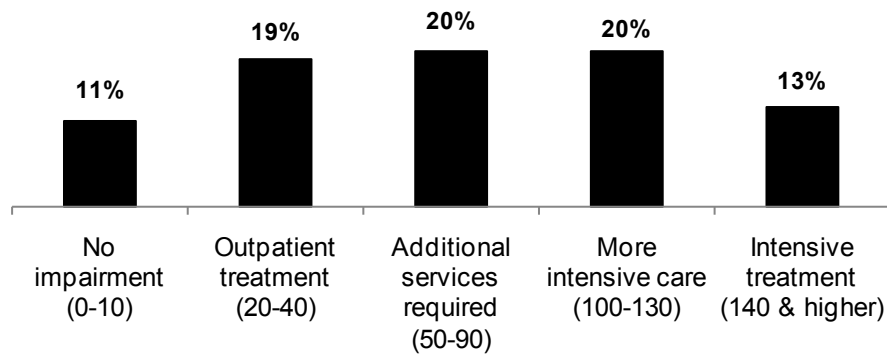
Findings regarding project implementation (process evaluation)

As mentioned earlier, in 2006, Wilder Research staff completed a report that focused on qualitative data about program implementation. This report, *Breaking new ground in teen adoption: Lessons learned in the first two years of the Homecoming Project,* is included in the Appendix. In addition, Homecoming staff partnered with Wilder Research to complete a report describing the lessons learned from program implementation. This 2008 report, *Finding adoptive families for teens: Practice tips from the Homecoming Project for working with teens under state guardianship,* is also included as an attachment in the Appendix.

We would like to direct the reader to these two documents for information about project implementation and replication.

Beyond these two documents, this section of the report focuses on summarizing information from semi-annual reports, information at youth's case closing as well as "dosage" forms submitted by Homecoming staff, and feedback collected midway through the project from key stakeholders: youth, care providers, and social workers.

A closing form was completed by Homecoming Project workers at the time of case closing or if there was a significant reduction in services due to an event.

Twenty-one youth had a significant reduction in services before the end of the project in October 2008. This was due to adoption (for 18 youth), a youth-family match (for 2 youth), and emancipation or aging out of care at age 18 (for one youth). As a general policy, the project kept cases open regardless of whether the youth turned 18 while being served.

27. Case status at closing

Reasons for case closing (N=100)	Reduced intensity of services N=21	Closed cases N=79
Adoption	18	-
Youth-family match	2	-
Youth emancipated, requested continuation, but reduction in intensity of Homecoming Project service	1	-
Youth Initiated		
Youth emancipated, and requested no Homecoming Project service	-	2
Youth ambivalence toward permanency work	-	11
Youth wants to remain in foster home	-	11
County Initiated		
Youth began work with the Homecoming Project; county closed	-	9
Youth ordered into long-term foster care	-	6
Homecoming Project Initiated		
Non-Homecoming social workers uncooperative, resistant, unwilling to participate in efforts to team cases or youth not allowed to participate in activities	-	4
Project ended	-	44

Source: *2007-2008 Closing Survey.*

Overview of project activities (summary of semi-annual reports)

Beyond the ongoing, intensive recruitment work done with youth, the project had many accomplishments over its five years. These activities are detailed in each of 10 semi-annual reports completed between April 2004 and October 2008. To access a copy of these reports, especially if considering project replication, please see the contact information on the cover page of this report. The following are some highlights in areas beyond the individual casework over the course of the five year grant period.

A summary of major activities and accomplishments in year 1

Project implementation

> The project solicited input from youth who have experienced adoption and/or foster care in the interviews of recruiter position applicants.

The Dave Thomas Foundation, who initially provided $40,000 as a cash donation to the project as part of the grant proposal, donated another $40,000 to fund an additional child-specific recruiter position (this funding ended midway through the five year project).

Developed grievance procedures for youth served, data privacy/informed consent documents, and completed the referral and intake process with 13 youth to participate in project services.

Homecoming Project staff saw leads followed up on for permanent families for youth, saw youth transition out of restrictive residential treatment and correctional settings to community-based foster homes (some birth family members), and saw referrals increase slowly as county and private agency social workers learned about the work of The Homecoming Project recruitment specialists.

Three Homecoming Project youth, now participating in *Our Voices Matter*: Youth Advocacy Project, attended two youth leadership conferences; one with youth from Massachusetts Families for Kids in May 2004.

Homecoming Project staff played a role in a statewide campaign promoting the use of child-specific recruitment efforts as a permanency tool for adolescents.

Staff assisted in the development of a brochure to target to county social workers, that clarifies the few legal circumstances under which long-term foster care may be ordered and advocating for utilization of child-specific recruitment efforts prior to considering the disposition of long-term foster care, encouraging social workers to utilize the project's services that are free of charge to the counties.

The child-specific recruitment campaign provided outreach at the Minnesota Foster and Adoptive Care Association's Annual Conference and at the St. Louis County Human Services Conference. The campaign hosted national expert, Pat O'Brien, who challenged audiences to think about their role in permanency for older youth.

A Homecoming Project youth, was profiled at the Wendy's Golf Classic, an annual fundraiser for The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption.

Project promotion

In the early months of The Homecoming Project, news releases were sent out, letters and flyers were sent to directors, supervisors, and social workers of the 87 Minnesota counties; Homecoming Project personnel began accepting opportunities to present information on the project to a variety of groups, organizations, etc, such as the Permanency Task Force and social services departments of both of the large urban counties and counties in greater Minnesota; and information was circulated electronically through resources such as the adoption listserv, a private email group for county, tribal, and private agency social workers who place children for adoption and complete adoption home studies.

Project evaluation

> The Minnesota Department of Human Services' Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval for a study of youth under state guardianship who meet the criteria for inclusion in The Homecoming Project. All youth were asked to voluntarily participate in a telephone interview.
>
> In spring 2004, interviewers from Wilder Research began contacting social workers assigned to youth under state guardianship to gather information about the whereabouts of youth, to enlist social worker participation in informing youth and their caregivers about the study, and to understand any communication barriers for individual youth.

A summary of major activities and accomplishments in year 2

Project implementation

> One lesson learned is that the adoptive families identified are virtually all new resources, not previously known to the youth.
>
> The project worked to match some home-studied families with youth living in residential treatment or institutional settings. These families visit youth as mentors or supportive adults.
>
> Creative strategies for targeting potential families included: 1) a mailing to 1,500 families involved in the Minnesota Recruitment Project which highlighting project youth waiting for families; 2) with the Department of Human Services, a letter and flier to all families registered on Minnesota's State Adoption Exchange to help families think about the issues of adolescents and consider adopting an older waiting child.
>
> Worked on developing a two-session training on adolescent permanency, presented in conjunction with Minnesota Adoption Support and Preservation (MN ASAP), Minnesota's statewide program to provide post-adoption services.
>
> An exciting new development is the project's agreement to provide child-specific recruitment services through Children's Home Society and Family Services, a private adoption agency under grant contract with the Minnesota Department of Human Services, allowing expansion of the project's staffing capacity to additional youth.

Project promotion

> Collaborated on the completion of *We Interrupt: Waiting Teens Talk About Recruitment*, a video which is part of a statewide campaign promoting child-specific recruitment. Free copies were distributed to county social services and private adoption agencies statewide. The video utilizes project youth to share an adolescent perspective on adoption, family, and waiting.

Our Voices Matter: Youth Advocacy Project has provided a helpful forum for a number of project youth to provide a very powerful message about what it is like to be a waiting youth in the foster care system.

The Heart Gallery photo of one sibling pair participating in The Homecoming Project services was included in Voice for Adoption's Portrait Project, an adoption of youth from foster care initiative to raise national awareness through individual connections to lawmakers. These youth were featured in the congressional office of U.S. Representative James Oberstar for two weeks of National Adoption Month in November. Participation in the project included an in-person meeting between the youth and the lawmaker.

Systems change

The project coordinator was contacted by U.S. Senator Norm Coleman's office and Voice for Adoption regarding legislation introduced by Senator Coleman to extend the definition of "independent student" to include youth adopted from foster care after age 13.

A summary of major activities and accomplishments in year 3

Project implementation

When the project framework was developed, recruitment of prospective adoptive families was not considered as a necessary task. In addition, the agency contracted to provide the services of The Homecoming Project is not a licensed child-placing agency which can complete adoption home studies. However, targeted recruitment for families willing, and prepared, to adopt waiting adolescents has become an unexpected, but important, role of the project. Successful in recruiting families exclusively interested in adopting waiting adolescents, project staff took advantage of numerous media opportunities that spurred many inquiries about adopting teens. Two such features resulted in a barrage of calls from prospective families interested in information about adopting not only the featured teen, but teenagers generally. The articles prompted approximately 80 families to contact the agency seeking information on adopting older youth, 13 families attended one of the two orientation/information sessions on adolescent permanency specifically developed and facilitated by The Homecoming Project staff, and an additional five families went directly to an agency orientation to begin the adoption home study process. Aside from the article responses, an additional 95 families communicated in person or by phone, at least six of those families participating in one-on-one informational meetings to learn more about waiting teens and the adoption process.

The Homecoming Project and Children's Home Society and Family Services developed a partnership to support recruitment and training of families prepared to adopt Minnesota's waiting teens.

Project staff developed a formal curriculum for orientation/training sessions for families considering adopting teens and conducted four training sessions with prospective adoptive parents working with a variety of private adoption agencies.

> Broad recruitment efforts/outreach to prospective adoptive families for adolescents

Systems change

> The Homecoming Project requested meetings with county adoption social workers and supervisors, Public Private Adoption Initiative (PPAI) representatives, and DHS staff regarding three cases in which decisions made by professionals had major negative impacts on recruitment efforts for Homecoming youth.
>
> About 18 youth from The Homecoming Project were featured in Minnesota's first Heart Gallery photo exhibit of waiting youth.
>
> A family who finalized the adoption of a Homecoming Project youth was featured on the front page of a local newspaper and on a community television channel.

A summary of major activities and accomplishments in year 4

Project implementation

> Project staff struggled to locate birth relatives and/or kin of one American Indian youth who was reluctant to proceed to permanency without first reconnecting with some very important people in his life. A connection with the Tribe was made.
>
> One project staff in particular has developed a positive working relationship with a metro county social worker and has secured the social worker's permission to review his cases for youth who have been court ordered into long-term foster care, but who might benefit from additional permanency efforts.

Project promotion

> In November 2006, at Minnesota's annual adoption celebration event, "Circus of the Heart," project staff responded quickly to a Department of Human Services' request for a project family to participate in an interview with a local television station. About one week after the interview aired on a news broadcast segment, the project received a call from Canadian Public Radio (CPR) inquiring about teen adoption.
>
> Two project youth continue participation in an American Public Media, Radio Works documentary on aging out of foster care and teen adoption. This sibling pair has now been matched with an adoptive family and the documentary producers have been present at nearly every step of this process.
>
> Project staff and three families attended the National Foster Parent Association Conference in May 2007 and presented a workshop on youth participation in permanency efforts to approximately 150 foster parents and professionals.

The project coordinator and one recruitment specialist presented a workshop to approximately 200 professionals at the National CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) Conference in June 2007.

A summary of major activities and accomplishments in year 5

Project implementation

Program staff remain proactive in supporting families as well as being accessible to families, regardless of the legal status of the youth (adoption finalized or not) or length of time the youth has been in the home. Staff visit with parents and/or youth and provide resources, encouragement, and whatever else is available that might support the family.

Parents continue to facilitate the parent group that project staff assisted in developing.

Project staff partnered with Children's Home Society and Family Services and the Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruiters in two metro counties to host a spring parent/teen event.

Project staff responded effectively and efficiently to requests from social workers for consultation on teen permanency.

Project promotion

On November 5, 2007, the American Public Media documentary *Wanted: Parents* aired on Minnesota Public Radio. The story featured a sibling pair participating in The Homecoming Project. The project coordinator, two project youth, staff from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, and Mark Courtney (by phone) responded to live audience and call-in questions for an hour after the broadcast. The program has aired on National Public Radio stations nationally. A variety of articles, links, and a podcast on the documentary as well as two subsequent broadcasts featuring another youth can be found at: http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/fostercare/index.html.

At the request of Minnesota Department of Human Services, a project staff appeared on WCCO-TV on December 23, 2007. The brief interview about older youth adoption was also broadcast on WCCO-AM radio in the Twin Cities.

In November 2007, the project coordinator was a guest on Pat O'Brien's live radio show, sponsored by the *You Gotta Believe* program in New York. The coordinator also recorded a 30 minute interview for the local radio show *It Takes a Village.*

Two project staff presented a workshop on achieving permanency for teens at the National CASA Conference in Washington in June 2008. CASA programs from several states then called to request specific information about the project and teen adoption.

Wilder Research worked with Homecoming Project and Minnesota Department of Human Services staff to implement a half day conference on teen adoption. This mini-conference entitled: *Adapting adoption: Fulfilling the promise of permanency* was held in September 2008 and was attended by over 100 adoption workers, foster parents, adoptive parents, and others involved in teen permanency planning. The mini-conference included: 1) a presentation by the Minnesota Department of Human Services on data related to why the project was developed in 2003; 2) a presentation by Wilder Research on five years of project data; 3) a presentation by Homecoming Project on project implementation; and 4) Catherine Winter, producer of the American Public Media's documentary "*Wanted: Parents*," moderating a panel of the project's teens, parents, and professionals discussing how to assist teens establish permanent families through adoption.

"*Wanted: Parents*" was awarded the Annie E. Casey Medal for Meritorious Journalism.

The project and one of its adopted youth were featured in the article "Teens Taking Charge" in the July/August 2008 edition of the Child Welfare League of America's Children's VOICE publication.

Based on referral from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the National Governors' Association invited the project coordinator to be a panelist for a webcast called "Permanency for Older Youth: Strategies that Work" broadcast in October 2008.

Systems change

Project staff conducted a training session for county social workers and waiting teens on involving teens in the orientation/training process for prospective adoptive parents.

The project coordinator met with staff from a small county in greater Minnesota, providing motivational training on permanency for older youth.

By invitation, project staff met with leaders from the Minnesota Department of Human Services' Adoption and Guardianship Unit to strategize about challenging cases and to gain insight into ways to improve efficiency in permanency efforts for older youth.

The project's philosophy on permanency, particularly the high level of youth involvement in developing their own recruitment plan, differs from more traditional adoption practice. At times, this has created conflict, but it has also provided the opportunity for healthy discussion and increased capacity to meet the permanency needs of waiting youth.

An analysis of program "dosage"

Researchers, Department of Human Services staff, and the Homecoming Project coordinator were interested in learning more about the amount and types of services provided to Homecoming youth. Each quarter, Homecoming staff completed dosage (services tracking) forms to measure implementation issues for each youth on their caseloads.

The following is a summary of the analysis of this information. Researchers focused on trying to understand program implementation differences between youth who were successfully adopted or in pre-adoptive placements at the end of the program versus those youth who were not.

Length of time in program

Youth who were adopted or in pre-adoptive placements at the end of the program had spent, on average, eight quarters (two years) with the program, which may include time after the adoption was finalized in which the program provided post-adoption support. The range is from as little as one quarter to a maximum of 15 quarters. There is no typical length – the number within each part of this range is very evenly distributed. The remaining youth, those not in adoptive or pre-adoptive homes when the pilot closed, were mostly (77%) still in their first through their eighth quarter of engagement with the program.

Kinds of services received

Youth who were not adopted, but had spent at least six quarters in the program, received services that are equivalent on average to those received by youth who were adopted. They and their caregivers received approximately equal number of in-person visits; on average, equal numbers of potential support persons were contacted; and approximately equal numbers of team meetings were held (i.e., meetings that included at least the youth, the county social worker, and the recruitment specialist from The Homecoming Project).

There were some differences between the two groups in levels of engagement and cooperation with the project. Youth who were adopted by the end of the project had been more consistently rated at the highest level of cooperation ("enthusiastic and engaged") than were youth of comparable program tenure who were not adopted: 66 percent of quarters for adopted youth, 41 percent of quarters for non-adopted youth. Caregivers of youth in both groups had lower average levels of cooperation than did the youth. In both groups (adopted and non-adopted youth of comparable program tenure) the caregivers had approximately the same proportion of quarters during which they were rated at the highest level (40% and 35%). However, when we expand the measure to include quarters in which the caregiver was "usually cooperative" *or* "enthusiastic and engaged," the

difference between the two groups becomes greater. In 85 percent of quarters for the adopted group, but only 68 percent of quarters for the non-adoptive group, caregivers were rated as *at least* "usually cooperative."

28. Types and amounts of contacts made, and levels of cooperation with the project

	Youth who are adopted or in pre-adoptive placements (N=33)			Non-adopted youth in the program for 6 or more quarters (N=31)			Non-adopted youth in the program for 1-5 quarters (N=22)		
	Average	Min.	Max.	Average	Min.	Max.	Average	Min.	Max.
Number of in-person visits with youth	30	0	93	35	9	84	9	1	35
Number of in-person visits with caregiver	22	0	78	25	9	58	6	0	23
Number of potential support people contacted	11	0	111	11	0	37	5	0	46
Approximate number of team meetings*	4	0	10	4	0	17	3	0	6
Percent of quarters in which the youth was enthusiastic and engaged with the project	66%	0%	100%	41%	0%	88%	30%	0%	100%
Percent of quarters in which the caregiver was enthusiastic and engaged with the project	40%	0%	100%	35%	0%	100%	6%	0%	100%
Percent of quarters in which the caregiver was usually cooperative *or* enthusiastic and engaged with the project	85%	25%	100%	68%	0%	100%	55%	0%	100%
Total estimated time (for those involved during the first 15 months)	**(N=14)**			**(N=13)**			**(N=13)**		
	252 hrs	17 hrs	564 hrs	146 hrs	0 hrs	471 hrs	97 hrs	21 hrs	208 hrs

Source: *Dosage forms filed quarterly by The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist for each youth in the program; calculations by Wilder Research.*

Amount of time spent on project activities

During the first five quarters (15 months) of the project, staff completed quarterly reports including estimated time spent on each of a variety of kinds of activity: contacts with youth, caregivers, professionals (such as county social workers, facility staff, therapists), and potential permanent support resources for the youth; team meetings; traveling to and from meetings and visits; and administrative tasks (such as reviewing case files, developing recruitment materials, and reviewing home studies).

For youth in the program during these first five quarters, Figure 29 below shows the number and percent on whose behalf the recruitment specialist performed each of these kinds of activities, and the average number of hours per youth per quarter for each.

The data show that in-person visits with the youth did not always start until the second quarter, and that the number and total time dropped slightly from the initial peak during which the specialist and youth were getting to know each other. Contact with professionals was nearly universal (at least once per quarter) across all quarters, and the time per quarter increased after the first half-year. Contacts with potential support people began during the first quarter for most youth (68%), and increased over the course of the year. Travel time was consistently a significant fraction of the total time. Time on administrative tasks grew consistently over the course of the first five quarters and became the most time-consuming of those tasks by the fourth and fifth quarters. Team meetings did not occur for all youth, and generally took little over an hour per month, on average, when they did occur.

Although not shown in the figure below, for youth referred together with siblings, the time in administrative tasks was significantly higher than for youth referred alone. Time in other kinds of activities did not differ significantly between these two groups.

29. Average time spent per case, by type of activity and quarter of youth's involvement in The Homecoming Project (first five quarters only)

	First quarter (N=40)			Second quarter (N=30)			Third quarter (N=24)			Fourth and fifth quarters (N=18)		
	# with this type of activity	% with this type of activity	Avg. hrs. in this activity	# with this type of activity	% with this type of activity	Avg. hrs. in this activity	# with this type of activity	% with this type of activity	Avg. hrs. in this activity	# with this type of activity	% with this type of activity	Avg. hrs. in this activity
In-person visits with youth	35	88%	13	30	100%	21	24	100%	15	15	100%	13
Phone, email or written contact with youth	17	43%	2	20	67%	3	17	71%	1	11	73%	4
Contact with professionals	40	100%	5	29	97%	8	24	100%	10	15	100%	11
Contact with potential permanent support people for youth	27	68%	3	26	87%	8	23	96%	8	15	100%	8
In-person visits with caregivers	34	85%	3	28	93%	3	21	88%	3	15	100%	3
Phone contacts with caregivers	35	88%	1	27	90%	2	21	88%	2	15	100%	2
Traveling to and from visits	34	85%	11	26	87%	20	23	96%	17	15	100%	15
Administrative tasks*	40	100%	5	30	100%	10	24	100%	13	15	100%	19
Team meetings**	16	40%	4	22	73%	4	12	50%	4	10	67%	3

Source: Dosage forms filed quarterly by The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist for each youth in the program; calculations by Wilder Research.

Notes: * Administrative tasks include developing recruitment materials, documentation, reviewing files, and reading home studies.

** Team meeting means any meeting including at least youth, The Homecoming Project staff, and county worker.

Variations in service type and amount are closely linked to the individual characteristics of youth and to their unique circumstances, including individual differences among counties, county workers, and caregivers.

On the quarterly report forms documenting services, recruitment specialists also recorded whether or not they had encountered any barriers to their ability to contact youth, and the types of barriers they faced. This is summarized below in Figure 30. Schedule conflicts and travel topped the list. Another common barrier was keeping up with youth who were in new placements. All of these were relatively constant across the different groups. The level of cooperation of key stakeholders – youth themselves, county workers, foster parents, and facility staff – also played an important role in facilitating or impeding the ability of recruitment specialists to work with youth on permanence options. There were significant differences among groups in factors related to youth motivation, as well as other youth characteristics, such as mental health and cognitive functioning. Compared to the other two groups, successfully adopted youth had a lower proportion of quarters in which either of these factors was reported as a barrier to meaningful contact.

30. Barriers to contacting youth: Average percent of quarters in which each of ten kinds of barriers was encountered

Percent of quarters in which barriers to contact included:	Youth who are adopted or in pre-adoptive placements (N=33)			Non-adopted youth in the program for 6 or more quarters (N=31)			Non-adopted youth in the program for 1-5 quarters (N=22)		
	Average	Min.	Max.	Average	Min.	Max.	Average	Min.	Max.
No barriers this quarter***	44%	0%	100%	14%	0%	70%	28%	0%	100%
Schedule conflicts	23%	0%	100%	24%	0%	63%	22%	0%	100%
Travel or transportation	17%	0%	100%	25%	0%	83%	12%	0%	100%
Youth moving around or in transitional placement	13%	0%	100%	16%	0%	57%	7%	0%	100%
County or facility staff not cooperative	9%	0%	100%	20%	0%	71%	10%	0%	100%
Youth not interested in or ambivalent to adoption**	8%	0%	50%	19%	0%	86%	27%	0%	100%
Youth characteristics (e.g., mental health, cognitive functioning)***	6%	0%	50%	29%	0%	100%	7%	0%	100%
Foster parent not cooperative***	5%	0%	40%	9%	0%	40%	27%	0%	100%
Gap in program services due to contract issues and brief state government shutdown	3%	0%	14%	5%	0%	14%	3%	0%	25%
Youth behavior***	2%	0%	29%	18%	0%	57%	5%	0%	57%
Normal case management issues (e.g. staff turnover)	1%	0%	11%	3%	0%	25%	3%	0%	25%
Average number of above types of barriers per quarter	*0.9*	*0*	*2.5*	*1.7*	*0.2*	*2.6*	*1.2*	*0*	*2.2*

Source: *Dosage forms filed quarterly by The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist for each youth in the program; calculations by Wilder Research.*

Note: *** p<.01 ***p<.001*

We conducted some preliminary analyses to understand what difference some of these service variables make in predicting successful adoption outcomes. We examined several different combinations of factors ("models") that included youth engagement, caregiver engagement, and a variety of common barriers. The most consistent predictor of a successful adoption, after controlling for the influence of other factors, was the percent of quarters in which the caregiver was enthusiastic and engaged. Even after controlling for youth motivation and engagement, county and facility levels of cooperation, youth characteristics, youth behavior, and youth's moving among placements, youth whose

caregiver was enthusiastic and engaged with the project were five to eight times more likely to be adopted than youth whose caregivers were less cooperative. These results should be considered preliminary, in part due to the small numbers of youth, which limits the richness of the models that can be tested.

Homecoming Project staff views of significant implementation outcomes at the case-level

At closing, each case was assessed by the Homecoming Project worker for various outcomes related to program implementation. Homecoming Project staff reported several important implementation outcomes for youth, foster homes, residential facilities, and prospective families.

■ Respondents reported high levels of youth engagement in placement and permanency decisions (81%) as well as *Our Voices Matter* and other leadership activities (44%)

■ Many youth were experiencing increased contact with siblings (42%) and birth family engagement (40%)

■ In many cases, foster care providers and residential facility staff engaged in conversation about permanency and participated positively in recruitment and/or matching efforts

■ In 39 percent of cases the youth demonstrated leadership and helped promote teen adoption by speaking with prospective families and adoption agency staff

31. Youth-related implementation outcomes

Outcome (N=62)	Number	Percent
Youth engaged in process/permanency decisions	50	81%
Our Voices Matter/Leadership participation	27	44%
Birth family engaged	25	40%
Life book completed	14	23%
Heart Gallery photos	25	40%
Increased contact with siblings	26	42%

Source: *2007-2008 Closing form.*

32. Foster home-related implementation outcomes

Outcome (N=62)	Number	Percent
Foster care providers engaged in conversation about permanency	38	61%
Foster parents actively participated in recruitment and/or matching efforts	23	32%
Homecoming Project staff advocated for services for youth	31	50%

Source: *2007-2008 Closing form.*

33. Residential facility-related implementation outcomes

Outcome (N=62)	Number	Percent
Staff engaged in conversation about permanency	22	36%
Staff participated positively in recruitment and/or matching efforts	13	21%
Staff reported that this youth was the first teen adoptive placement they had been involved with in their role at residential placement	12	19%

Source: *2007-2008 Closing form.*

34. Prospective family-related implementation outcomes

Outcome (N=62)	Number	Percent
Recruitment materials produced for/with this youth generated more then ten prospective family inquiries	27	44%
One or more families reported completing their home study process as a result of seeing recruitment efforts for this youth	16	26%
One or more families that completed their home study influenced by recruitment for this youth have moved forward with adoption of another teen	12	19%
This youth demonstrated leadership and helped promote teen adoption by speaking with prospective families and adoption agency staff	24	39%

Source: *2007-2008 Closing form.*

Case-level implementation impacts on the system

In addition to the way the implementation of cases impacted youth, foster homes, residential facilities, and prospective families, several important system-related outcomes were identified.

- 74 percent of respondents stated that the case provided opportunity for advocacy and improved practice at the county level

- Several respondents believed that the case was a good example of teamwork between The Homecoming Project, the county and other professionals (60%)

35. Places of opportunity for advocacy and improved practice provided by the case

	(N=62)	
Area	Number	Percent
County	46	74%
Adoption agency	14	23%
Foster care agency	19	31%
Residential program	18	29%
Clinical professional	20	32%

Source: *2007-2008 Closing form.*

36. Aspects of case process and progression

	(N=62)	
Outcome	Number	Percent
Staff advocacy was required to keep adoption process moving efficiently forward to finalization	31	50%
County social worker updated social history and case file for prospective families	25	40%
The case was a good example of teamwork between The Homecoming Project, the county and other professionals	37	60%
Homecoming Project staff were given the lead on permanency work for this youth, at least in part due to county worker's lack of expertise in adoption	28	45%

Source: *2007-2008 Closing form.*

Feedback from Homecoming youth

In addition to the baseline surveys conducted by telephone, Homecoming youth were asked to complete satisfaction surveys about the Homecoming recruiter assigned to work with them. Thirty-three paper surveys were completed by youth – the majority in 2005.

Frequency of contact

Figure 37 shows the frequency of contact workers had with the youth. The average number of times that youth met with their Homecoming worker was roughly once every two weeks.

- 65 percent of the youth met with their recruitment specialist at least once per week (23%) or every two weeks (42%)

- 29 percent met with their Homecoming worker only once per month

- 7 percent of the project youth met with the recruitment specialist less than once per month

37. Homecoming youth views of the frequency of contact with their Homecoming worker

		Percentage of youths responding				
Question	**N**	**At least once a week (1)**	**Once every two weeks (2)**	**Once every month (3)**	**Less than once every month (4)**	**Mean**
How often do you meet with or talk on the phone with him/her?	31*	23%	42%	29%	7%	2.2

__Note:__ *Throughout this report, the number of cases in each table varies because of missing or unknown information. Percentages are reported based on the number (N) noted in each table. Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

Relationships and communication

Next, youth were asked questions about their relationships with their recruitment specialist, and staff's abilities relating to communication, trust, dependability, and sensitivity to the youth's issues. Generally, responses to all questions indicated high levels of satisfaction. This was especially true with regard to the staff's ability to communicate honestly and to be respectful about youth's birth family or other people important to the youth with 94 percent having rated their specialist as doing this "yes, a

lot." One area that was rated slightly lower was: helping youth connect or reconnect with adults who will help youth as they get older.

38. Homecoming youth views on working with Homecoming Project staff

Please rate [NAME OF HOMECOMING WORKER] on the following questions:	N*	Percentage of youths responding				Mean
		Yes, a lot (1)	Yes, a little (2)	No, not much (3)	No, not at all (4)	
S/he is respectful about my birth family and other people who are important to me.	33	94%	6%	-	-	1.1
I trust her/him to communicate honestly with me about the work we are doing together.	32	94%	3%	3%	-	1.1
I feel that s/he cares about my future and my goals.	31	94%	3%	3%	-	1.1
S/he includes my foster parents or staff by telling them about the work we are doing together.	33	88%	9%	3%	-	1.2
S/he is dependable – returns calls and comes to see me when s/he says s/he will.	33	91%	9%	-	-	1.1
S/he talked with me about adoption and lifelong connections.	32	84%	16%	-	-	1.2
S/he helped me talk about family.	32	66%	31%	3%	-	1.4
S/he helped me connect or re-connect with adults who will help me as I get older.	31	52%	42%	7%	-	1.5

Note: *Throughout this report, the number of cases in each table varies because of missing or unknown information. Percentages are reported based on the number (N) noted in each table. Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

Youth were then asked to rate how they felt about the balance of time spent together with their recruitment specialists. Most of the youth (94%) felt there was the "right balance of work and fun." Six percent felt that too much time had been spent on having fun.

39. Homecoming youth views of the balance of work and play in the project

Item	N	Percentage of youths responding			Mean
		Too much time working (1)	The right balance of work and fun (2)	Too much time on fun (3)	
When we are together, we spend…	32	-	94%	6%	2.1

Overall satisfaction

All youth indicated they were satisfied with the recruitment work done with their specialist. Over three-quarters (79%) indicated they were "very satisfied," while 21 percent rated the work as satisfactory.

40. Satisfaction with recruitment work

Question	N	Percentage of youths responding				Mean
		Very satisfied (1)	Satisfied (2)	Dissatisfied (3)	Very dissatisfied (4)	
Overall, how satisfied are you with the recruitment work the two of you have done together?	33	79%	21%	-	-	1.2

Our Voices Matter

Homecoming recruitment staff encouraged all project youth to participate in Our Voices Matter, a youth advocacy project. When asked whether they had seen a presentation by Our Voices Matter, half of the youth confirmed they had. Two, in particular, indicated that they had also participated.

In their own words: youth feedback about their involvement

In addition to rating the staff about their services, youth were asked, "What have you done with The Homecoming Project that will make the most difference for your future?" and gave the following answers:

What have you done with The Homecoming Project that will make the most difference for the future?

> Talked about adoption and making friends with people I haven't seen in a while.
>
> I've talked about what I want in a family and opened up.
>
> [Learned] about how much my "voice matters" and how to speak up [for] myself.
>
> I met old family and friends to help me.
>
> Worked on what is possible that can or can not happen in the near future.
>
> I [went] out to eat [to] help [me] learn manners. I [had] Amy come to my house [to] help me learn [to communicate] with my boss at work.

I've shared my insides and feelings on how to improve things next [time].

Going on news and [newspapers]. Talk about family and finding people who care.

Went to a meeting to meet adoptive parents.

I met new kids.

We have found options for a new home and are trying them out.

Everything we've done with each other!

Have fun, get a job, stay balanced in [world], and have fun at the same time. Have fun with [my recruiter]. Do my work with her.

We go places and play outside and talk.

We would go to places and play outside while talking.

I will become [an] artist and a [busy] man.

Talking about my problems.

Panels went to Washington DC for a panel in a documentary for American Public Radio.

I found a new family.

I have changed my life around. I trust more people than I used to.

Our Voices Matter panel and training, picture.

I have an adoptive family! I have also gone to panels, and I went to Washington, DC for a panel.

I have met a family, and I am getting adopted.

I was able to use my voice to show what I needed and what I felt.

Suggestions for improvement

Finally, youth were asked about their suggestions for improving the program. Two respondents who did not give any particular suggestions did instead give positive feedback about the program. One youth mentioned that s/he was "getting adopted because of this project."

Youths' suggestions generally centered on spending more time with a family member, a close friend, or the recruiter; publicity to gain more exposure for the program; and bringing youth to the table when it comes to making decisions about their adoptions.

What suggestions do you have for improving The Homecoming Project?

None, I think they're doing great!!

Nothing. I'm getting adopted because of this project.

At the end of the project, we should go to Valley Fair (summer) and bring one close friend that helped through this whole thing.

Put out ads about The Homecoming Project or something to that extent to put the idea of adoption in adults' minds!! Thanks.

Asking for more time with my grandparents or my grandmothers.

Prepare the kids for adoption and changes they will have to go through. Prepare the youth how to control their testing modes.

More panels!

More fun – keep visiting.

Well, we could let the kids go to the meeting they have with the parents and then have them meet there at the meeting or you could have them come with you to the presentation and have them present themselves.

Talking about it a lot.

Have foster homes preset for visits just in case we can't think of any one to be with.

Come out more and talk about school, home, life, and all of those things, but [my recruiter] is a good person and a good friend.

Stay cool.

Having activities for us to do.

Have this be a permanent thing. It helps kids have a little hope.

Keep it going. Let it have more workers and across the USA.

Nothing except maybe having fundraisers for it, so it can go on longer than the five-year grant.

Feedback from care providers (foster parents and residential staff) midway through the project

In addition to the surveys of youth administered at project midpoint, each youth's care provider was asked to complete a survey. Thirty provider surveys were completed – most in 2005 – midway through the project. It should be noted that, in the final two years of the project, the project received an increased amount of media coverage, as well as increased recognition of positive outcomes with youth. Therefore, some perceptions on the part of caregivers may have changed by the end of the project.

Care providers of Homecoming youth primarily were non-relative foster parents, and staff from group homes, residential treatment facilities, and corrections facilities (75%). One, each, was an adoptive parent, pre-adoptive parent, or a relative.

41. Types of care providers for Homecoming youth

N=30	Number	Percent
Non-relative foster care (not treatment/therapeutic)	7	23%
Residential treatment facility	7	23%
Treatment foster care	4	13%
Group home	4	13%
Pre-adoptive home	3	10%
Relative/kinship foster care	1	3%
Corrections facility	1	3%
Adoptive	1	3%
Other	1	3%
Unknown/not reported	1	3%

Note: Throughout this report, the number of cases in each table varies because of missing or unknown information. Percentages are reported based on the number (N) noted in each table. Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Overall, there was regular communication between the Homecoming recruitment specialist and the care providers. On average, care providers communicated with Homecoming staff once every two weeks. Nearly a quarter (24%) of all providers were in contact with the recruitment specialist at least once a week. Sixty-nine percent of providers communicated with the recruitment specialist at least once a month. About one-third indicated that they were in contact with Homecoming staff less than once a month.

42. Care providers views of the frequency of communication with the Homecoming worker

Question	N	Percentage of youths responding				Mean
		At least once a week (1)	Once every two weeks (2)	Once every month (3)	Less than once every month (4)	
How often do you communicate (email, phone, face-to-face) with The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist?	29	24%	28%	17%	31%	2.6

Note: *Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

A majority of care providers (60%) reported satisfaction with the amount of contact received from the Homecoming recruitment specialist. Thirty-seven percent of providers specified that they were "very satisfied" with the amount of their contact with their specialist. On average, care providers indicated that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied on the issue of contact with the recruitment specialist.

43. Care providers' satisfaction with amount of contact with Homecoming worker

Question	N	Percentage of Providers responding					Mean
		Very dissatisfied (1)	Dissatisfied (2)	Neutral (3)	Satisfied (4)	Very satisfied (5)	
How satisfied are you with the amount of contact you have with The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist?	30	7%	10%	23%	23%	37%	3.7

Note: *Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

Over half of all care providers found the Homecoming recruitment specialist helpful in working with youth on permanency options. Most providers (76%) found the specialist responsive to questions and feedback, and 70 percent reported that they trusted the specialist to keep them honestly informed about the work s/he was doing with youth.

■ As one potential area for improvement, 24 percent of providers did not agree that their recruitment specialist communicated effectively.

44. Care providers' views on working with the Homecoming Project worker

	Homecoming Providers N=29-30				
	Strongly disagree	**Disagree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
A. The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist communicates effectively with me	17%	7%	10%	27%	40%
B. S/he is responsive to my questions and feedback	7%	-	17%	28%	48%
C. S/he explained to me The Homecoming Project and its emphasis on permanent connections for youth	3%	3%	13%	30%	50%
D. S/he works as a team with me when the youth has behavioral reactions to the permanency work we do	14%	3%	31%	24%	28%
E. S/he has helped the youth think more about and discuss the future	10%	10%	20%	37%	23%
F. I trust The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist to keep me honestly informed about the work s/he is doing with youth	10%	7%	13%	27%	43%
G. Sometimes the values of youth participation and honest communication appear to conflict with the youth's emotional well-being. I believe that The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist balances these two issues	10%	10%	23%	33%	23%
H. S/he has asked me if I have ideas for other people who might be potential permanent family for this youth	13%	17%	20%	30%	20%

Note: *Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

When asked to describe in their own words the most helpful aspects of working with The Homecoming Project, 30 percent of care providers found the recruitment specialist's connection with the youth to be the most helpful. They also noted that the specialist was always reliable/quick to respond (13%) and gave the providers hope that a home can be found for the youth (10%).

- 20 percent of providers indicated that they had not had enough contact with the recruitment specialist to comment on this question.

- Some providers (10%) also reported that they had not found the recruitment specialist helpful overall.

45. Care providers' views of the most helpful aspects of working with the Homecoming worker

	Care Providers N=30
S/he really connected with youth, made youth comfortable	30%
Have not had enough contact to say	17%
S/he was always present and reliable/quick response	13%
Gives me hope that a home can be found	10%
Have not been helpful	10%
Giving us suggestions on how to deal with youth's behaviors	3%
Found missing info on youth's background/birth family	3%
Understands mental health and his/her behavior needs	3%
Got youth involved in activities	3%
Helped me understand program/process	3%
Easy to work/get along with	3%

Note: *This was an open-ended question. Respondents could give up to three responses. Therefore, percentages do not total 100.*

Overall, the providers' top suggestion (30%) was to "meet with children more often/ more communication."

■ 10 percent of the providers' suggestions commented that Homecomings was too focused on youth adoption, above other issues facing the youth.

46. Care providers' suggestions for improving The Homecoming Project

	Care Providers N=20
Meet with children more often/more communication	30%
None	15%
It should be a mandatory resource	5%
Staff in northern part of state	5%
Don't push for adoption so hard	5%
Should be looking for two-parent households	5%
More communication with care providers	5%
The project creates another layer of bureaucracy, to be effective it needs to replace existing caseworkers	5%
Should start working intensely with youth immediately	5%
The project focused on getting youth adopted, rather than working with problems and issues	5%
More staff like the one that worked with my child	5%
Better understanding of how HP works with other organizations	5%
Youth seemed able to manipulate staff against each other	5%

Note: *This was an open-ended question. Respondents could give up to three responses. Therefore, percentages do not total 100.*

Feedback from county social workers midway through the project

In addition to these surveys of youth and caregivers administered at project midpoint, each youth's county social worker was asked to complete a survey. Seventeen paper surveys were completed from March to June 2005. It should be noted, again, that in the final two years of the project, the project received an increased amount of media coverage as well as increased recognition of positive outcomes with youth. Therefore, some perception of county social workers may have changed by the end of the project.

On average, social workers were contacted by Homecoming Project recruitment specialists once every two weeks. Over a quarter (29%) of social workers also reported that they had communicated with their specialist at least once a week. Eighteen percent of social workers reported contact with their recruitment specialist less than once every month.

47. County social worker views of the frequency of communication with the Homecoming worker

Question	N	Percentage of Social Workers responding			
		At least once a week (1)	Once every two weeks (2)	Once every month (3)	Less than once every month (4)
How often do you communicate (email, phone, face-to-face) with The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist?	17	29%	35%	18%	18%

Note: *Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

The majority (77%) of social workers were satisfied with the amount of contact they had with the recruitment specialist.

■ 18 percent of social workers were dissatisfied with the amount of contact they had with their specialist.

48. County social workers' satisfaction with the amount of contact with Homecoming worker

Question	N	Percentage of Social Workers responding				
		Very dissatisfied (1)	Dissatisfied (2)	Neutral (3)	Satisfied (4)	Very satisfied (5)
How satisfied are you with the amount of contact you have with The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist?	17	12%	6%	6%	24%	53%

Note: *Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

On average, social workers were satisfied with the amount of help they received from their recruitment specialist. Fifty-nine percent specifically indicated that they were "very satisfied" with the amount of help received.

49. County social workers' satisfaction with amount of help received from the Homecoming worker

Question	N	Percentage of Social Workers responding				
		Very dissatisfied (1)	Dissatisfied (2)	Neutral (3)	Satisfied (4)	Very satisfied (5)
How satisfied are you with the amount of help you have received so far from The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist?	17	6%	-	-	35%	59%

Note: *Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

Three-fourths of social workers rated the support components of the Homecoming Project as "good" or higher. Social workers also indicated that the recruitment specialists were "outstanding" at establishing clear roles and expectations (41%) and responding to questions or concerns (41%).

■ 63 percent of social workers thought that the recruitment specialist was "outstanding" at interacting with the youth.

■ 53 percent ranked the specialists' individualized support to youth as "outstanding."

50. County social workers' views on working with the Homecoming Project worker

N=15-17	Terrible	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Outstanding
A. The recruitment support I receive from The Homecoming Project	7%	-	-	20%	20%	53%
B. The individualized support provided to the youth I referred	6%	-	12%	12%	18%	53%
C. How well The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist interacts with the youth	6%	-	13%	13%	6%	63%
D. How well The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist responds to my questions or concerns	6%	-	-	12%	29%	53%
E. How well The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist and I have established clear roles and expectations	6%	-	12%	6%	35%	41%

Overall, a majority of social workers (89%) agreed that the recruitment specialist effectively communicated with them. Eighty-two percent also agreed that the Homecoming Project specialist successfully balanced the values of youth participation and the youth's well-being.

51. County social worker views of communicating with Homecoming staff

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
A. The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist communicates effectively with me	6%	-	6%	24%	65%
B. Sometimes the values of youth participation and honest communication appear to conflict with the youth's emotional well-being. I believe that The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist balances these two issues	-	6%	12%	41%	41%

One-quarter of social workers were satisfied with the recruitment specialist's abilities to provide "several possible placements." Social workers also noted that the recruitment specialist "went above and beyond the call of duty" (25%) and "did job without unnecessary conflict and respected youth" (17%).

■ 93 percent of social workers indicated that they would refer another youth to the Homecoming Project.

52. County social worker comments about helpful aspects of The Homecoming Project

	Social Workers N=17
Worker went above and beyond the call of duty	25%
Provided several possible placements	25%
Worker did job without unnecessary conflict/respected youth	17%
Great team player	8%
Established boundaries	8%
Followed through	8%
Developed rapport/worked well with youth	8%
Worker was experienced/knowledgeable	8%
Not social worker's fault, child is unwilling to cooperate	8%
Pushed youth too hard	8%
Did not follow through/spend necessary time with youth	8%
Did not establish/maintain boundaries with youth	8%

Note: *This was an open-ended question. Respondents could give up to three responses. Therefore, percentages do not total 100.*

Overall, social workers reported positive changes in youths' lives as a result of working with the Homecoming Project. Over a third (35%) of social workers also remarked that the youth they worked with "now know that active efforts are being made for adoption and life-long connections."

53. Social workers' views of changes in the youth's life as a result of working with The Homecoming Project

	N=20
Youth know that active efforts are being made for adoption and life-long connections	35%
Youth more aware of the lack of resources available	10%
The child was adopted	10%
Youth has more open attitude about being adopted	5%
Improved self concept	5%
Allowed outreach to family members who may have never gotten involved	5%
Created opportunities s/he may have never had otherwise *(unspecified)*	5%
Another rejection	5%
Youth decided not to be adopted	5%
Youth was introduced to another adult without healthy boundaries	5%
Youth is now in more stable situation	5%
Nothing	5%

Note: *This was an open-ended question. Respondents could give up to three responses. Therefore, percentages do not total 100.*

Social workers found that working with the recruitment specialist helped provide the youth with needed attention (36%), created smaller caseloads (29%), and allowed for more sharing of the work (e.g., rides, visits; 21%).

54. Social workers' perceptions of the most helpful aspects of working with The Homecoming Project recruitment specialist to achieve the goal of adoption or life-long connections for the youth

	N=21
Another person to give him/her needed attention	36%
Smaller caseloads	29%
Sharing of the work (rides/visits)	21%
Special recruitment like videos and brochures	14%
Youth connecting with family and friends	14%
Nothing to date	14%
The media opportunities the children have been involved in	7%
Youth's awareness that he needs to prepare for emancipation	7%
Youth is doing well in adoptive home	7%

Note: *This was an open-ended question. Respondents could give up to three responses. Therefore, percentages do not total 100.*

Fourteen social workers provided suggestions for how to improve the Homecoming Project in the future. A quarter of the social workers suggested that future recruitment specialists "not push the process or slow down" and provide "more or better communication."

55. Social workers' suggestions for improving The Homecoming Project

	N=14
Do not push the process/slow down	25%
Need more/better communication	25%
Work harder to identify potential adoptive resources	17%
Find more innovative ways of recruiting besides the normal tried and true methods	8%
Closer monitoring of workers	8%
Hire staff that are more skilled	8%
Nothing/I am satisfied	25%

Note: *This was an open-ended question. Respondents could give up to three responses. Therefore, percentages do not total 100.*

Project outcomes: changes in youth served

Permanency outcomes for Homecoming Project youth versus the comparison group of similar youth

As mentioned previously in this report, extensive efforts were made to identify and interview a comparison group of youth in care. Youth were selected to be in the comparison group based on the same criteria for referral to The Homecoming Project. At the time of selection, which was updated quarterly from January 2004 to December 2005, comparison youth had to have: 1) been between the ages of 13 and 17; 2) been under state guardianship; 3) had a termination of parental rights court ordered more than a year prior; and 4) had a permanency plan of adoption.

The only criteria that could not be matched between The Homecoming Project's criteria and the sample selection was the requirement that youth have no identified adoptive resource. There was no way of ascertaining this information from state records. Additional information about the selection of the comparison sample is included in the section describing the results of the Survey of Youth in Care.

■ Between January 2004 and December 2005, 164 youth met these criteria according to state records provided by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

■ The records of these youth were matched against the 100 Homecoming youth to see if there were differences between the groups.

Administrative data about outcomes of Homecoming youth and comparison group youth was gathered from statewide databases administered by the Minnesota Department of Human Services. At the end of the study (November 2008), researchers worked to analyze information about adoption, long-term foster care, and aging out of care outcomes with the assistance of Department of Human Services staff.

Comparing Homecoming and comparison group youth: differences in outcomes over time using administrative data

An analysis of administrative outcomes between The Homecoming youth and the comparison group showed some differences between the two groups:

■ Overall, 39 percent of Homecoming youth compared to 24 percent of comparison group youth were in an adoptive home or intact pre-adoptive placement (this difference was statistically significant).

■ 31 percent of Homecoming youth were adopted compared to 21 percent of comparison group youth.

56. Permanency: adoptions and pre-adoptive placements, Homecoming versus comparison group

	Homecoming youth (N=100)		Comparison youth (N=165)	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Adoption finalization	31	31%	35	21%
Pre-adoptive placement (intact)	8	8%	5	3%
Legal permanence total	**39**	**39%***	**40**	**24%**

Source: *Minnesota Department of Human Services administrative data.*

Note: *A Chi Square statistical test was run to examine differences in adoption rates between the two groups. This difference was not statistically significant. However, when we examine either adoption or intact pre-adoptive placements, the differences between the two groups was statistically significant (p<.05).*

57. Various permanency-related outcomes: Homecoming versus comparison group youth

Adoption finalization — (N=31) **31%** / (N=35) **21%**
Pre-adoptive placement (intact) — (N=8) **8%** / (N=5) **3%**
Legal permanence total — (N=39) **39%** / (N=40) **24%**
Long-term foster care court ordered and not adopted or in pre-adoptive placement — (N=14) **14%** / (N=70) **42%**
Aged out of foster care — (N=24) **24%** / (N=82) **50%**
Child (over age 14) signed affidavit (to not have a plan of adoption) — (N=10) **10%** / (N=32) **20%**

■ Homecoming youth (N=100) □ Comparison youth (N=165)
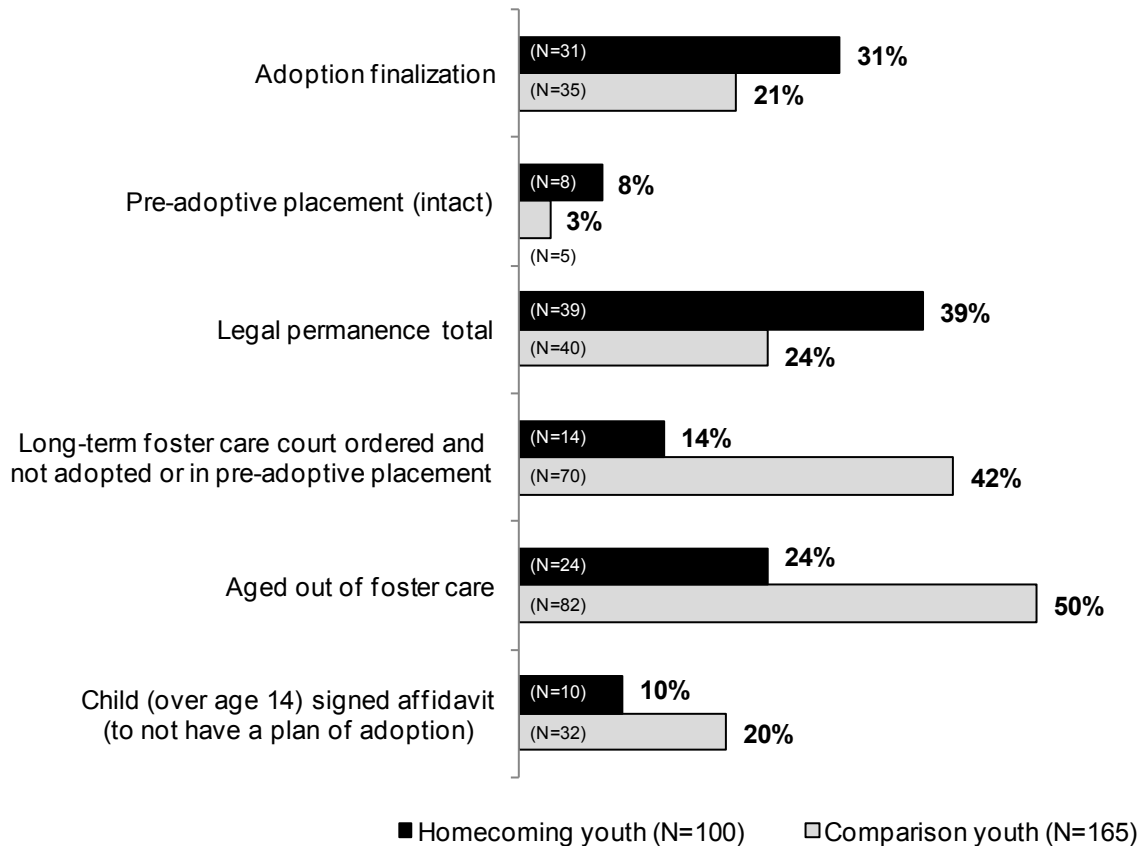
An examination of adoptions completed each year shows that the percentage of youth adopted in the comparison group remained relatively steady with a slight increase in 2006. As to be expected, no youth from The Homecoming Project were adopted in 2004 – the first year of the project. However, the percentage of Homecoming youth adopted increased each year from 2005 to 2007. It is also known that an additional youth has been adopted after the project analysis was completed in 2008 but was not included in the figures below.

58. Adoptions by year, Homecoming versus comparison group youth
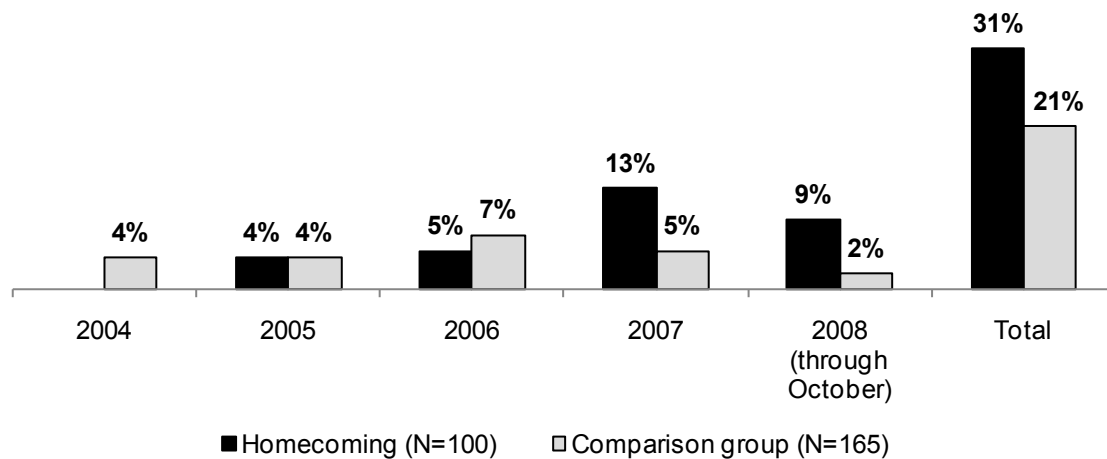
■ Homecoming (N=100)　　□ Comparison group (N=165)

If we only examine those Homecoming and comparison group youth who participated in the Survey of Youth in Care, similar results appear. However, this smaller sample of Homecoming youth (referred in the first two years of the study) had significantly higher adoption rates (p<.05).

59. Adoption finalization: Survey participants only, Homecoming versus comparison group

	Homecoming youth survey participants (N=53)		Comparison youth survey participants (N=116)	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Adoption finalization	20	38%*	25	22%
Pre-adoptive placement (intact)	2	4%	3	3%
Legal permanence total	**22**	**42%***	**28**	**24%**

Source: *Minnesota Department of Human Services administrative data.*

Note: *A Chi Square statistical test was run to examine differences between the two groups. For finalizations and total permanency, this difference was statistically significant (p<.05).*

If we examine the adoption rates by racial and ethnic background, about 40 percent of youth adopted in both the Homecoming and the comparison groups were White, and 60 percent were youth of color.

However, if we look at those youth who were not adopted, there was a difference between the two groups. About half of Homecoming youth not adopted were youth of color (51%), while two-thirds (68%) of comparison group youth not adopted were youth of color. For both groups, fewer American Indian youth were adopted compared to other races within this sample.

Other related outcomes

When we examine other outcomes related to youth permanency – particularly those related to youth not achieving adoptive or pre-adoptive placements – there were some significant differences between Homecoming youth and the comparison group.

■ Comparison group youth were significantly more likely to sign an affidavit requesting that they not have adoption recruitment efforts, to be ordered into long-term foster care by the court, and to age out of foster care. These differences were statistically significant (more than can be attributed to chance).

60. Other related outcomes: Homecoming versus comparison group

	Homecoming youth (N=100)		Comparison youth (N=165)	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Long-term foster care court ordered and not adopted or in pre-adoptive placement	14	14%	70	42%***
Aged out of foster care	24	24%	82	50%***
Child (over age 14) signed affidavit to not have a plan of adoption**	10	10%	32	20%*
Transfer of guardianship to Tribe	0	-	4	2%

Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services administrative data.

Note: A Chi Square statistical test was run to examine differences between the two groups. *This difference was statistically significant (p<.05) . ***These differences were statistically significant (p<.001).

** Six youth signed affidavits but were adopted afterwards. Two were Homecoming youth and four were comparison group youth. These youth are not included in this table under child signed affidavit.

If we only examine those Homecoming and comparison group youth who participated in the Survey of Youth in Care, similar results appear. This smaller sample of Homecoming youth (referred in the first two years of the study) had a slightly higher likelihood of

court-ordered long-term foster care or aging out than the entire Homecoming group – although still significantly lower rates than the comparison group.

61. Other related outcomes: Survey participants only, Homecoming versus comparison group

	Homecoming youth (N=53)		Comparison youth (N=116)	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Long-term foster care court ordered and not adopted or in pre-adoptive placement	10	19%	49	42%**
Aged out of foster care	17	32%	58	50%*
Child (over age 14) signed affidavit to not have a plan of adoption**	6	11%	26	22%
Transfer of guardianship to Tribe	-		1	1%

Source: Minnesota Department of Human Services administrative data.

Note: A Chi Square statistical test was run to examine differences between the two groups. *This difference was statistically significant (p<.05). ** This difference was statistically significant (p<.01).

Homecoming youth: worker ratings of other measures of youth permanence

Homecoming staff were asked to rate, on the closing form, various aspects of the youth permanency status. Sixty-two closing forms were analyzed. It should be noted that some cases were kept open, even after adoption finalization, in order to provide post-adoption supports.

Legal permanence

62. Legal permanence at case closing

N=62	Percentage of Youth
Adoption	26%
Under age 18, Long-term foster care ordered	16%
Under age 18, waiting	39%
Emancipated, Long-term foster care ordered	2%
Emancipated, waiting	5%
Unknown	13%

Source: 2007-2008 Closing form.

Emotional Permanence

63. Emotional permanence status

N=62	Percentage of Youth
Connected with permanent family	38%
Connected with birth parent(s)	18%
Connected with sibling(s)	39%
New adult connection	31%
Strengthen existing support network	36%
Establish new support network	21%
Other	5%

Source: 2007-2008 Closing form.

Homecoming Project worker satisfaction with case outcomes

64. Homecoming project worker satisfaction with case outcomes

	Satisfaction Rating				
Youth Outcome (N=62)	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neither	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
Physical permanence					
Success with case	27%	23%	19%	18%	11%
Related outcomes	34%	18%	19%	15%	13%
Legal permanence					
Related outcomes	31%	8%	16%	23%	21%
Emotional permanence					
Related outcomes	36%	27%	15%	15%	8%
Sibling information					
Related outcomes	27%	23%	18%	19%	3%

Source: 2007-2008 Closing form.

Sibling groups

Several Homecoming youth were referred with other siblings or had siblings referred to the program at a different time.

■ 26 percent of youth were referred along with other siblings, and 11 percent were referred at a different time than other siblings

■ The average group size was two siblings

65. Sibling group referrals

Referral (N=62)	Number	Percent
Member of sibling group referred at the same time with county intention for placement together	16	26%
One or more siblings in The Homecoming Project referred at a different time	7	11%
All referred siblings lived together when first youth was referred	1	2%
One or more siblings under 18 that were not referred to The Homecoming Project	40	65%

Source: *2007-2008 Closing form.*

66. Living situation of siblings under 18 at time of youth's placement

Location (N=62)	Number	Percent
All siblings lived together	5	8%
Adoptive family	26	42%
Foster home/group home	20	32%
Family/kin	15	24%
Institution	7	11%
Unknown/Runaway	1	2%

Source: *2007-2008 Closing form.*

Note: *Percentages total more than one due to siblings in same group in different placements.*

67. Sibling group placement outcomes

	Number
All members of sibling group placed together	10
Some members of sibling group placed together	4
No member of sibling group placed together	17
No member of sibling group was placed	4
For sibling groups referred at the same time, to be placed separately, sibling separation had already been approved by the time of referral to The Homecoming Project	7
For sibling groups referred at different times, to be placed separately, sibling separation had already been approved by the time of referral to The Homecoming Project	6

Source: *2007-2008 Closing form.*

Other outcomes for Homecoming Project youth versus the comparison group: examining the follow-up Survey of Youth in Care

Method and response rates

Wilder Research used a structured telephone survey to interview selected youth participants. The survey was intended to last about 15 minutes, and included 19 open- and closed-ended questions. Youth who completed the interview were given a $10 Target or Kmart gift certificate in appreciation for their time at baseline and 2-year follow-up, and a $20 gift certificate at the final 3-year follow-up interview.

Homecoming sample

Between April 2004 and December 2005, 59 youth began active participation in The Homecoming Project. All Homecoming youth were selected for the Baseline Survey of Youth in Care. It should be noted that two youth immediately received a long-term foster care order and thus were not included as eligible participants in the baseline survey. Therefore the number of Homecoming youth eligible for the telephone survey was 57.

■ Of the 57 Homecoming youth eligible for the study (entering the program during the first two years of the project), 48 were interviewed at baseline (84%). An additional five youth were interviewed as part of the comparison sample, but were later referred to Homecoming. They were added to the Homecoming baseline surveys for analysis purposes. Thus, the overall number of Homecoming youth at baseline was 62, and the number of completed interviews was **53** (85%).

- Of the **53** Homecoming youth eligible for a follow-up study, 43 (81%) were interviewed after approximately two-years, and 41 (77%) were interviewed a year later.

Comparison group sample

Youth were selected to be in the comparison group based on the same criteria as for referral to The Homecoming Project. At the time of selection (which had been updated quarterly from January 2004 to December 2005), comparison youth had to 1) be between the ages of 13 and 17; 2) be under state guardianship; 3) have a termination of parental rights court ordered more than a year prior; and 4) have a permanency plan of adoption.

- The only criteria that could not be matched between The Homecoming Project's criteria and the sample selection was the requirement that youth have no identified adoptive resource. There was no way of ascertaining this information from state records.

Between January 2004 and December 2005, 170 youth met these criteria according to state records provided by the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

- Of the 170 comparison youth selected and eligible for the study, 121 were interviewed at baseline (72%). However, five of these youth were referred to The Homecoming Project. Their baseline responses are included in the Homecoming analysis. Thus, the overall number of comparison group youth at baseline is **165**, and the number of completed interviews was **116** (70%).

- Of the 116 comparison youth eligible for a follow-up study, 94 (81%) were interviewed after approximately two-years, and 73 (63%) were interviewed a year later.

It should be noted that an additional 46 comparison group youth were deemed ineligible to participate in the telephone survey because of not meeting the criteria for inclusion in the study. Because of a lag-time in reporting information such as long-term foster care orders, state records did not reflect the current status of these youth.

68. Response rates for Survey of Youth in Care, baseline

Contact disposition	Homecoming youth	Comparison youth	Total youth
Unable to contact: social worker did not respond to requests	5	18	23
Refused (youth)	2	13	15
Unable to participate (due to severe physical or emotional disability)	2	9	11
Unable to contact: youth on run or unknown location or ineligible due to age by the time of response	-	9	9
Ineligible	2	46	48
Complete	53*	116*	169
Total eligible	62	165	227
Response rate	**85%**	**70%**	**74%**

Note: *Ineligible youth were not included in the response rates due to being adopted at baseline, in long-term foster care, or no longer a minor. If time was spent trying to contact social worker and the youth was no longer a minor after a lengthy period, this youth was still deemed eligible, but not contacted for follow-up.*

Five youth were originally interviewed as part of the comparison group. However, at some point during the project, the youth were referred to The Homecoming Project. For the purposes of this analysis, these youth are included as Homecoming youth.

69. Response rates for Survey of Youth in Care, 2-year follow-up

Contact disposition	Homecoming youth	Comparison youth	Total youth
Unable to contact: social worker did not respond to requests	6	16	22
Refused (youth)	3	4	7
Not enough time between first interview and follow-up period	0	2	2
Runaway/or aged out and unable to locate	1	0	1
Complete	43	94	137
Total eligible	53	116	169
Response rate based on those eligible (completed baseline surveys)	**81%**	**81%**	**81%**
Response rate based on original sample list at baseline	69%	57%	60%

70. Response rates for Survey of Youth in Care, final 3-year follow-up

Contact disposition	Homecoming youth	Comparison youth	Total youth
Unable to contact: social worker did not respond to requests	3	16	19
Refused (youth)	0	1	1
Complete	41	73	114
Total eligible	43	94	137
Response rate based on those eligible (completed baseline and 2-year follow-ups)	**95%**	**77%**	**83%**
Response rate based on original sample list at baseline	66%	44%	50%

Results of analysis of the three youth development outcomes selected at project implementation

In addition to the recruitment of permanent families for youth served, The Homecoming Project was also designed to focus on seven youth development goals in their work with youth. These goals have been shown in the literature to serve as protective factors and to lead to healthy adult lives. For the purposes of the evaluation, three of these youth development goals were prioritized. These included the youth's: feelings of autonomy and control over his/her future; sense of belonging; and connection with a caring adult. The Survey of Youth in Care was designed to measure these outcomes as well as to collect some other outcome data such as youth permanency, housing, education, and employment.

Youth autonomy

Locus of control is considered to be an important component of personality. It can be defined as an "individual's perception about the underlying main causes of events in his/her life (internal or external)." In all, there are eight items in the Survey of Youth in Care dealing with the respondent's autonomy. These include:

- I take action to avoid problems when I see them coming

- Everyone knows that luck or chance determines one's future

- When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work

- My problems will dominate or rule me all my life

- My mistakes and problems are my responsibility to deal with

- My life is controlled by outside actions and events

- To continually manage my problems, I need professional help

- I am confident of being able to deal successfully with future problems

Items were clustered during analyses to assess a single factor: youth autonomy. Researchers looked at variations between responses at baseline and follow-up for the two groups using a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) and other statistical tests.

- At baseline as well as at follow-up, there were no significant differences between Homecoming youth and comparison group youth on their average responses.

- If we examine changes in scores over time, between baseline and follow-up, participants in both groups demonstrated an increased sense of control and autonomy. This difference was statistically significant for both groups ($p<.01$).

- However, in relationship to the comparison group, Homecoming youths' senses of autonomy showed a greater amount of improvement over time ($F = 4.93$, $p < .05$).

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71. Autonomy as selected youth development outcome: Homecoming versus comparison group average scores

Data point	Homecoming participants (N=45) Mean	Comparison participants (N=93) Mean
Baseline	2.92	2.98
Follow-up	3.16*	3.08*

Source: Baseline and follow-up Survey of Youth in Care.

* $p< .05$ between groups over time; $p<.01$ for each group over time.

Youth sense of belonging

Youth relationships and sense of belonging are important factors in increasing youth anticipation of the consequences of behavior. Having a sense of belonging motivates young people to show respect and concern, as well as making them more receptive to guidance from other community members, both of which have implication for positive youth development. The set of questions focusing on youth relationships and sense of belonging are located in questions 8 and 9 of the youth survey. In all, there are six items dealing with the respondent's feelings about their relationships.

- There is no one who likes to do the things I do

- I am able to do things as well as most other people my age

- On the whole, I am happy with myself

- How often do you feel…

  o That the people most important to you understand you?

  o Lonely?

  o That you have as many close relationships as you want?

Items were clustered during analyses to assess a single factor: sense of belonging. Researchers looked at variations between responses at baseline and follow-up for the two groups using a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) and other statistical tests.

- At baseline as well as at follow-up, there were no significant differences between Homecoming youth and comparison group youth on their average responses.

- If we examine changes in scores over time, between baseline and follow-up, participants in *both* groups demonstrated an increased sense of belonging. This difference was statistically significant for both groups (*p<.001*).

- Homecoming youth and comparison group youth showed *similar* amounts of improvement over time (not a statistically significant difference).

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72. Sense of belonging as selected youth development outcome: Homecoming versus comparison group average scores

Data point	Homecoming participants Mean	Comparison participants Mean
Baseline	2.81	2.88
Follow-up	3.25*	3.22*

Source: *Baseline and follow-up Survey of Youth in Care.*

Note: *p< .218, not significant, between groups over time;*

* *p<.001 for each group over time.*

Connections with Caring Adults

Establishing relationships with a caring adult, whereby the adult is available and useful in times of need, is an important element of positive youth development. In all, there were multiple items dealing with the respondent's feelings about their connections to caring adults. These included:

- Was this adult right there with you (physically) in a stressful situation?

- Did s/he tell you what s/he did in a situation similar to yours?

- Did s/he do some activity with you to help you get your mind off of things?

- Did s/he talk with you about some interests of yours?

- Did s/he let you know that you did something well?

- Did s/he tell you that you are OK just the way you are?

- Did s/he help you in setting a goal for yourself?

- Did s/he comfort you by giving you a hug?

- Did s/he give you information to help you understand a situation you were in?

- Did s/he give you a ride somewhere?

- Did s/he check back in with you about an issue or conversation you had?

- Did s/he help you understand why you didn't do something well?

- Did s/he listen to you talk about your personal feelings?

- Did s/he loan or give you something that you needed?

Items were clustered during analyses to assess a single factor: connections with caring adults. Researchers looked at variations between responses at baseline and follow-up for the two groups using a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) and other statistical tests.

- At baseline as well as at follow-up, there were no significant differences between Homecoming youth and comparison group youth on their average responses.

■ Over time, participants in both groups had lower ratings with regard to connections with caring adults. That said, the amount of decline between baseline and follow-up was only statistically significant for the comparison group (p<.01).

73. Connections to caring adults as selected youth development outcome: Homecoming versus comparison group average scores

Data point	Homecoming participants Mean	Comparison participants Mean
Baseline	3.17	3.32
Follow-up	3.02	2.94*

Source: Baseline and follow-up Survey of Youth in Care.

* *p<.01*

Other information from the final follow-up Survey of Youth in Care

Extensive information about the responses, including participant characteristics of the Survey of Youth in Care administered at *baseline*, is included in Appendix A. The overall results of this baseline survey show that Homecoming youth and comparison group youth gave similar responses to the survey at baseline. For example:

■ Between the two groups, self-perceptions of autonomy, control over the future, and sense of belonging were similar.

■ The vast majority of both groups (94%) felt connected to a caring adult.

There are some indications that the Homecoming group may have been slightly more at-risk at baseline. We know that Homecoming youth had no identified adoptive resource, for instance. We also know that Homecoming youth had histories of more restrictive placement settings than comparison group youth.

■ At baseline, one-third (34%) of Homecoming youth had lived in their current placement less than 5 months (compared to 21% of comparison group youth).

■ Homecoming youth appeared slightly more likely than comparison youth to say that the closest adult in their life was a foster parent or a social worker.

An additional analysis was done comparing the final follow-up survey completed by both Homecoming and the comparison group of youth.

Criminal or delinquent behavior

Participants were asked if they had been arrested by police in the previous two years. About 30 percent of Homecoming youth reported "yes." Twenty-two percent of comparison group youth reported "yes." When asked if they have been charged with a crime or delinquency offense in the previous two years, 36 percent of Homecoming youth compared to 20 percent of comparison group participants reported "yes" ($p < .05$). Forty-four percent of youth had a probation office during the previous two years. This differed from the 15 percent of comparison group youth who reported a probation officer ($p < .05$).

Risky behavior

When Homecoming youth were asked whether they had run away or left their current location without permission for at least one night, 30 percent of them indicated that they had. Twenty-two percent of the comparison group reported that they had run away. The difference between groups differed slightly, but was not statistically significant.

Compared to the comparison group youth (15%, 7%), Homecoming participants reported no incidents of pregnancy ($p < .05$) or children, respectively.

When Homecoming youth were asked whether they had attempted suicide in the previous two years, 11 percent of them indicated they had. This differed significantly from the comparison group, of whom 2 percent had attempted suicide.

Roughly 18-20 percent of youth reported having problems with alcohol or drug use during the previous two years in both groups.

School involvement

Eighty-two percent of Homecoming youth and 74 percent of comparison group youth were enrolled in school at the time of the interview.

Adult-youth connections

A similar percentage of Homecoming and comparison group youth had their siblings living with them at the time of the interview. Sixteen percent of Homecoming participants, compared to 20 percent of comparison youth, had their biological siblings living with them at the time of the interview.

Most Homecoming (60%) and comparison (69%) youth reported contact with their birth family in the previous month. Fewer Homecoming (40%) and comparison (32%) youth reported contact with their birth family or relatives more than one month prior.

74. Adult-youth connections

Adult-youth connection	Homecoming participants		Comparison participants	
	N	% "Yes"	N	% "Yes"
Parent	30	67%	56	60%
Foster parents, residential or group home staff	30	73%	55	76%
Adult relative	34	76%	72	77%
Social workers/case manager	30	67%	63	67%
Psychologists, therapists, or counselors	19	42%	37	39%
Pastor, rabbi, or other church leaders	22	49%	39	42%
Teachers	25	56%	58	62%
Adult friend, mentor, sponsor	32	71%	73	78%
Other Adult	2	5%	11	12%

Source: *2008 follow-up Survey of Youth in Care.*

Note: *Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding. Other adults may include: biological or foster sibling, group/program leader, Homecoming worker, biological parent, sponsor (AA/NA), mentor or Big Brother/Sister, godparent, probation/police officer, PCA (personal care assistant or attendant), or friend's parent.*

Participants were then asked the number of times that they had contact with the adult closest to them in the previous four weeks. Roughly 86-88 percent of all participants reported they had some sort of contact in the previous four weeks, ranging in different activities from being physically present during a stressful situation to providing advice or encouragement. The frequency of contact (face-to-face) ranged from less than once a month to as often as everyday.

75. Frequency of adult-youth connections

Frequency	Homecoming participants		Comparison participants	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
Everyday	15	37%	45	54%
At least once a week	14	34%	21	25%
At least once a month	4	10%	11	13%
Less than once a month	8	20%*	6	7%

Source: *2008 Follow-up Survey of Youth in Care.*

Note: *Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

* *p < .05*

Project outcomes: changes in families served

As stated in the section of the report describing project implementation, The Homecoming Project did significantly more work with recruiting and supporting potential adoptive families than originally anticipated. Due to extensive media coverage and other project promotion activities, many families contacted The Homecoming Project with questions about specific teens or about adopting teenagers in general.

The Homecoming Project began keeping information about contacts with families in 2006. On average, during the second half of the project, The Homecoming Project provided information about adopting teens to about 130 families every six months. About 70 families were recruited and served more intensively by the project.

In addition, 26 families were supported throughout the process of adopting Homecoming youth as well as after finalization – until the project ended in October 2008. An additional 10 families were provided extensive support in establishing permanent lifelong connections with project youth.

Of the 36 families receiving support throughout the adoption or permanent connection process, 18 were two-parent, male/female headed families; 5 were two-parent, female/ female headed families; 8 were mom-only headed families; and 5 were dad-only headed families. Twenty percent of parents (N=59) identified as GLBTQ.

Feedback from the Family survey

In May of 2007, Wilder Research worked with project staff to design a survey for families who had worked directly with The Homecoming Project. Project staff identified between 50 and 60 families who had significant contact with the program over the previous four years, regardless of whether they had adopted a teenager through the program. Project staff mailed each family a copy of the survey and asked them to complete it and return it to Wilder Research in an enclosed envelope. Individual responses were kept confidential from Homecoming Project staff. Families were given a $10 gift card to thank them for their time. Wilder received completed surveys from 18 families, for a response rate of about 30 percent.

Demographic information

■ Of the families who responded to the survey, 14 were two-parent households, and 3 were one-parent households. Of the two parent households, nine were male-female

couples, and five were same-sex couples. One respondent did not provide this information.

■ The parents ranged in age from 29 to 68 years old, with a mean age of 44 years.

■ Almost all (94%) respondents were White.

■ Most families (69%) reported an annual household income between $51,000 and $100,000.

■ Almost all families (89%) reported some type of religious affiliation. The most commonly reported affiliation was Christianity (69% of those reporting). In addition, most respondents (71%) indicated that religion or spirituality played a significant role in their decision regarding adoption.

■ Thirteen respondents reported living in the Twin Cities metro area, while four respondents reported living in either Central or Northwestern Minnesota.

■ Six respondents (35%) reported that they had been foster parents, and three parents (18%) reported that they were also birth parents.

Previous experience with adoption

A little over half (56%) of the respondents who participated in the survey reported that they had been considering adoption for at least three years. However, eight respondents (44%) reported that they only began thinking adoption in the previous one to two years.

76. Length of time considering adoption

When did you first begin thinking about adopting? (N=18)	Number	Percent
One to two years ago	8	44%
Three to five years ago	5	28%
Six or more years ago	5	28%

Of the families that responded to the survey, one had completed adoption orientation, one had begun a home study, one was in the matching process, eight were living with their youth in a pre-adoptive placement, and six had a finalized adoption. One family did not answer this question. Overall, the families reported using many different resources to help them in this process.

77. Adoption resources used by families

What resources have you used to learn more about adoption? (N=18)	Number	Percent
On-line photo listing of waiting children		
Minnesota waiting kids	17	94%
Adopt US kids	7	39%
Other states' sites	6	33%
Other	3	17%
Minnesota websites about adoption		
Minnesota Adoption Support and Preservation	14	78%
Minnesota Department of Human Services	12	67%
Minnesota County sites	12	67%
Other resources		
Harambee Project	8	44%
North American Council on Adoptable Children	5	28%
The Homecoming Project staff	14	78%
Adoption agency social workers	12	67%
Other adoptive parents	12	67%
Newspaper, radio, or other media coverage of the issue	11	61%
Heard Our Voices Matter youth	10	56%
Social workers from my county	5	28%
Attended a Heart Gallery exhibit	2	11%

Families were at different stages of the adoption process when they first came into contact with The Homecoming Project. Perhaps surprisingly, 44 percent were still in the beginning stages ("still thinking about it"). This may indicate that the project was able to recruit families who may not have pursued adoption further without the project's involvement.

78. Adoption status at first contact with The Homecoming Project

Where were you in your current adoption journey when you first came into contact with The Homecoming Project? (N=16)	Number	Percent
Still thinking about it	7	44%
Pre-adopt training began	3	19%
Completed pre-adopt training	1	6%
Home study approved	3	19%
In matching process	2	13%

79. Adoption status at time of survey

Please describe where you are today in your current adoption journey? (N=17)	Number	Percent
Adoption orientation complete	1	6%
Home study begun	1	6%
In matching process	1	6%
Pre-adoptive placement (includes foster-adoption)	8	47%
Finalized adoption	6	35%

Adoption experience with The Homecoming Project

Families who noted that they were in the process of being matched with a youth, had a pre-adoptive placement, or had a finalized adoption (N=14) were asked to indicate the number of children or youth they had inquired about. The number ranged from 0 to 50, with a median of 6 youth. Of these inquires, 36 were Homecoming youth, with a range of 1 to 8 youth per family.

Families who inquired about Homecoming Youth were asked in what ways their experience working with The Homecoming Project differed from inquires they had made about other youth. Their responses were grouped into themes, identified below:

> Homecoming staff was more responsive/proactive. (N=5)
>
> More communication in working with The Homecoming Project staff. (N=3)
>
> Homecoming staff provided more information/background about the youth. (N=3)
>
> Homecoming staff was more helpful. (N=2)

Families were asked to identify the most encouraging and discouraging aspects of their first experiences contacting an adoption agency or county to learn more about adoption. Families provided a range of responses which were grouped into the categories below:

Most encouraging aspects

> Staff were nice/friendly/made me feel comfortable. (N=5)
>
> Staff answered my questions. (N=5)
>
> Agency provided adoption orientation. (N=4)
>
> Staff gave us recommendations. (N=2)

Staff expanded the process. (N=2)

Asked us for suggestions. (N=1)

Most discouraging aspects

Paperwork. (N=3)

Waiting. (N=3)

Did not educate me on policies/procedures. (N=3)

Tried to scare us away from adoption. (N=2)

Pushed us too fast. (N=1)

Social worker was not comfortable working with teens. (N=1)

Worried we might not get approved. (N=1)

80. Age of child family is considering adopting

(N=18)	When first considering adoption	Currently
Newborn to 3 years	3	0
4 to 7 years old	8	2
8 to 12 years old	12	5
13 to 18 years old	12	15

81. Factors that influenced families' change in thinking

If there has been a change in your thoughts about the age of a child you might consider, what do you think informed your decision? (N=18)	Number	Percent
Saw a panel of teens speak about adopting older youth	7	39%
Interaction with The Homecoming Project	5	28%
Learning about specific children and their behaviors	4	22%
Consultation with my home study worker	3	17%
Information I learned at pre-adopt training	2	11%

82. Adoption-related activities

Which of the following adoption-related processes have you participated in with The Homecoming Project? (N=18)	Number	Percent
General information about teen adoption/permanency		
I saw Homecoming Project staff present at a training event	13	72%
I saw youth from The Homecoming Project speak at a training event	13	72%
I read a newspaper article about the project and/or specific youth	9	50%
I attended a prospective parent group orientation	4	22%
I saw the video "We Interrupt"	8	44%
I visited The Homecoming Project website to learn about waiting teens	14	78%
I communicated with Homecoming Project staff by phone/email about teen adoption in general	12	67%
I met in person with Homecoming Project staff to learn more about teen adoption in general	14	78%
Child-specific recruitment and matching		
I spoke with Homecoming Project staff about a specific youth	16	89%
I saw video clips of a specific waiting youth	11	61%
I saw brochures on Homecoming Project youth	14	78%
I downloaded information from The Homecoming Project website	11	61%
I participated in collateral meetings about a Homecoming Project youth that I have considered adopting	12	67%
I had visits with a prospective adoptive youth that was a Homecoming Project youth	10	56%
I had a Homecoming Project youth placed in my home	12	67%
I finalized an adoption of a Homecoming Project youth	5	28%
I had a placement of a Homecoming Project youth disrupt	3	17%
General support to families		
I utilized Homecoming Project staff to provide support as I went through my pre-adopt training and home study process	10	56%
I spoke by phone or email with The Homecoming Project staff for resources or support	13	72%
I contacted The Homecoming Project staff when I had difficulty with my child	10	56%
Homecoming Project staff have initiated contact with me, simply to check in or offer support	12	67%

Parents who were involved with a placement or potential placement of youth from the project were also asked a number of questions regarding their experiences with project staff throughout the process. In general, most respondents had positive reviews of Homecoming staff with regard to their effectiveness, support, and rapport with youth and families. In particular:

■ Many respondents felt Homecoming Project staff did an outstanding job throughout the adoption process, particularly with regard to working around the family's schedule to coordinate meetings (N=11), working with home study workers (N=10), and supporting the youth and family after the youth moved into the home (N=9).

■ All respondents (N=14) saw Homecoming staff as very good or outstanding partners with county workers.

83. Perceptions of staff from The Homecoming Project

How well did The Homecoming Project Staff… (N=4-14)	Terrible	Poor	Okay	Very good	Outstanding
Work as a team with you and your home study worker	0	1	0	2	10
Seem to be in an effective partnership with county worker	0	0	0	7	7
Communicate with you and your worker about Homecoming's role in collateral meetings and placements	0	1	1	4	7
Make sure that you received answers to questions you had about the youth	1	0	0	5	8
Make sure that you received answers to questions you had about the adoption process	0	0	1	5	8
Make sure that you received answers to questions you had about adoption assistance	1	0	2	3	8
Support you and the youth during the matching and visiting phases	0	0	1	3	8
Support you and the youth after the youth moved in	0	0	0	2	9
Support you and the youth after finalization	0	0	0	2	2
Encourage and/or provide resources to help you make contact with birth family	0	0	1	2	2
Build and maintain rapport with the youth	0	0	3	3	5
Build and maintain rapport with you	1	0	3	4	5
Build and maintain rapport with other children in your home	1	0	1	0	2
Work around your schedule when coordinating meetings or visits	0	0	0	3	11

Families were also asked in what ways, if any, their interaction with Homecoming Project staff helped dispel any myths or misunderstandings they had about adopting older youth. The most common responses were:

> Staff were open and honest. (N=5)
>
> Staff were able to answer questions and provide information and resources. (N=4)
>
> Staff are experienced and know the youth well. (N=3)

Finally, parents were asked what had been helpful and unhelpful about working with The Homecoming Project, with regard to adopting an older teen. In general, most respondents thought being involved with the project had been helpful because staff were involved in their case. This helped them have more information and in some cases may have sped up the process. Most respondents did not mention an aspect of project involvement that was unhelpful, although a few families (N=3) felt that they were pushed too quickly to make a decision.

Project outcomes: systems changes

Changes in perceptions of adoption workers

Project staff and Wilder researchers wanted to collect process-level data about the potential impact of The Homecoming Project on "business as usual" – the attitudes and practice of county social workers. In order to assess this, baseline and follow-up self-administered surveys were designed. A total of 64 surveys were completed by adoption workers in December 2003 as the baseline. At follow-up, 46 surveys were completed by adoption workers in April 2005, and 50 surveys were completed in September 2008. Because the surveys were anonymous, baseline and follow-up surveys could not be matched. However, we do know that 37 percent of adoption workers who responded to the 2005 follow-up reported completing a survey previously, and 22 percent of workers who responded to the 2008 follow-up reported completing a survey previously. The baseline and follow-up surveys were nearly identical, with a few questions regarding The Homecoming Project added to the follow-up.

Workers' roles in the adoption process

At baseline and follow-up, more than seven out of 10 workers indicated their roles in the adoption process included placing children and recruiting families. At follow-up, there were greater numbers of workers who also did home studying or licensing (74% in 2005 and 72% in 2008 vs. 52% of baseline).

84. Adoption workers' roles in the adoption process

Item	Baseline (2003)			2005 follow-up			2008 follow-up		
	N	Number "Yes"	Percent "Yes"	N	Number "Yes"	Percent "Yes"	N	Number "Yes"	Percent "Yes"
Which of the following roles do you have in the adoption process?									
Placing children	62	49	79%	45	32	71%	44	28	64%
Recruiting families	59	45	76%	45	32	71%	44	35	79%
Home studying and/or licensing families	60	31	52%	46	34	74%	43	31	72%
Other [a]	58	18	31%	45	16	36%	46	15	33%

Source: Baseline adoption workers' survey (December 2003), and Follow-up adoption workers' survey (April 2005, September 2008).

Note: This was a closed- and open-ended question. Respondents could give up to four responses. Therefore, percentages do not total 100.

[a] Other roles mentioned include: supervisor, paperwork finalization, Life book planning, run adoptive parent support group, matching placements, adoption assistance, educational component, administrative functions, case management, training, child protection worker, preparing kids for process, post placement, and lead groups for kids.

When asked about their main role, a higher percentage of workers at baseline <u>placed</u> children (40% in 2003 versus 28% in 2005 and 21% in 2008). A higher percentage of workers did home-studying at follow-up (28% in 2003 versus 38% in 2005 and 37% in 2008).

85. Adoption workers' main roles in the adoption process

Item	Baseline (2003) N=58		2005 follow-up N=47		2008 follow-up N=43	
Which *one* of these roles would you say is your *main* role? (Check <u>one</u> category)	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**
Placing children	23	40%	13	28%	9	21%
Home studying and/or licensing families	16	28%	18	38%	16	37%
Recruiting families	6	9%	6	13%	3	7%
Other – adoption is not the main role of my job	4	6%	4	9%	6	14%
Other – adoption is the main role of my job, and my main role in that process is…[a]	9	15%	6	13%	9	21%

Source: Baseline adoption workers' survey (December 2003), and Follow-up adoption workers' survey (April 2005, September 2008).

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

[a]   Other main roles include: supervisor, director, case management, adoption assistance, guardianship, administration, and post placement.

Adoption worker characteristics

Seven out of 10 workers surveyed worked in the 7-county Twin Cities Metro area, and the majority worked for a county agency.

For both the baseline and follow-up surveys, half of the participants indicated having worked in the field for five years or more. The rest of the participants had been in the field less than five years.

86. Adoption worker characteristics

Item	Baseline (2003) N=64		2005 follow-up N=48		2008 follow-up N=47	
Please indicate where you work:	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**	**N**	**Percent**
County agency	44	69%	26	54%	25	53%
Private agency	19	30%	20	42%	20	43%
Missing	1	1%	2	4%	2	4%
In what part of the state do you work?						
7-county Twin Cities metropolitan area	45	70%	34	71%	29	62%
Greater Minnesota	14	22%	12	25%	16	34%
Missing	5	8%	2	4%	2	4%
How long have you worked in the adoption field?						
< 1 year	4	6%	8	17%	7	15%
1 to <3 years	12	19%	7	15%	7	15%
3 to <5 years	14	22%	9	19%	8	17%
5 years or more	32	50%	23	48%	25	53%
Missing	2	3%	1	2%	1	2%

Note: *Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

Workers were asked questions to determine their personal experiences with foster care, either through being a foster/adopted child or foster/adoptive parent themselves (see Figure 87).

Baseline (2003) results

■ Almost half (48%) of adoption workers have been one or more of the following: foster child, foster parent, adopted child and/or adoptive parent

■ Sixteen (26%) adoption workers indicated they had once been an adopted and/or foster child

■ Fourteen (22%) adoption workers have been or currently are foster and/or adoptive parents

2005 follow-up results

■ More than half (67%) of adoption workers have been one or more of the following: foster child, foster parent, adopted child and/or adoptive parent

■ Twelve (26%) adoption workers indicated they had once been an adopted and/or foster child

■ Nineteen (41%) adoption workers have been or currently are foster and/or adoptive parents

2008 follow-up results

■ More than half (62%) of adoption workers have been one or more of the following: foster child, foster parent, adopted child and/or adoptive parent

■ Six (12%) adoption workers indicated they had once been an adopted and/or foster child

■ Twenty-two (50%) adoption workers have been or currently are foster and/or adoptive parents

87. Adoption workers' personal experiences with foster care

Item	Baseline (2003)			2005 follow-up			2008 follow-up		
	N	Number "Yes"	Percent "Yes"	N	Number "Yes"	Percent "Yes"	N	Number "Yes"	Percent "Yes"
Have you yourself ever been any of the following?									
A foster parent	63	5	8%	47	8	17%	44	9	20%
An adoptive parent	62	9	15%	46	11	24%	44	13	29%
A foster child	62	6	10%	47	4	9%	44	2	4%
An adopted child	63	10	16%	47	8	17%	45	4	9%

Note: *Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

There were no significant differences in the number of adoption workers who had been a foster child, foster parent, adopted child, and/or adoptive parent among the three data time points.

Background and adoption work experience

The first question asked workers how many cases they were directly involved with that resulted in finalizing an adoption for a child under state guardianship for the previous calendar year. This question was asked both at baseline and follow-up and showed similar results (see Figure 88), with the exception of the decline in response percentage at the 2008 follow-up regarding more than 11 cases. Between 81-89 percent of adoption workers surveyed had, in the prior year, been directly involved in a case that resulted in a finalized adoption.

88. Adoption workers' involvement with adoption cases

"During [the last] calendar year, how many cases were you directly involved with that resulted in finalizing an adoption for a child under state guardianship?"	N	None (1)	1 or 2 cases (2)	3 to 5 cases (3)	6 to 10 cases (4)	11 to 19 cases (5)	20 or more cases (6)
Baseline	64	11%	12%	12%	22%	17%	25%
2005 follow-up	46	13%	15%	26%	15%	15%	15%
2008 follow-up	48	19%	15%	31%	27%	6%	2%

Note: *Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

a   *Means are based on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being "None" and 6 being "20 or more cases."*

Worker contact with Homecoming

At follow-up, workers were asked to indicate the kinds of contact they had with The Homecoming Project (and see Figure 89):

■ Over 80 percent had heard about Homecoming through a Task Force presentation

■ More than half (60% and 53%) had heard Homecoming present elsewhere

■ 28 percent had referred a child to the program at the 2005 follow-up, and 16 percent had referred a child to the program at the 2008 follow-up

■ Over one-quarter of workers indicated that at least one of their cases had been a project youth

■ 45 percent of workers at the 2005 follow-up and 38 percent of workers at the 2008 follow-up indicated other forms of contact, including: case consultation, Community Action Team, Life Planning Groups, etc.

89. Follow-up: Worker contact with The Homecoming Project

Item	2005 follow-up		2008 follow-up	
	N	Percentage of workers responding "Yes"	N	Percentage of workers responding "Yes"
Since January 2004, what kind of contact have you had with The Homecoming Project?				
Heard them present at Task Force	45	82%	46	87%
Heard them present elsewhere	45	60%	45	53%
Referred a child	43	28%	44	16%
One of my cases is a project youth	43	26%	44	27%
Other contact[a]	47	45%	47	38%

Note: *This was a closed- and open-ended question. Respondents could give up to five responses. Therefore, percentages do not total 100.*

[a] *Other types of contacts include: family looking at adopting a Homecoming child contacted me, case consultation, Community Action Team, The Homecoming Project contacted me, Advisory Board, teamed up with The Homecoming Project, recruitment discussions, one of my foster children is in the program, and Life Planning Groups.*

Worker experience with teen adoptions

At baseline, workers were asked whether they had ever received help from the Minnesota Adoption Resource Network (MARN) for any of their cases within the previous two years. Eighty-two percent had received help from MARN, with a majority (74%) indicating one or more times within the previous two years.

Workers were asked at baseline and follow-up, whether they had ever helped place a teen in an adoptive family. At baseline, 82 percent had helped place teens, with nearly half having done so once or twice in the previous two years. At follow-up, 78 percent had helped place teens, with nearly half having done so once or twice in the previous two years. In the fall 2008, 81 percent had continued to do so, with the majority having done so once or twice in the previous two years.

Finally, workers were asked whether they had ever worked directly with a teen to get his/her ideas about prospective persons willing to adopt him/her (see Figure 90). During the baseline survey, 25 percent of workers indicated they had never included teens in the process. This figure jumped significantly in the following year (2004), where 43 percent of workers indicated they had never worked directly with youth. In the subsequent follow-up (2008), the percentage of workers decreased to 31 percent.

90. Adoption workers' experiences with teen adoptions

Item	N	Percentage of workers responding			
		Never (1)	Yes, but not in past 2 years (2)	Yes, 1 to 2 times in past 2 years (3)	Yes, 3 times in past 2 years (4)
Since you began working on adoptions, have you ever received help from MARN for a case?					
Baseline[a]	62	18%	8%	37%	37%
Have you ever helped to place a teen (age 13 or older) in an adoptive family?					
Baseline	64	17%	17%	45%	20%
2004 follow-up	46	22%	4%	46%	28%
2008 follow-up	48	19%	10%	46%	25%
Have you ever worked directly with a teen to get his/her ideas about specific people who might adopt him/her?					
Baseline	64	25%	16%	37%	22%
2004 follow-up	46	43%	9%	24%	24%
2008 follow-up	48	31%	8%	35%	25%

[a]   This question was not asked during the follow-up survey, therefore no data is available for comparison.

Youth eligibility

In the follow-up survey, workers were asked whether there were any youth on their caseloads that they wanted to refer to The Homecoming Project but had not, due to the youth not meeting eligibility requirements. Workers were asked to describe why they would have liked to refer those youth and to list the reasons that had made them ineligible. Of those who said "No," one person indicated that s/he did not have a lot of information regarding The Homecoming Project.

Four workers (9%) indicated that they did have *ineligible* youth on their caseloads that they would like to refer to The Homecoming Project. The following were given as some of the reasons why those youth did not qualify.

> Intense needs, not old enough [youth is 12 years of age], and TPR [termination of parental rights] not a year out yet.

> [Youth] is currently in residential treatment.

> Children are too young (9-10 years old).
>
> Difficult to place; [child is] 8 years old, and really wants a family.

Opinions about teen permanency

Finally, workers were asked for their opinions regarding teen permanency. A significant difference occurred between baseline and both follow-up points for the statement, "Teenagers in the foster care system can be effective partners." Ninety-seven percent of adoption workers agreed with this statement. At follow-up, the percentage of those in agreement was 100 percent. A significant difference occurred between baseline and the 2008 follow-up for the statement, "It is harder to find placement for teens today than it was five years ago." (see Figure 91). Twenty-eight percent of respondents agreed with this statement at baseline. At the 2008 follow-up, the percentage of those in agreement was 11 percent. Finally, a trend in a positive direction was observed for the statement, "Most teenagers want to be adopted." For this item, differences in responses over time nearly reached the level of statistical significance.

91. Adoption workers' opinions about teen permanency

Statement	Baseline			2004 follow-up			2008 follow-up		
	N	Percent strongly agree or agree	Mean	N	Percent strongly agree or agree	Mean	N	Percent strongly agree or agree	Mean
It is hard to find adoptive families for teens (children age 13 or older)	64	89%	1.8	48	87%	1.8	47	87%	1.6
People don't want to adopt teens because teens have a lot of problems	63	73%	2.1	48	67%	2.2	48	73%	2.1
Teenagers in the foster care system can be effective partners*	64	97%*	1.6**	48	100%*	1.3**	48	100%	1.3**
It is harder to find placement for teens today than it was five years ago	61	28%	2.7*	46	26%	2.7	45	11%	3.0*
Most teenagers want to be adopted	62	89%	1.9	48	94%	1.7	47	98%	1.8
Long-term foster care is better than adoption, because families receive more benefits as foster parents than as adoptive parents (such as reimbursement rate, medical coverage, services)	64	12%	3.2	46	13%	3.3	47	11%	3.3

** *Indicates significant difference (<.01). * Indicates significant difference (<.05).*

Scale: 1= Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Disagree, and 4=Strongly Disagree

How workers feel permanency options have changed for youth

At baseline, when asked if they thought their perspective about permanency options for teens changed, 25 percent of adoption workers responded "yes." At follow-up in 2005, 64 percent of workers responded "yes." At follow-up in 2008, 44 percent responded "yes." A significant change in workers responses was determined ($p < .05$) among baseline and follow-ups.

The following are the open-ended descriptions of workers' changes of opinions in this respect.

> I understand that the process may take longer and [to] involve teens more in the process.
>
> I am more encouraging of families to consider teens than before.
>
> I believe lifelong connections are/can be very valuable for those without permanency.
>
> I realized that many teens do not want to be adopted; [I have] gained greater appreciation and understanding of their beliefs, fears, and ideas about being adopted.
>
> I'm beginning to understand the importance for older kids to have a sense of belonging in a permanent way to a family.
>
> I believe [more strongly] about [teens] having permanent homes.
>
> After attending your workshop and learning about adoption for teens, I feel every teen deserves a family.
>
> I did tend to think long term foster [care] offered more benefits, if the child was older.
>
> Our agency needs to try harder!
>
> Awareness is stronger.

A few people who felt that their opinions had not changed from before January 2004 stated:

> I thought then, as now, that teens can be successfully adopted when provided proper support.
>
> Our agency started because teens needed homes. That was a main focus that moved to place any children under state guardianship.
>
> I still believe in working hard to find adoptive resources for teens.
>
> I've always encouraged permanency/adoption for teens and young adults.

Changes in long-term foster care rates

The Minnesota Department of Human Services data (see Figure 92) shows that long-term foster care rates rose from 12 percent in 1998 to 25 percent in 2003. Since then, during the project grant period, rates steadily declined to 12 percent reported in 2007.

This decline in the last five years was due to many factors including a change in statute in 2007. However, the amount of recognition of The Homecoming Project and the continual emphasis in presentations and case work on these issues may have had a tertiary impact on this change.

92. Changes in percentage of children under state guardianship in long-term foster care, 1998-2007
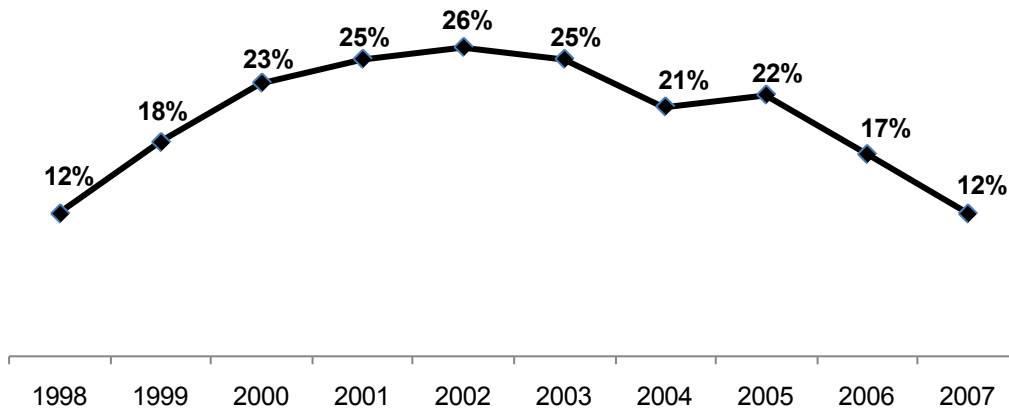
Changes in teen adoption rates

Between 2002 and 2006, the average number of children under state guardianship who reached age 18 and left care without a permanent family was 114 (Minnesota Child Welfare Report, 2006). This number increased to over 200 if we include *all* youth aging out of care in Minnesota, including those whose parents retain legal rights. All teens leaving foster care, whether or not they are under state guardianship, are likely to encounter similar challenges without concrete family support.

In 2007, 672 children under state guardianship were adopted. Of these, 106 youth were between the ages of 12 and 17. This was 16 percent of the total number of adoptions. This number has steadily increased over the past five years.

Project staff reported that they had provided consultation and support to several cases in several counties that ended in a finalized adoption for a youth that was not on The Homecoming Project caseload. This positive increase in the number and percentage of teen adoptions was one of the anticipated outcomes of the project.

93. Number of adoptions of youth under state guardianship, 1998-2007

	Age 12-17	Percent of all adoptions
1998	50	10%
1999	61	10%
2000	69	11%
2001	50	9%
2002	76	12%
2003	77	11%
2004*	84	15%
2005*	97	13%
2006*	80	13%
2007*	106	16%

* The Homecoming Project was operating during 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007.

94.   Adoptions by age, 2003-2007

Adoptions by age, 2003-2007
Percent of all adoptions

Ages 0-5
- 57% (2003)
- 54% (2004)
- 55% (2005)
- 59% (2006)
- 56% (2007)

Ages 6-11
- 32% (2003)
- 32% (2004)
- 32% (2005)
- 28% (2006)
- 28% (2007)

Ages 12-17
- 11% (2003)
- 15% (2004)
- 13% (2005)
- 13% (2006)
- 16% (2007)

Legend: ■2003 ▨2004 □2005 ⊠2006 □2007
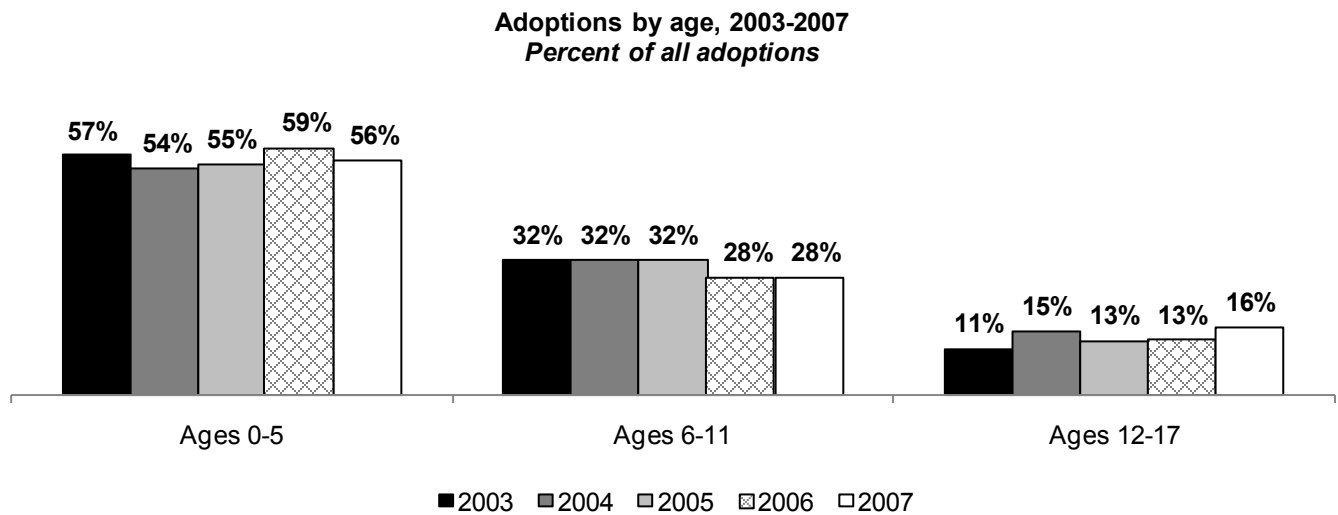
Youth views: Suggestions for improvement in the system of care

Youth who participated in the Survey of Youth in Care were asked for their suggestions about improving out-of-home care or the adoption process for teenagers in general. Youth gave thoughtful responses with a theme centered around a need for workers and other adults to listen more to youth and to respect their views.

Suggestions for improvement in the system: Homecoming youth views

Do you have any ideas about how to make the out-of-home care or the adoption process work better for teenagers?

Homecoming participants (N=37)

> No response. (23 respondents)
>
> Treat teens like everyone else. The county and foster parents label kids just because they have been adopted or [are] in foster care – like they have issues. It may not be the kids' fault if they are in that situation.
>
> To know that even if you are not with your mom, to look at the bright side. To know you will always be able to love your mom. And to make sure your social worker puts you in a home you will like; to keep searching until you find one you will be comfortable with.

The parents need to realize that older kids can forget about things just like younger kids. They shouldn't worry about if kids forget about things they have done for them. They (kids) won't just leave them… They should listen to how kids feel about things. They don't always think about things the way adults think they do. Kids want homes. They shouldn't worry that kids will forget about them.

The adults should give teenagers some time to cool off before making and/or deciding on what's best.

Since I have been in foster care, as I grew up, I have seen younger kids picked to go in foster care before older kids. I thought the Homecoming Project would help me out, but it is just as slow as everything else. Talking about foster care really makes me angry. It is too complicated of a system and the government has all these kids and parents who don't want their kids. A lot of foster parents and things just want the money and some abuse the kids. Sometimes I think kids would be better off in residential treatment.

Maybe if they (kids) know it's not a bad thing that is happening but a good thing that is happening to them. I don't know what to say really. Just that it is not a bad thing and [it] can help them out a lot.

Listen to them. Build them up. Build them up in a real way, not a cheesy, lame, sucky way. Don't tell them the same thing everybody tells them: "You can do whatever you want," etc. Tell them real stuff. Tell them what you really see in them: "You have potential." Build up even the kids that get into trouble. Still let them know you really care for them and will be there for them – that even though they keep messing up, you care for them and are there for them.

Just be respectful and listen to what everyone has to say and say your part. The kids that go to a foster home and have problems with a foster parent; just be respectful. I carry around trying to be respectful. Who should listen to whom, who says their part. The kids should listen to the adults first, and the adults should be respectful. That is what I have gotten so far.

Instead of having babies on billboards put older children on them.

Help people reach out to them, comfort them (new people) – not for [themselves], but [for] others who need them.

It's hard to get a teenager adopted. People want babies so they can control them.

Give kids choices, like what you like while living at the group home and choice of places to live.

For people to actually listen to us. To ask our opinions rather than forcing things on us.

Don't get in trouble when you are there. Respect your elders. Be responsible for your actions.

Suggestions for improvement in the system: comparison group views

Do you have any ideas about how to make the out-of-home care or the adoption process work better for teenagers?

Comparison group participants (N=102)

No response. (49 respondents)

When they place a kid in a placement, they should make it work for the kid to fit in. They should have some comparisons. They should like the same things. Put them together, see if they [fit together]. If they both like to be active or they both like to be quiet.

When kids turn a certain age, most people won't adopt them any more [over age 15]. They need to help kids find parents who are looking for older kids; show them that older kids need help too.

Try to find more homes for them and increase activities – more homes; group homes and foster homes – because most foster homes are taking in little kids instead of older ones.

Try and find a family that will actually take me in [stop my actual acting out sexually].

Trust them, if they are in your lives every day. Help with your problems. There when you need them. Not judge you. Just like real parents.

They should talk with the kids, too. They will spend lots of time talking with the adults – don't get the kid's opinion. Kids should have some say in the process because if the kids are not matched, nobody will be happy.

The people that look for adoption families should find parents that have a child around their age. The teenager should try not to fight with their adoptive parents. They should treat them with respect and be thankful that they have a home and a place to live.

The background of the child; know what the child wants in a family.

Serve more pizza! Just to think on the bright side of things. Don't look back on your life. Just move forward.

Putting children in group homes helps.

Put kids on an adoption list earlier than they do. Also do it faster.

Place them in a decent home.

People should start believing and listening to teens. Don't judge right away. Give them a chance. Don't judge a book by its cover. Teenagers are cool people.

Listen to them.

One thing I think we should have: more freedoms. I usually have people on my back all the time. They are always badgering me, trying to make me do something I don't like. The doctors – they put me on medicine that turns me into a zombie. I don't eat, sleep, don't do anything... I just sit there.

Nobody seems to want kids our age – 16 or over. In my opinion, once you turn 16, you might as well drop out of the adoption program and just stay in foster care. What's the point of getting adopted and living there for just three years?

Maybe if they help them with things they don't have like clothes and things.

Maybe if social workers listened to their clients more. They want you to have a better relationship with them. They should also have a better relationship with you. This would help them get better placements for you because if you don't like the placement, you are going to act out more.

Listen to what they have to say. When kids are younger, they don't have much choice. What they think is right, so you should listen to them. Example: If they can't live with their mother, you should listen to their ideas about other relatives they would like to live with, etc.

Let them [the kids] interview several people [foster parents] to see which ones they like better.

Let the kids meet or see a video tape rather than hearing about them.

Late night curfews. More PlayStation (games) time.

Kids should stay out of foster care. I don't know.

Just let the current child be their own person. Try not to put so much stress on him or her; putting them in groups they don't know anything about without letting them have any input on it.

I think the teens should meet with the family and spend time with the family before they are adopted to see if they get along. And if they don't get along, I think the teens should have a say in it and people should listen to them.

I think the kids need to be heard a lot more. I think there is a lot of talking behind their backs in the county. They talk about them and make decisions about them without listening to them. When a kid doesn't like a placement or doesn't want a placement, they should listen to them about what is going on. I think that has a lot to do with why kids rebel – not being listened to.

I have been almost adopted seven times, but it never went through. The only thing I can say is: better background checks. I have had some experiences with adoptive parents who were a little crazy in the head and I found out about it on my own. I called it off.

I don't like being adopted. I would think foster care would be better. It depends upon the type of social worker you have. It is better if you have one who will always do things to help you even though she is busy all the time.

I didn't like not being with my people. Match/place children with their own cultural and ethnic background. It's ok now, but it was hard at first.

Having patience.

Have them decide where they want to go within reason.

Have the kids take a personality test, have possible adopting parents take one, too, and pair things up.

Have more advertising for kids that want to be adopted. Put on the Internet and newspaper. Details about kids that want to be adopted. More exposure.

Have a transportation service for us. Give us cell phones for emergencies. Talk more about adoption, have groups for that (know someone who wants to adopt client eventually). Should have groups where they give advice on relationships with boys.

Give older kids more choices in making decisions and allow them more freedom so we don't have to be supervised so strictly, since we are older and growing up.

Getting adopted by my foster parents.

Get to know parents. If you don't like the people, talk to [the] social worker and get to know others.

Get them to understand.

For all the teenagers to have a place to talk with each other and with counselors.

Find a suitable place. Don't just rush them into a house. If they are babies, I can understand it. But if they are older, take time to transfer them. Maybe let them try it for a weekend, then a week – move slower. If you rush it and it doesn't work out, then they might run away or get into trouble.

Don't screw up. Don't do something you will regret later or that you know is wrong and have been told not to do before.

Don't bounce them around so much (don't know how that can happen).

Don't be afraid to be who you are. Adults should help kids be able to talk more about their feelings and listen to them (kids).

Do what you do like: talk with people and doing this interview.

County should check in or have the kids talk to them. Trust them, don't ignore them. Believe what they have to say.

Could try a good family.

Can't get no freedom in group homes – [this] should be changed. As I get older, I need more freedom and I can't stand that, [being] treated like kindergarteners.

By having people understand them by asking them for their opinion instead of always telling them what needs to be done.

Both should try to connect right away. Understand and listen to each other and don't be so quick to judge. Keep an open mind.

Before parents can adopt, they should have a test on what to expect as a parent. The parents should talk to the kid's other family members, too. There are other family members [of the kid] who care about them. It would make the kid feel better, knowing that they can stay in touch and communicate.

Be open-minded about things. That is what I have been working on. I didn't used to be like that. Use the tools that are given. It gives you time to change your outlook on life. A lot of times, there are resources like counselors and social workers who can help you.

Add more family contact.

Conclusions

Between 1998 and 2002, the number of teenagers under state guardianship in Minnesota grew by 70 percent. This dramatic change prompted the state of Minnesota and its partners to seek out new methods to increase the likelihood that older teens would be able to find permanent family connections.

The Homecoming Project began serving youth under state guardianship in early 2004. Over the course of nearly five years, 100 youth, including their siblings when requested, were referred to The Homecoming Project. Youth received extensive one-on-one individualized recruitment services. Prior to enrollment in the project, these youth had typically been in placement for five years and had experienced 10 or more placements. At the time of program entry, most were in foster homes or group homes, and over a quarter had lived in more restrictive facilities in the six months prior to enrollment. More than nine out of 10 had mental health issues, and three-quarters had been physically abused. Remarkably, 76 percent had been in contact with a number of their birth family in the year preceding enrollment in the program.

At the end of the project, over half of the youth served achieved permanency: 31 percent were adopted, 8 percent were in pre-adoptive homes, and 12 percent had permanent life-long connections with families. These adoption rates are about five times the rate of adoption of teenagers for the state at baseline. Moreover, when compared to a similar group of youth under state guardianship, Homecoming youth were significantly less likely to have been ordered into long-term foster care by the courts, to sign an affidavit saying that they did not want to be adopted, and to age out of care.

In addition to differences in adoption and long-term foster care rates, youth who participated in the Homecoming Project also showed greater improvements in critical areas of youth development. In relationship to the comparison group, Homecoming youth's sense of autonomy as well as their sense of belonging showed a greater amount of improvement over time. These differences were statistically significant.

These positive results can be primarily attributed to the project's focus on what might be called the authentic engagement of youth. By using recruitment specialists who made young people a partner in the search for permanency, workers were able to leverage each young person's stake in his or her own future. Through the responses of both young people and families it was clear that each felt engaged at a deep level, respected in their role, and given an opportunity to be more thoroughly aware of both the risks and rewards inherent in adoption.

This form of child-specific recruitment and engagement appears to be critical in achieving greater levels of permanency for youth under state guardianship. Of perhaps equal importance was the balance of both fun and work in the way recruitment specialists connected with young people. Families who inquired about Homecoming youth were also more deeply engaged and reported that in comparison to other adoption related experiences they had had, Homecoming staff were more responsive, communicated more often, and provided more information and background about each youth.

The benefits of the project appear to extend beyond the individual youth and families served. In particular, project staff were successful in gaining public attention and an increased systemic emphasis on teen adoption and the permanency needs of youth aging out of care. This is exhibited by the statistically significant decreases over time in perceptions of adoption workers about the degree of difficulty in finding adoptive homes for teens. It is also apparent through the multiple requests received by project staff for information and speaking engagements as well as the multi-part radio documentary *Wanted: Parents* completed by American Radio Works.

The Homecoming Project navigated a complicated system that at times appeared to work against providing permanency for teens. There were multiple barriers including gaining access to teens – who were often in restricted settings or in placements in all corners of the state. In addition, there was extensive work involved in pressing the need for permanency with multiple professionals involved in the lives of these teens. There were misperceptions about the ability of teens to get adopted – especially considering the severity of the needs of the youth served by the project.

In the end, the project was able to promote and secure permanency for 51 youth served, and to change perceptions of adoption workers and other key stakeholders throughout the state. This project demonstrates that an environment of richer engagement and communication, one that emphasizes the potential youth have to be part of a planning team with a recruitment specialist, may be able to help youth who previously had little potential for adoption, to establish a different view of their own future; one in which they are part of a family.

Implications of results and issues to consider

The Homecoming Project provides some insights into what contributes to the relatively low number of teens achieving permanency through adoption as well as practical tips for increasing teen permanency. Minnesota's challenges likely mirror those of other states and appear to be consistent with the literature on older youth permanency. These challenges include myths within the child welfare field and among individual workers about the adoptability of teenagers and their ability to participate in their own case planning; variation in the application of rules, statutes, and best practices across agencies and regions of the state; and other systemic barriers that might impede adoption workers from even considering adoption as an option for older youth.

Recommendations to administrators of future projects

Throughout the course of their work on the project, Homecoming staff identified seven basic beliefs that should be shared by all adults involved in the case in order for permanency efforts to be successful. Project staff recommend that these beliefs be a core component in the development of any new program models focused on teen adoption, and part of any staff training for individuals doing this work:

- All youth and families have dignity and the right to participate in decisions made regarding their lives.

- Teens should be involved in their own permanency planning.

- Teens have a basic right to a safe, committed family.

- Teens are adoptable, and there are families who have the skills and desire to adopt teens.

- Teens are capable of navigating complex relationships. They can have positive relationships with both their birth family and adoptive family, if the adults support them.

- Change, including new approaches and new people, can be a good thing.

- Permanency is not a placement or an event. Permanency efforts require workers to take a long-term perspective on the youth's life.

Recommendations to project funders

It is clear anecdotally and from the research that many youth under state guardianship may find the idea of adoption to be unappealing or even frightening at first. However, staff from The Homecoming Project found that over time and with appropriate one-to-one engagement, youth often change their minds and determine that they are in fact interested in pursuing adoption. This study provides further evidence for that assumption. There was a statistically significant difference between the number of project youth and comparison group youth who signed a legal document (affidavit) stating that they do not want to pursue adoption – more project youth chose not to sign the document because they wanted to pursue adoption. This indicates that when youth are provided with appropriate information, support and encouragement, most want to be adopted. Permanency options must be kept open for teens who have faced multiple challenges and may need time to consider the right family. In fact, in Minnesota, policy makers have responded to the need to keep permanency options open for teens. A change in stature was instituted, effective July 2007, barring young teens from the option of the affidavit stating they do not want to be adopted.

In addition, given the other positive outcomes exhibited so far, it seems logical to continue to fund these types of efforts.

Recommendations to the general field

The primary purpose of this project was to help a greater number of teens under state guardianship establish and maintain permanent connections to caring adults, ideally through adoption. This goal was based on a premise that adoption is a better path for teens in guardianship. There is little research on the long-term outcomes of youth who are adopted as teens. On the other hand, it is well established that youth who age out of foster care are significantly more likely than other youth to face life challenges related to their physical and emotional well-being. While it makes intuitive sense that long-term outcomes for adopted teens would be better than outcomes of similar teens who did not join a permanent family, there is no research available to substantiate that assumption. This evaluation began that process by following a group of youth in care for three years, some of whom became adopted and others who did not. However, it would make a substantial contribution to the field to continue this and similar studies to measure similarities and differences in the long-term outcomes of these populations.

Appendix A: Additional information and analysis

Logic model

Results of baseline Survey of Youth in Care

Logic model

Inputs	Activities (see detail on separate page)	Outputs	Short-term outcomes (0-18 months)	Long-term outcomes (1 1/2 to 5 years)

Inputs

MN ASAP - on-going support to adoptive families

OVM - (a) youth advisors to project; (b) activities for project participants

County social workers - (a) referrals; (b) access to comparison group youth; (c) on-going services to participants

Existing recruiters - on-going services to youth and adoptive families, including home studies and placement support

SAE - (a) register of waiting youth and families; (b) info & referral for inquiring families; (c) identify & resolve barriers to adoption for waiting kids

MARN - project management

NACAC - (a) post-adoption support thru ASAP; (b) opportunities for OVM to present & advocate; (c) access to data and information resources

Youth groups through county agencies

MN Recruitment Project (thru NACAC) - recruitment and support of prospective adoptive parents

PPAI - services to prospective and adoptive families

MN DHS - project oversight

MN Foster and Adoptive Care Assoc - opportunities for OVM to present and advocate

Hennepin County adoption support groups - consultation on establishing support groups for youth in child-specific recruitment

Project staff have experience and training in positive youth development

Youth leadership of planning process

Wendy's Wonderful Kids - funding and information to support project work

Activities (see detail on separate page)

Identify & train project staff (Recruitment Specialists, or R.S.)

General outreach and education, to explain program and philosophy

Facilitate specific referrals from county staff and engage referred youth to participate

R.S. work with youth to identify and strengthen existing adult connections

Work with county social workers and caregivers on casework for youth

R.S. work with youth's adult resources to explore possible options for emotional, legal, and physical permanency for youth

Ongoing support and resource referral for youth and adult connections after agreements

Advocate for best interests of children in guardianship

R.S. work one-on-one with youth to increase skills for self-advocacy

Youth have opportunity to observe and/or participate in OVM and HP group activities

Outputs

R.S. hired
who have received training
- in wraparound/FGDM/CAFAS
- in positive youth devt principles
- in facilitating youth leadership

county staff who have attended H.P. presentations
who have returned consent to contact comparison group youth
who have made referral to H.P.
youth who agree to meet with RS to hear about HP
who sign agreement to participate

contacts/quarter/youth
youth who are taking leadership role in recruitment activities
siblings affected who are not part of participant pool

adult contacts/quarter/youth
new connections identified
youth with agreements made for emotional permanency
youth with agreements made for legal permanency
youth with agreements made for physical permanency

post-agreement contacts made for on-going support

OVM opportunities offered
youth who attend/observe
youth who actively participate
frequency of participation/youth
HP group activities offered
youth who attend/observe
youth who actively participate
frequency of participation/youth

Short-term outcomes (0-18 months)

Professionals more likely to view adoption as possible for older teens
Foster care providers and facility staff have more understanding and appreciation of permanency options other than long-term foster care

Youth have a positive view of their future

More youth (*participants and/or younger siblings) have identified any adult connections

Youths' (*) existing adult connections are recognized, affirmed, and strengthened

Youth (*) have more adult connections

More youth (*) have formalized a long-term adult connection

More families are willing to consider adoption of older youth
More interested families persist through application and homestudy process

Youth develop self-confidence
Youth perceive and assert more power to plan own future
Youth gain self-esteem

Youth gain exposure to more potential adult connections
Youth learn & practice skills in leadership and self-expression
Youth sees self as an agent of change

Long-term outcomes (1 1/2 to 5 years)

Improved foster care/adoption system for all older youth
- less use of long-term foster care as permanency plan
- facility staff better maintain and promote youths' connections with adults in community
- youth input sought more routinely
- broader understanding of permanency as a process rather than an event
- more positive images and role models of (former) foster care youth capacities and potential

Increase rate and frequency of adoptions for teenagers under state guardianship

Reduce use of long-term foster care as a permanency option

Lower rate of disrupted adoptions among youth in the program

Strengthen youth's connectedness to caring adults and the larger community

Increase youth's internal locus of control, empowerment, and sense of mastery

WRC 9/27/2004 rev. 12/15/2005

Results of baseline Survey of Youth in Care

Participant characteristics

The average age of Homecoming youth at intake was 14.1, which was similar to the average age of 14.7 for comparison group youth.

A1. Age of participants

Age	Homecoming participants N=52		Comparison participants N=117	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
11 years	2	4%	-	-
12 years	2	4%	-	-
13 years	14	27%	23	20%
14 years	17	33%	39	33%
15 years	8	15%	25	21%
16 years	4	8%	14	12%
17 years	5	10%	14	12%
18 years	-	-	2	2%
Mean age		**14.1**		**14.7**

Source: 2004-2005 Baseline Survey of Youth in Care.

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

For the most part, Homecoming and comparison group youth had stayed in their current locations similar amounts of time. Homecoming participants may have been more likely than comparison group participants to have stayed in their current locations less than three months at the time of the survey (22% vs. 11%), and were slightly less likely than comparison group participants to have stayed in their current location more than five years (4% vs. 11%).

When youth were asked whether they had run away from or had left their location without permission for at least one night, 29 percent of them indicated that they had. That did not differ from the comparison group, 30 percent of whom had run away.

A2. Length of time living in current setting

Length of time respondent stayed at current location	Homecoming participants N=50	Comparison participants N=117
Less than three months	22%	11%
Three to five months	12%	10%
Six to eleven months	16%	19%
One to two years	34%	34%
Three to five years	12%	15%
More than five years	4%	11%

Source: 2004-2005 Baseline Survey of Youth in Care

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

A3. Number of siblings living with respondents

Number of siblings living with respondent	Homecoming participants N=52		Comparison participants N=117	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0 siblings	43	83%	84	72%
1 sibling	9	17%	15	13%
2 siblings	-	-	11	9%
3 siblings	-	-	5	4%
4 siblings	-	-	2	2%

Source: 2004-2005 Baseline Survey of Youth in Care.

A4. Ages of siblings living with respondents

Number of siblings	Siblings of Homecoming participants N=9		Siblings of comparison participants N=60	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
4 to 5	-	-	2	3%
6 to 9	-	-	16	27%
10 to 12	3	33%	21	35%
13 to 15	6	67%	12	20%
16 to 17	-	-	9	15%

Source: 2004-2005 Baseline Survey of Youth in Care.

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Involvement in activities

Participants were asked a series of questions to determine how much time they spent on different activities in a typical week during the school year. The evaluators hypothesized there would be little or no difference between the groups. Questions in that segment of the survey were based on the Minnesota Student Survey conducted by the Minnesota Departments of Education, Health, Human Services; Public Safety; and Corrections. Statistical tests were done to compare the time spent on each activity ("0 hours" vs. "1 or more hours"), and the results confirmed the original hypothesis. The only significant difference found between the two groups was the amount of time spent on "homework or study" activities. Comparison group youth were more likely to spend more hours on homework than youth in the Homecoming group. Homecoming youth were two times more likely than comparison youth to not spend time on homework (32% vs. 13%).

A5. Involvement in activities in a typical week

Activities/hours spent	Homecoming participants N=52	Comparison participants N=117
Homework or study		
No time was spent on this activity	32%*	13%*
One to two hours	26%	33%
Three to five hours	26%	30%
Six to 10 hours	12%	14%
Eleven to 20 hours	2%	7%
Twenty-one or more hours	2%	3%
Band, choir, orchestra, other musical activities		
No time was spent on this activity	81%	75%
One to two hours	8%	10%
Three to five hours	4%	11%
Six to 10 hours	8%	3%
Eleven to 20 hours	0%	1%
Twenty-one or more hours	0%	1%
Clubs or organizations outside of school (i.e., YMCA or Scouts)		
No time was spent on this activity	71%	56%
One to two hours	20%	17%
Three to five hours	4%	17%
Six to 10 hours	4%	6%
Eleven to 20 hours	0%	3%
Twenty-one or more hours	2%	3%

A5. Involvement in activities in a typical week (continued)

Activities/hours spent	Homecoming participants N=52	Comparison participants N=117
Playing sports on a school team		
No time was spent on this activity	63%	54%
One to two hours	16%	8%
Three to five hours	14%	12%
Six to 10 hours	6%	13%
Eleven to 20 hours	0%	9%
Twenty-one or more hours	2%	4%
Other sports or exercise activities		
No time was spent on this activity	20%	17%
One to two hours	33%	31%
Three to five hours	28%	27%
Six to 10 hours	12%	18%
Eleven to 20 hours	6%	5%
Twenty-one or more hours	2%	3%
Attending services, groups, or programs at a church, synagogue or mosque		
No time was spent on this activity	55%	48%
One to two hours	16%	24%
Three to five hours	16%	21%
Six to 10 hours	8%	6%
Eleven to 10 hours	2%	2%
Twenty-one or more hours	2%	0%
Volunteer work		
No time was spent on this activity	57%	65%
One to two hours	31%	17%
Three to five hours	4%	12%
Six to 10 hours	4%	4%
Eleven to 20 hours	4%	2%
Twenty-one or more hours	0%	1%

A5. Involvement in activities in a typical week (continued)

Activities/hours spent	Homecoming participants N=52	Comparison participants N=117
Doing chores or babysitting at home		
No time was spent on this activity	14%	10%
One to two hours	50%	38%
Three to five hours	16%	26%
Six to 10 hours	10%	17%
Eleven to 20 hours	6%	5%
Twenty-one or more hours	4%	4%
Working for pay, including babysitting for pay		
No time was spent on this activity	50%	48%
One to two hours	15%	16%
Three to five hours	15%	10%
Six to 10 hours	10%	14%
Eleven to 20 hours	4%	7%
Twenty-one or more hours	6%	5%

Source: 2004-2005 Baseline Survey of Youth in Care.

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

* *Statistical tests compared results for the two groups to see if there were significant differences between them in terms of "0 hours" vs. "1 or more hours." Homework or study was the only area with a significant difference between the two groups with comparison group youth more likely to spend time on this activity.*

Perceptions of autonomy, control over future, and sense of belonging

Next, participants were read statements to determine how they felt regarding their personal futures. Again, evaluators hypothesized that there would be little or no difference between the two groups of participants.

Differences were found for the following statements:

■ "I am with a group of people who think the same way I do about things." Comparison participants were more likely to have agreed with that statement than were their Homecoming counterparts (78% vs. 55%).

■ "There is no one who has the same interests and concerns as me." Comparison participants were somewhat more likely to disagree with that statement than were their counterparts (86% vs. 71%).

A6. Perceptions of autonomy, control over future, and belonging

Statements	Homecoming Participants N=52				Comparison participants N=117			
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
A. I take action to avoid problems when I see them coming	0%	10%	76%	14%	2%	19%	64%	15%
B. Everyone knows that luck or chance determines one's future	6%	44%	46%	4%	12%	49%	33%	5%
C. When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work	0%	15%	67%	19%	2%	13%	67%	19%
D. My problems will dominate or rule me all my life	24%	51%	24%	2%	26%	59%	14%	1%
E. My mistakes and problems are my responsibility to deal with	0%	10%	60%	31%	0%	7%	56%	37%
F. My life is controlled by outside actions and events	12%	40%	46%	2%	8%	56%	32%	4%
G. To continually manage my problems, I need professional help	14%	55%	29%	2%	16%	53%	30%	2%
H. I am confident of being able to deal successfully with future problems	0%	18%	61%	20%	2%	9%	65%	25%
I. There are people I know who will help me if I really need it	0%	6%	48%	46%	1%	3%	44%	53%
J. There are people who like the same social activities I do	0%	2%	73%	26%	2%	2%	62%	34%
K. Other people do not think I am good at what I do	18%	65%	16%	2%	14%	57%	25%	4%
L. I am with a group of people who think the same way I do about things	10%*	35%*	45%*	10%*	2%*	19%*	72%*	6%*
M. I do not think that other people respect what I do	12%	68%	14%	6%	14%	59%	25%	3%
N. There are people who value my skills and abilities	0%	6%	68%	26%	1%	6%	70%	23%
O. There is no one who has the same interests and concerns as me	10%*	61%*	22%*	6%*	23%*	63%*	11%*	4%*
P. There is no one I can count on for help if I really need it	36%	56%	8%	0%	40%	54%	5%	1%
Q. There is no one who likes to do the things I do	19%	75%	6%	0%	31%	62%	6%	2%
R. I am able to do things as well as most other people my age	0%	10%	71%	19%	3%	4%	64%	30%
S. On the whole, I am happy with myself	0%	6%	75%	19%	1%	4%	66%	29%

Source: 2004-2005 Baseline Survey of Youth in Care. Questions were based on the Locus of Control, Social Provisions, and Minnesota Student Survey scales.

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding. * Denotes significant difference as determined by the Chi-Square Test.

Additional questions were asked about youths' senses of belonging, using a modified version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale.[1] No differences were found among the youth when asked to rate their feelings related to loneliness. In fact, youth appear to feel connected to other people. For future studies, it might be interesting to analyze these questions compared to a general population of youth.

A7. Feelings of loneliness

Personal feelings: "How often do you feel…"	Homecoming participants N=52	Comparison participants N=117
A. That the people most important to you understand you?	**Mean = 1.5**	**Mean = 1.5**
Often	67%	63%
Sometimes	24%	26%
Rarely	4%	9%
Never	6%	3%
B. Lonely?	**Mean = 2.5**	**Mean = 2.6**
Often (1)	20%	10%
Sometimes (2)	33%	37%
Rarely (3)	26%	34%
Never (4)	22%	19%
C. That you are wanted by the people or the groups that you like belonging to?	**Mean = 1.8**	**Mean = 1.7**
Often	45%	52%
Sometimes	31%	35%
Rarely	20%	8%
Never	4%	5%
D. That you have as many close relationships as you want?	**Mean = 1.8**	**Mean = 1.8**
Often	50%	44%
Sometimes	32%	39%
Rarely	10%	12%
Never	8%	5%

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[1] Russell, D., Peplau, L.A.,& Cutrona, C.E. (1980). The revised UCLA Loneliness Scale: Concurrent and discriminant validity evidence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 39*, 472-480.

A7. Feelings of loneliness (continued)

Personal feelings: "How often do you feel…"	Homecoming participants N=52	Comparison participants N=117
E. Emotionally satisfied in your relationships with people?	**Mean = 1.7**	**Mean = 1.7**
Often	51%	48%
Sometimes	35%	35%
Rarely	10%	16%
Never	4%	1%

Source: *2004-2005 Baseline Survey of Youth in Care. Questions were based on the UCLA Loneliness Scale.*

Note: *Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

Adult-youth connections

Participants were read a list of the "kinds of adults some youth feel connected to," and asked to indicate whether or not they themselves felt connected to the adult mentioned or shared another type of connection to an adult not mentioned on the list. The most common adults listed by both groups were: relatives, present/former foster parents, and friends. Homecoming youth felt most connected with their adult relatives (94%).

Comparison group and Homecoming youth appear similar in the types of adults with whom they feel connected, though Homecoming group participants were, overall, less likely to identify a connection with an adult from specified categories. Homecoming youth were slightly more likely to mention adult relatives and other adults than were comparison group participants, but less likely to mention adult friends (77% vs. 89%), foster parents (83% vs. 92%), and teachers (67% vs. 76%). For other types of adults, the groups appeared similar, with only slightly higher numbers of identified connections among comparison group participants.

A8. Adult-youth connections

Adult-youth connection (Yes/No)	Homecoming participants		Comparison participants	
	N	% "Yes"	N	% "Yes"
Adult relatives	47	94%	102	87%
Foster parents or former foster parents	39	83%	105	92%
Adult friends	40	77%	102	89%
County social workers	40	77%	88	77%
Psychologists, therapists, or counselors	40	77%	90	80%
Residential or group home staff	21	70%	48	74%
Pastor, rabbi, or other church leaders	34	68%	84	74%
Teachers	35	67%	86	76%
Other adults*	13	26%	22	19%

Source: 2004-2005 Baseline Survey of Youth in Care.

Note: Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding. Other adults may include: biological or foster sibling, group/program leader, Homecoming worker, biological parent, sponsor (AA/NA), mentor or Big Brother/Sister, godparent, probation/police officer, PCA (personal care assistant or attendant), or friend's parent.

Next participants were asked to think about their relationship with the adult they felt closest to. Ninety-six percent of both Homecoming and comparison group participants reported having a close relationship with an adult. Four percent of respondents from each group reported not having a close relationship with *any* adults, or could not answer the questions.

The three most common close adult connections for Homecoming youth were:

■ foster parent (40%),

■ social worker (10%), and

■ adult friend (10%).

The four most common close adult connections for the comparison group included:

■ foster parent (35%),

■ adult friend (10%),

■ adult relative (9%), and

■ biological parent (9%).

Participants were then asked about the contact they had over the preceding four weeks with the adult they felt closest to. Ninety-three percent of Homecoming participants reported contact over this period, compared to 79 percent of the comparison group. Participants were then asked about the frequency of various types of interactions with these principle adults, ranging from being physically present during a stressful situation to providing advice or encouragement. The frequency of contact (in-person, phone, email, or mail) ranged from once or twice in the past four weeks to as often as everyday.

The first question was whether the adult was physically present when the respondent faced a stressful situation. Seventy-four percent of Homecoming youth and 85 percent of comparison youth reported their closest adult relation had been present in person at least one or more times during the previous four weeks.

There were no differences between the two groups for this series of questions, as both groups seemed to have spent similar amounts of time for each activity with the adult they considered to be their closest adult contact.

Both Homecoming and comparison youth gave the highest ratings for the frequency with which the close adult let them know that they did something well (96% and 94%, respectively). Participants in both the Homecoming and comparison groups were also likely to identify that a close adult had told them that they were "okay just the way they are" (87% vs. 89%), listened to them talk about their personal feelings (87% vs. 92%), and gave them information to help them understand a situation they were in (84% vs. 92%). Lowest ratings among Homecoming participants were given for the frequency with which the closest adult told the youth what the adult did in a similar situation to the youth (64%, compared with 79% of the comparison group) and comforted the youth by giving them a hug (65%, compared with 75% of the comparison group).

A9. Frequency of adult-youth connections

		Homecoming Participants				Comparison participants		
	N	Not at all	Once or twice in the past four weeks to about once per week	Several times a week to about everyday	N	Not at all	Once or twice in the past four weeks to about once per week	Several times a week to about everyday
A. Was this adult right there with you (physically) in a stressful situation?	46	26%	33%	41%	100	15%	32%	53%
B. Did s/he tell you what s/he did in a similar situation to yours?	47	36%*	30%	34%	99	20%	42%	37%
C. Did s/he do some activity with you to help you get your mind off things?	47	26%	43%	32%**	102	19%	46%	35%**
D. Did s/he talk with you about some interests of yours?	47	19%	47%	34%	101	8%	40%	52%
E. Did s/he let you know that you did something well?	46	4%**	39%	57%*	100	6%**	28%	66%*
F. Did s/he tell you that you are OK just the way you are?	46	13%	33%	54%	101	11%	27%	62%
G. Did s/he help you in setting a goal for yourself?	47	19%	47%	34%	102	16%	44%	40%
H. Did s/he comfort you by giving you a hug?	46	35%	30%	35%	102	25%*	36%	39%
I. Did s/he give you information to help you understand a situation you were in?	43	16%	33%	51%	102	8%	41%	51%
J. Did s/he give you a ride somewhere?	47	30%	28%	43%	102	26%	36%	38%
K. Did s/he check with you about an issue or conversation you had?	46	24%	33%	43%	101	14%	46%	41%
L. Did s/he help you understand why you didn't do something well?	47	21%	40%	38%	102	21%	38%	41%
M. Did s/he listen to you talk about your personal feelings?	46	13%	35%	52%	101	9%	39%	53%
N. Did s/he loan or give you something that you needed?	47	23%	43%	34%	102	16%	40%	44%

Source: *2004-2005 Baseline Survey of Youth in Care. Questions were based on the Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors.*

Note: *Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

*   Denotes highest rated figure in that column.*

**   Lowest rated figure in that column.*

Peer connections

Participants were asked to think about a group of people they enjoyed being with and describe what they had in common with that group. Ninety-six percent of Homecoming youth were able to identify shared interests/characteristics with such a group (compared to 100% of the comparison group). The remainder responded that they "don't have a group like that" (3%) or providing a non-responsive answer (1%).

Responses were grouped together and categorized. The most common responses from both groups were that they liked to play the same sports (26% for Homecoming participants and 38% for comparison group participants). The next most common response for Homecoming participants was "We like to have fun/laugh/joke around" (24%). In contrast, 18 percent of comparison youth indicated "We understand each other/think the same/have the same personalities" as the second most common response.

Participants from both groups were also similar in their responses regarding the frequency with which they are with their peer groups. For example, 56 percent of Homecoming youth indicated they are with their peers "every day," similar to 52 percent of comparison youth.

A10. In their own words: peer connections

Group activities/commonalities	Homecoming participants N=52	Comparison participants N=117
We like the same sports/to play sports	26%	38%
We like to have fun/laugh/joke around	24%	12%
We like to talk (unspecified)	10%	11%
We understand each other/think the same/have the same personalities	12%	18%
We like to listen to/play the same music/dance	12%	13%
We like to go to the mall/shopping	8%	7%
We like the same movies/go to the movies	8%	8%
We are the same age	6%	4%
I don't have a group like that/non-responsive answer	8%	4%
Biking or skateboarding	6%	8%
We go to the same school/classes	4%	3%
Same hobbies (unspecified)	4%	5%
We all like drawing/art	4%	1%
We take care of each other/look out for each other	4%	4%
We all trust each other	4%	1%

A10. In their own words: peer connections (continued)

Group activities/commonalities	Homecoming participants N=52	Comparison participants N=117
We all have parents who have been separated from us	4%	2%
We like to get in trouble/stay out late/party	4%	3%
We like the same things (unspecified)	8%	10%
We like to play video/computer games	6%	4%
We go to the same church/we all love Jesus	2%	1%
Fishing/hiking (outdoor activities)	2%	1%
We like to do things together (unspecified)	2%	13%
We all have similar problems/similar past/had a hard life	4%	8%
We live in the same group home	2%	-
We are family/relatives	2%	3%
We all get good grades/want to go to college	2%	2%
We like the same clothes	-	5%
We like to drive around (cruising)/work on our cars	-	3%
We all like to help others	-	1%
We all go to the same activities	2%	-
Hustling	-	1%
Our sexuality or like girls/boys (opposite sex)	2%	3%

Source: *2004-2005 Baseline Survey of Youth in Care.*

Note: *This was an open-ended question. Respondents could give up to three responses. Therefore, percentages do not total 100. Some figures may be duplicates of similar answers with the same participants.*

A11. Frequency of peer connections

Frequency respondents are with their peer groups	Homecoming participants N=52	Comparison participants N=117
Every day	56%	52%
At least once a week	23%	29%
At least once a month	4%	5%
Less than once a month	8%	9%
No response	10%	4%

Source: *2004-2005 Baseline Survey of Youth in Care.*

Note: *Totals may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.*

Long-term goals and plans for the immediate future

When asked about whether they had goals for their future (within the next couple of years), both groups were similar in their responses. Eighty-one percent of Homecoming participants affirmed that they did have goals, similar to 89 percent of the comparative group. A few marked differences to note included:

- 67 percent of the Homecoming group named "going to college/technical school" and/or a specific field of study as their long-term goals, compared with only 52 percent of the comparison group.

- 22 percent of the comparison group named "graduating from high school" as their long-term goal, compared with 19 percent of Homecoming youth.

- 7 percent of the Homecoming group affirmed "staying out of trouble" as a long-term goal, compared with 3 percent of the comparison group.

- 5 percent of Homecoming youth stated a yearning for independence or "finding my own place to live" as a long-term goal, compared to 2 percent of comparison youth.

A12. In their own words: long-term goals

Long-term goals (Two years ahead or more)	Homecoming participants N=52	Comparison participants N=117
Go to college/technical school/graduate from college	36%	26%
Named a specific field of study/career goal	31%	26%
Graduate from high school	19%	22%
Stay out of trouble	7%	3%
Be independent/Find my own place to live/a house	5%	2%
Getting grades up/better	5%	9%
Get a good job/career	7%	12%
Be in another foster home	5%	1%
Be adopted	-	2%
Celebrate my birthday	2%	-
Finish my Harry Potter book	2%	-
Be a better skateboarder	2%	1%
Do my homework	-	1%
Make more friends	-	1%
Get 200 score in bowling	-	1%

A12. In their own words: long-term goals (continued)

Long-term goals (Two years ahead or more)	Homecoming participants N=52	Comparison participants N=117
Take my medication	-	1%
Be on the football team	-	2%
Named a specific college to attend	-	3%
Start my own business	2%	1%
Be a professional musician	2%	2%
Be with my siblings	2%	-
Have a good/successful life (unspecified)	2%	5%
Be rich/have lots of money	2%	-
Have a family/wife/kids of my own	2%	4%
Help kids who grew up in placement homes like me	2%	1%
Keep a positive attitude	2%	-
Be a professional athlete	-	12%
Joined the Armed Forces	-	2%
Find my mother/father	-	2%
Travel the world	-	1%
Stay clean and sober/Finish my treatment program	-	3%
Get my driver's license/Buy a car	-	5%

Source: 2004-2005 baseline Survey of Youth in Care

Note: This was an open-ended question. Respondents could give up to two responses. Therefore, percentages do not total 100. Some figures may be duplicates of similar answers with the same participants. Other goals also include: be a better skateboarder, celebrate my birthday, be on the football team, get a score of 200 in bowling, and take my medication.

A13. In their own words: immediate plans

Immediate plans to reach long-term goals	Homecoming participants N=52	Comparison participants N=117
Do good in school/get better grades	33%	35%
Go to school/summer school	24%	23%
Staying out of trouble/getting my act together	17%	14%
Study/do my homework	19%	16%
Taking college prep courses/looking at colleges	5%	5%
Volunteering/working in field of study	5%	7%
Finish high school/graduate	5%	5%
Keeping busy/waiting for time to pass	5%	1%
Looking for someone to help me	5%	1%
Working a job/looking for a job	5%	8%
Research/read/and talk about stuff outside of school	2%	2%
Working through/graduating from my program	5%	4%
Stay strong/help myself/apply myself	2%	3%
Writing/keeping a journal	2%	1%
Practicing/playing sports	5%*	12%*
Work on portfolio	2%	1%
Reading every day	2%	1%
Practicing instrument/music	2%	2%
Staying clean and sober	2%	1%
Working with my social worker	-	1%
Nothing right now	-	4%
Exercising/working out	-	2%
Saving money	-	2%
Find a place to live	-	1%
Taking my medication	-	1%

Source: *2004-2005 Baseline Survey of Youth in Care*

Note: *This was an open-ended question. Respondents could give up to two responses. Therefore, percentages do not total 100.*

Appendix B: Related project reports

As mentioned in this report, Wilder Research has produced two reports that tell additional detail about project implementation, lessons learned, and replication.

The first report, completed midway through the project, gives detailed feedback from the process evaluation. This report is attached and is entitled, *Breaking new ground in teen adoption: Lessons learned in the first two years of the Homecoming Project.*

In addition, Homecoming staff partnered with Wilder Research to complete a report describing the lessons learned from program implementation. This report, often described as a "how to" manual, gives extensive information about how to replicate successes of the project. This report is attached and entitled, *Finding adoptive families for teens: Practice tips from the Homecoming Project for working with teens under state guardianship.* Completed at the end of the five year project in 2008, the report is also available at the Wilder Research website: www.wilderresearch.org. (See attached report.)

Breaking new ground in teen adoption

Lessons learned in the first two years of
The Homecoming Project

October 2006

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Contents

Evaluation of The Homecoming Project
final results
    150
    Wilder Research, December 2008

Contents (continued)

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Homecoming Project staff for their assistance with and support of the evaluation activities including Jen Braun, Erica Dahlquist, Lakeisha Daniels, Wilhelmina Moos, Amy Snyder, and Jim Paquette. In particular, Michelle Chalmers partnered in developing the evaluation plan and instruments. In addition, Melissa Sherlock from the Minnesota Department of Human Services was integral in developing and reviewing the evaluation activities. We would also like to thank the county social worker staff who participated, anonymously, in an in-depth interview about the project and its relationship with the county's work.

Sheila Romero of Wilder Research also contributed to this report.

Summary

The Homecoming Project is a Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) project to increase the number of adoptions of adolescents who are under state guardianship in Minnesota. Funded in 2003 as a demonstration project under a federal Adoption Opportunities and Activities Grant, The Homecoming Project provides an opportunity to expand efforts to recruit permanent families for teenagers.

Wilder Research is the evaluator for the project. This report presents findings about the implementation of the project in its first two years, including the extent to which actual practices corresponded to the planned philosophy, goals, and activities; the adequacy of resources to implement as planned; the suitability of the model to its environment; the effectiveness of program organization and processes to support program activities; the extent to which the project is reaching its intended target population; and the appropriateness of the services actually delivered.

Data sources are in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the project manager, four of the five original Recruitment Specialists, the state manager overseeing the project, and a county social worker who has referred youth to the program and worked closely with the project. The project and state staff interviews were completed between June and September 2005, and the county worker interview was conducted in September 2006. In addition, evaluators reviewed notes from 10 meetings held with project and state staff from the beginning of the implementation through May 2005 during which project plans, activities, experiences, and observations were discussed.

The data indicate that The Homecoming Project is being implemented with high fidelity to its original philosophy and goals, and that it is serving its intended target population. Activities have been modified slightly to accommodate ways in which the target population was different than expected, or the prior recruitment work was not as expected. However, these accommodations preserve the original spirit and goals of the project. The resources and management of the project are sufficient to carry out the planned services, and those services are generally well received.

Stakeholders from all the different vantage points represented agree that The Homecoming Project is demonstrating a promising new model for recruiting adoptive families for teens in state care, and that it is doing so in a way that is likely to effectively promote youth development and permanent connections for youth even if adoptive homes are not found.

Background

The Homecoming Project is a project of the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, under the Adoption Opportunities and Activities grant program. The program is being operated under contract to DHS by the Minnesota Adoption Resource Network (MARN). The purpose of this five-year demonstration project is to increase the number of adoptions of teens under state guardianship.

The project targets adolescents age 13 to 17, who have historically been difficult to place in adoptive homes due to their distinctive cognitive, developmental, and emotional differences from younger children. Youth in this age group are eligible for project services if they are under state guardianship, had parental rights terminated by the courts at least one year previously, have a permanency plan of adoption, and have no adoptive resource yet identified.

In addition to seeking adoptive families, the project also has the explicit goal of strengthening participating youth's connections to caring adults and the larger community. Without replacing any existing recruitment methods, it provides additional services. These services are grounded in a youth development philosophy that places the youth at the center of the recruitment activities, to the extent that the youth is capable and wishes to participate. Beginning with adults already familiar with the youth, the project engages in child-specific and child-centered recruitment efforts based on actively identifying and building on each youth's strengths and potential.

Wilder Research is evaluating the implementation and outcomes of this demonstration project. This report presents an overview of process evaluation findings for the initial start-up period of implementation.

Methods

This report is based on key informant interviews with the project supervisor, four of the five initial project staff, the state grant manager for the project, and a county social worker who has referred youth to the project. It also incorporates information about project activities collected during 10 meetings with project staff during the first two years of operations.

To help understand what has been learned in the initial implementation of this demonstration project, this report addresses the following key questions:

1. Have there been any changes in goals, concept, or design?

2. Does the program have the resources and capacity to implement as planned?

3. Is the program suited to its environment (socially, politically, economically, culturally)?

4. Are the program organization and management operating as planned?

5. Is the program reaching its intended target population?

6. Is the program delivering appropriate services, in type and intensity?

Interviews with project staff and the state representative were completed between June and September, 2005. The interview with the county social worker was completed in September 2006. During the summer of 2005 the work of The Homecoming Project was briefly suspended when the state temporarily delayed the renewal of its contract with MARN (the project's parent agency). This suspension was for reasons unrelated to The Homecoming Project. The interruption of regular work and contact with the youth in the project was frustrating as well as financially difficult for the project staff. Three of the five Recruitment Specialists resigned during this time to take or seek different positions. Interviews were completed with all who could still be contacted, in order not to lose the project's lessons learned from the first two years of implementation. However, since the program's temporary suspension was also disruptive to county workers, to a lesser extent, we decided to postpone county worker interviews until work had been resumed and had regained a sense of normality.

Findings in this process evaluation summarize learnings from the first two years of implementation of The Homecoming Project. They do not necessarily represent the activities of the project at the date of publication. By this time, several new staff have

been hired, and some of the project's activities have been modified and strengthened based on the first two years of experience.

This report is a companion to the May 2006 report on preliminary findings (baseline and midpoint outcomes), *Initial information and feedback related to The Homecoming Project*.

Findings

The findings of the process evaluation are shown below, organized by the key questions addressed.

1. *Have there been any changes in goals, concept, or design?*

Implementation is faithful to the initial design.

Two years into the implementation of the project, The Homecoming Project is adhering closely to its original goals and overall concept, with minor adjustments to accommodate the conditions encountered by the project. The implementation is very faithful to its initial design.

Activities have been slightly modified in light of actual conditions.

Once the program began receiving referrals and doing in-depth case work, staff found that the youth in the project generally have few or no realistic adoptive resources among the family and other adults with whom they are already familiar. As a result, the following adjustments have been made in the way staff do their work:

■ Youth are less involved in identifying potential adoptive parents to be contacted and recruited. Instead, staff work to help youth develop activities and materials to help them be more visible to other potential resources, through personalized brochures and videos and activities such as "Our Voices Matter."

■ Resource Teams (of professionals and personal connections) have rarely been convened as groups. Instead, Homecoming Project staff work with professionals and personal connections mainly on a one-by-one basis, but keep each resource person informed of all the work they do.

■ When staff arrange permanent connections for youth, those connections are less often than anticipated made by strengthening existing relationships, and more often from developing and nurturing new relationships.

■ The identification of adoptive resources is more often through recruitment of strangers than was expected.

Project staff have found that many youth have developmental delays, or are ambivalent about the idea of adoption, with the result that they do not have the capacity to be intensively involved in their own case planning. With other youth, placements that are

far from their home counties or placements in secure facilities restrict the access of project staff to the youth. The youth-centered and youth-driven philosophy is still at the core of program:

■ The extent of the individual youth's involvement is tailored to the youth's cognitive and emotional readiness (and sometimes the level of restriction in residential settings).

■ Regardless of the youth's capacity, each youth is actively engaged by project staff in thinking about desirable kinds of families and outcomes. Youth are asked about their preferred level of knowledge and involvement in specific recruitment activities, and their preference is honored.

■ The Youth Advisory Committee was very helpful in the hiring process, but has not been involved since. This reflects the same barriers mentioned to youth being actively involved in their own case planning: high proportions with developmental delays or restrictive placements or ambivalence about adoption. Staff feel that most youth find it challenging enough to think about their own situations, let alone the system as a whole.

The Homecoming Project's two parallel goals – adoptions and permanent connections – both continue to be of high importance. There is some difference among staff in the understanding of their relative importance. There is shared understanding that adoption may not be the most desirable goal for every youth, depending on unique circumstances. (For example, one developmentally disabled youth had been in a group home for a long time and was mutually bonded with the foster parent at that home, but a legal adoption would have significantly decreased the state's contribution to the youth's medical expenses, which the foster parent could not afford to make up.) However, there has been some tendency to increase the emphasis on adoptions and decrease the emphasis on connections as the project has matured. This reflects in part the fact that there are fewer available existing connections to be strengthened from the youths' own lives. In part it also reflects some project staff's perception that the youth development outcomes could best be met in the context of a family, and that settling for "permanent connections" would not be in the youths' best interests.

2. Does the program have the resources and capacity to implement as planned?

Resources are adequate, and adequately flexible.

The resources available to the project have been sufficient for implementation as planned. Importantly, the resources have also been sufficiently flexible to carry out the unique activities of the demonstration model.

The most important resources might be hard to replicate in a business-as-usual environment.

Staff feel that the most important resources, in terms of carrying out the philosophy of the model, are:

■ Small caseloads that allow staff time to get to know the youth.

■ Flexibility of funding that allows for travel to where youth are, and whatever creative kinds of activities will help promote the youth's engagement.

The small caseloads and flexibility in spending are both considerations that might be hard to replicate in a setting constrained by typical funding levels and limitations on allowable kinds of expenditures. Future replication will need to consider whether the project can be effectively incorporated into county-level work, or depends for its success on its current freedom from county boundaries and constraints. Staff cite advantages on both sides of this issue, and feel that the balance may shift as the project matures and the pool of eligible youth changes.

3. Is the program suited to its environment?

Project work is sometimes strained by differences in approach compared to standard adoption and foster care work.

The Homecoming Project operates in addition to, not in place of, the counties' own usual adoption practices. Its activities are thus very sensitive to those practices and to instances in which they differ from previous or expected practices. Some of these differences, and their effects on the project, are as follows:

■ When the project was designed, the research literature suggested that most state wards awaiting adoption had potential adoptive resources in their files that had not been considered. This assumption has not been borne out in the program's

experience. However, this assumption was widely cited when the project initially introduced itself to counties and solicited referrals from them. This may have led to some tensions in initial relationships with county workers.

■ Other program experiences point to other ways in which counties' practices have not matched expectations. Overall, at the outset, the project found somewhat low levels of effort to recruit adoptive parents for teens. Often county adoption workers felt pressure to settle for a permanency plan based on long term foster care, followed by independent living when the youth aged out at their 18th birthday.

■ Related to this low commitment to recruitment for teens, the project has found that some of the youth who have been referred to them have not had some of the standard, expected recruitment work done during the year or more since parental rights had been terminated. This work includes registering the youth on the electronic State Adoption Exchange (although this is required by statute following termination of parental rights), highlighting the youth in the "Thursday's Child" weekly waiting child feature on KSTP-TV, and including the youth in state and national photo listings of children awaiting adoption. Project staff have undertaken these activities with project youth for whom such efforts had not been previously made, which has somewhat diminished their available resources for recruitment more specifically in line with the program's child-centered, child-specific model.

■ Some staff at residential facilities have shown limited understanding of the permanency work required for state wards. As a result, they have sometimes tried to restrict youths' work with project staff to develop permanency plans. Project staff, sometimes with the help of the state grant manager, have done considerable work in the past two years to educate residential facility staff about the unique needs and requirements for children under state guardianship who do not have permanent family awaiting their release from the facility.

■ Homecoming Project staff working with youth in foster care placements have sometimes found conditions that do not appear to live up to licensing standards. These included a variety of kinds of shortcomings such as overcrowded rooming conditions, or foster parents' efforts to restrict youths' preparation for adoption. In some cases the responsible county staff explained that there were few alternative foster care placements available, and they considered it unwise to take steps to remediate existing homes that were less than fully adequate because such action might result in their closure. In general, when conditions could not be ameliorated by discussions with the caregivers and/or the supervising counties, The Homecoming Project has left resolution to the state Department of Human Services, and worked to

maintain relationships with the foster parents and county social workers that would allow them to continue to work with the youth.

Relationships with county staff and caregivers have been generally positive.

Despite stresses related to the above issues, county social workers have a generally positive impression of the program. Attitudes are somewhat less uniformly favorable only in one county, though it is a large one. Based on a limited number of sources, we find that most county adoption workers who are familiar with the program appreciate the work that The Homecoming Project does, which they do not typically have the time to do themselves. Some also appreciate the "breath of fresh air" the project has brought – that is, an infectious sense of hopefulness and motivation, an emphasis on the youths' potential and an unwillingness to settle for less than adoption even for hard-to-place teens.

The project has been responsive to the cultural needs of its clients.

Aware that the state's teens awaiting adoption are predominantly youth of color, The Homecoming Project's plans called for a racially and ethnically diverse staff. During the hiring process, leadership worked hard to recruit and interview a diverse pool of applicants, deferring filling positions for several months in order to ensure that everything possible was done to hire a diverse staff. Despite these efforts, the project was not successful in its goal of hiring staff whose racial and ethnic distribution matched that of its client population. Effects on program implementation include the following:

■ Individual workers report that they have not had problems due to racial or ethnic differences with clients, foster parents, facility staff, or county social workers. The key informants we spoke with who are not project staff reported that they had observed no problems relating to cultural issues.

■ Program staff and leadership consider that the low level of racial diversity in the staff is, however, a weakness at the level of the program as a whole. In particular, it means the project does not have a desirable level of already-existing relationships with communities of color (especially African American and American Indian), which would be helpful in recruiting a more diverse pool of new resource families.

■ Aside from racial diversity, the team has been quite diverse in terms of personal and professional background. While this is felt to be a strength, it has also created challenges in the development of the most effective team processes, especially since project leadership had limited prior experience in team-building. However, these challenges do not appear to have been any greater than is commonly found in start-up projects, and they do not appear to have impeded the work of the project.

When court interventions have been needed, the courts have been timely, flexible, and supportive.

Relatively few cases have required court hearings or interventions (other than standard periodic reviews). In each case so far, project staff report that the judges have been thoughtful, timely, and respectful of the youth's own input. Staff feel the decisions made have been in the best interests of the children, and have shown the needed flexibility.

4. Are program processes (such as organization and management) operating as planned?

Project staff need skills with youth work and adult relationships, and familiarity with the adoption process.

In the initial staff recruitment and hiring process, the highest emphasis was placed on skills with youth engagement and youth development. In practice, these youth work skills have proven important, but skills in developing adult professional relationships and managing bureaucracy have proven equally important. As one staff member put it, "To capture the spirit of the program you must work well with youth, but to have any chance of actually achieving anything you must be system-savvy as well."

Familiarity or experience with the details of the adoption system was a relatively low priority among the considerations in hiring. Some of the Recruitment Specialists had prior experience with the system, all received training on it at the outset, and those who were not initially familiar with it have learned quickly. The staff's overall relatively low familiarity with the routine details of the adoption process at the outset appears to have somewhat impeded the project's establishment of credibility and good relationships with county staff. However, with considerable diplomacy and quick learning, the project has built considerable credibility and good relationships with most county staff and caregivers they work with.

Staff report that the key skills they have most relied on are relationship-building, tact, patience, mediation, tenacity, sense of humor, advocacy, time management, and self-care.

Team and caseload dynamics among the staff affect job satisfaction.

The project's intention was to have staff work closely together as a cooperative team. This has not always been easy, since much of the work takes place outside of the office, and one staff member is based an hour and a half away from the Minneapolis office. Differences in individual styles of staff contributed to some feeling more comfortable with the team dynamics than others. Some reported that they felt happy and well

supported with the opportunities to work with each other, and others reported that they found the work more competitive and individualistic than they would have preferred. In general, staff report a preference for a cooperative approach to case handling, in which staff share tips on networking for potential resources, tips about prospective families, and helping out with each others' kids (such as in transportation to activities).

The assignment of cases to individual staff was based partly on the geographic distribution of the youth and partly on who had room in any given week when new ones were received. This relatively informal procedure resulted in a distribution of cases that some staff members felt was uneven in its allocation of easier and harder cases. This in turn was felt by some to contribute to a decreased sense of teamwork, because staff with difficult caseloads felt they were held individually responsible for outcomes that related less to their efforts and more to difficulty levels they could not control.

Staff are highly committed to the program model and work.

Staff commitment to the program model, philosophy, and case work has been high. In general, Recruitment Specialists report that they found the work about as they expected. Some found that it required more systems management and diplomacy than they had anticipated. Most commented that they enjoyed the work with the youth more than they expected.

5. Is the program reaching its intended target population?

The youth being served are those the project intended to serve.

State, county, and project informants all report that the project is reaching its intended population. Initially, staff had the impression that counties were referring primarily their hardest cases. Looking back on the first two years, staff felt that this may have been true for some social workers in one county, but that for the most part the case load has been relatively consistent with the characteristics of the eligible pool of waiting teens in Minnesota.

The *number* of referrals was somewhat lower than expected, especially in the early months. The project has never had the waiting list it anticipated. However, the case load has been close to optimal, and cases have been referred at a rate that was very appropriate for the project's capacity.

The level and specific types of needs among project youth are sometimes higher than anticipated.

Compared to initial expectations, project youth have included somewhat more youth who were in residential settings, sibling groups, and sexual offenders. However, the project has accommodated these and shown some notable successes with them. For example, one youth referred to the project was being held in a locked unit, where he was expected to stay for more than a few months. The Recruitment Specialist recruited for – and found – not an adoptive family, but a mentor family for the youth while he was in placement. When the youth was eventually released, the mentor family asked for the youth to come live with them, and they are now considering adopting him.

6. Is the program delivering appropriate services (in type and dosage)?

Program services are perceived as appropriate and effective.

State, county, and project staff all consider the services of The Homecoming Project to be appropriate and effective. After two years of experience, project staff described the following as the most effective practices in working with the many different stakeholders involved:

Youth

- Get to know them quickly.

- Engage in joint task-oriented activity together (such as a life book or recruitment brochure) to develop a relationship and demonstrate the Recruitment Specialist's credibility as someone who not only asks for but also honors their own ideas and wishes.

- Get them away from institutional settings into more socially natural ones.

- Ask them about the level of involvement and knowledge they are comfortable with, and honor their preference.

County workers

- Work hard to communicate well. Both project staff and county staff have expressed frustration about each other's lack of communication.

- Send email about case activities simultaneously to all workers and connections (including foster parents or facilities staff, guardians ad litem, home study workers if

any are involved, and any concerned mentors, prospective parents, and other supportive adults).

■ Be open, honest, and humble in communications with county staff; understand their situations and constraints; communicate hopefulness; and know "the field" (of adoption).

Private agency staff

■ Build relationships, not only with individual staff members but also with entire agencies that provide services (such as home studies and post-adoption support) that the youth or their adoptive parents might need.

■ Be flexible, and help them identify ways to be flexible.

■ Work with agencies to help prospective parents identify potential support needs for all contingencies, and to get those supports lined up in advance of finalization.

Facility staff

■ Make sure the managers and front-line staff are familiar with the program and its philosophy from the start.

■ Get to know the facility's care philosophy.

■ Honor staff authority. For example, if a youth is on restriction status, let the youth know you respect the facility's need to enforce its expectations, and that you will defer any off-site activities until the youth has earned privileges back.

■ Also let staff know you expect and assume that they will honor your need to work with youth on their permanency plans. Call upon facility directors and/or state staff as needed to explain or clarify the status of state wards and their unique needs to work on permanency planning even while in a restricted facility.

Foster parents

■ Build relationships.

■ Be honest.

■ Check in regularly. Let them know what you and the youth have discussed or worked on. Agree on the level of communication they want, and honor that. Some foster parents want to know everything that has been done, so they can discuss it with the

youth or anticipate any needs to help the youth think through difficult choices. Other foster parents prefer to maintain more distance from the work.

■ Understand how your work with the youth may have repercussions for the foster parent. For instance, be aware that parents may be concerned about loss of income if a foster youth is adopted. In such situations, it may be possible to let the referring county worker know that the parent would be available for a new foster child should one be in need of a placement.

■ Some foster parents attempt to discourage youth from considering adoption. In such cases, make sure both the foster parent and the youth understand the long-term implications. For example, ask whether the foster parent has any intentions of being a resource to the youth beyond his or her 18th birthday, and make sure the youth understands what to expect if they stay in foster care until they age out.

Potential adoptive parents

■ Understand that the system is confusing and often overwhelming. Give them time to ask questions, repeatedly if needed.

■ Give them time to get to know the youth.

■ Stay in close touch and keep asking them what they need. Support them and connect them to the resources and information they need. In particular, make sure parents and youth in trans-racial adoptions are both provided with resources for cultural support.

■ Avoid doing too much after finalization.

■ In cases of youth who are hard to adopt, consider recruiting potential resources as mentors first. This allows them and the youth to get to know each other and size each other up without pressure. They can then consider possible adoption if the mentorship relationship feels right.

Some kinds of cases require special or different kinds of effort.

Several youth referred to the project were part of sibling groups. As individuals, siblings were no easier or harder to recruit for than other project youth. However, the need to recruit a single adoptive family for more than one youth makes the work with sibling groups more complicated. It is a tricky combination of separate but parallel work for each member of the group. Different siblings may have different readiness to think about adoption, or different preferences in kinds of families.

Staff also report unique challenges in working with youth in restrictive facilities. Furthermore, although the file documentation only shows two youth with juvenile charges for sexual assault or criminal sexual conduct, when staff became acquainted with project youth they learned that several (at least five or six) had histories of sexual offending or acting out. Findings about best practices in both of these kinds of cases are still tentative. They will be reported later when outcomes can be determined for a larger number of youth.

Work on youth development goals is accomplished as part of the permanency work.

The youth development focus of The Homecoming Project is accomplished not through separate activities, but rather as a result of the way in which the Recruitment Specialists work with project youth on the permanency planning. Staff report that progress in youth development takes place as a result of the consistency with which they ask the youth to describe their own preferences, decide on what should go in their brochures and videos, and decide what kinds of families they would prefer – and the consistency with which those preferences and decisions are honored. It is embedded in the consistency and respect with which staff relate to the youth.

Youth development is also promoted by the staff's work behind the scenes to develop greater options for youth. Examples include efforts to persuade foster parents or residential facility staff to permit or encourage youth to be involved in more normal kinds of teen activities. Some project youth also participate in Our Voices Matter, a group of youth currently or formerly in foster care who present at conferences, trainings, and other events where it is helpful for social workers, foster parents, prospective parents, or others to understand the experiences and impressions of youth in care. Such participation, or being in the audience at Our Voices Matter panel presentations, are also important vehicles for development of youth's self-efficacy, connections with caring adults, and sense of participation and belonging.

Conclusion

Based on in-depth interviews with project staff, the initial process evaluation finds that The Homecoming Project is being implemented in close harmony with the philosophy, goals, and activities that were planned.

Some initial expectations about the needs of youth, and the kinds of recruitment that had already been tried, have been found to be less commonly true than assumed. For example, not all youth are developmentally or emotionally ready to help with their permanency planning; a high proportion of youth are in residential care that limits their mobility to take part in project activities; and basic recruitment activities such as listing on the State Adoption Exchange have not been completed for all youth before they are referred to the project.

Specific activities of the project have been modified to accommodate these variations from initial expectations. However, these adjustments have been made in ways that preserve the youth development philosophy and approach of the model, and continue to place emphasis on the original two goals of adoptions and permanent connections for youth.

The work of the project staff in the first two years has led to some common understandings about best practices in carrying out youth-centered adoption recruitment for teens. During the remaining course of the project, the evaluators will continue to seek feedback about effective practices from project staff, other staff they work with, and youth in care. Once more data have been collected about outcomes, we expect future reports to be able to present more discussions of the implications of these findings for replication.

Finding adoptive families for teens: Practice tips from the Homecoming Project for working with teens under state guardianship.

This document is attached to the back cover of this report. It is not bound with the rest of the document. Completed at the end of the five year project in 2008, the report is also available at the Wilder Research website: www.wilderresearch.org. (See attached report.)

Appendix C: Evaluation instruments

Homecoming Project Intake Information Form

Homecoming Project Closing Information Form

Survey of Youth in Care, final follow-up

Survey of Youth in Care, baseline

Baseline Adoption Workers' Survey, December 2003

Follow-up Adoption Workers' Survey, April 2005

Homecoming Project Intake Information Form

Homecoming Project
Intake Information

Youth SAE #:	THP Worker Name:
Youth Name:	Youth's DOC point total:

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Date of birth _____ / _____ / _____
   month   day   year

2. Sex: ☐[1] Male
   ☐[2] Female
   ☐[3] Transgender

3. Identifies self as: ☐[1] Heterosexual or straight
   ☐[2] Gay or Lesbian
   ☐[3] Bisexual
   ☐[4] Unsure

4. Any children?
   ☐[1] Yes → **IF YES:** Number of children: _____
   Age at first birth: _____
   ☐[2] No

5. Citizenship: ☐[1] US citizen   ☐[2] Non-citizen

6. Is English primary language?
   ☐[1] Yes
   ☐[2] No → **IF NO:** What is? _____

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

7. Grade in school: _____
   a. Currently enrolled in school?   ☐[1] Yes   ☐[2] No
   b. Regularly attending school?   ☐[1] Yes   ☐[2] No   ☐[3] Other: _____
   c. What type of school?   ☐[1] Mainstream   ☐[3] School in a treatment facility
   ☐[2] Alternative   ☐[4] Other: _____

8. Receiving special educational services?
   ☐[1] Yes →   **IF YES:**

   8a. **W**hat reason? **(CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)**
   ☐[1] Learning disability
   ☐[2] EBD
   ☐[3] Developmental disability
   ☐[4] Physical disability
   ☐[5] Other: _____

   8b. What level? **(CHECK ONE)**
   ☐[1] Mainstream with some support
   ☐[2] Less than one-half day pull-out
   ☐[3] One-half day to less than full pull-out
   ☐[4] Full day pull-out

   ☐[2] No special education services

9. Any current (within last 3 months) issues in school with:
   a. Truancy?   ☐[1] Yes   ☐[2] No
   b. Reading below grade level?   ☐[1] Yes   ☐[2] No
   c. Suspensions/expulsions?   ☐[1] Yes   ☐[2] No

10. School meeting youth's needs?   ☐[1] Yes   ☐[2] No

11. Ever completed any job training programs?   ☐[1] Yes   ☐[2] No

---

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

12. Currently employed?

    ☐[1] Yes → **IF YES:**

        12a. Total hours worked in average week: _____

        12b. How long in current position: _____

          Check one: ☐[1] weeks ☐[2] months ☐[3] years

    ☐[2] No → **IF NO:**

        12c. Ever been employed?   ☐[1] Yes   ☐[2] No

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

13. Where have you lived most of your life?

    ☐[1] St. Paul

    ☐[2] Minneapolis

    ☐[3] In the 7-county Metro area but not St. Paul or Minneapolis (Hennepin, Ramsey, Dakota, Washington, Anoka, Carver, Scott counties)

    ☐[4] Greater Minnesota (outside the 7-county Metro area)

    ☐[5] Another State **(SPECIFY)** _____

    ☐[6] Another Country **(SPECIFY)** _____

14. Length of time in out-of-home care (cumulative time in care): _____ months

15. Approximate number of placements (every move): _____ times

16. Age at very first out of home placement? _____ years

17. History of physical abuse   ☐[1] Yes   ☐[2] No   ☐[8] Don't know

18. History of sexual abuse?   ☐[1] Yes   ☐[2] No   ☐[8] Don't know

19. History of neglect?   ☐[1] Yes   ☐[2] No   ☐[8] Don't know

20. Mental health diagnosis?

    ☐[1] Yes → **IF YES:** Diagnosis if known_____

    ☐[2] No

    ☐[8] Don't know

21. Serious physical health problems?

    ☐[1] Yes → **IF YES:** Type of concerns, if known_____

    ☐[2] No

    ☐[8] Don't know

22. Developmental disability?   ☐[1] Yes   ☐[2] No   ☐[8] Don't know

23. Self abuse/cutting/self mutilation?   ☐[1] Yes   ☐[2] No   ☐[8] Don't know

24. Youth ever attempted suicide?

☐[1] Yes → **IF YES:** Number of times, if known_____

☐[2] No

☐[8] Don't know

---

25. Witness to domestic violence?　　　☐[1] Yes　　　☐[2] No　　　☐[8] Don't know

---

26. History of drug or alcohol abuse?

☐[1] Yes → **IF YES:** Type, if known_____

☐[2] No

☐[8] Don't know

---

27. Current drug or alcohol abuse?

☐[1] Yes → **IF YES:** Type, if known_____

☐[2] No

☐[8] Don't know

---

28. Drug or alcohol dependency in biological family?

☐[1] Yes → **IF YES:** Relationship to youth _____

☐[2] No

☐[8] Don't know

---

29. History of mental illness in biological family?

☐[1] Yes → **IF YES:** Relationship to youth _____

☐[2] No

☐[8] Don't know

---

30. Youth ever arrested by the police?

☐[1] Yes → **IF YES:** Number of times, if known _____

☐[2] No

☐[8] Don't know

---

31. Youth ever charged with a status or delinquency offense?

☐[1] Yes → **IF YES:** Number of times, if known _____　　Most serious offense: _____

☐[2] No

☐[8] Don't know

---

32. Does youth have a probation officer?　　　☐[1] Yes　　　☐[2] No　　　☐[8] Don't know

33. I am going to read a list of places you may have lived. Have you ever lived in. . .	IF YES, ASK 33, b, AND c ➔ ➔ ↑		33b. In the last 6 months?		33c. Approximate number of times in your life?
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Number
1. A foster home?	☐1	☐2	☐1	☐2	
2. A drug or alcohol treatment facility?	☐1	☐2	☐1	☐2	
3. A residence for people with physical disabilities?	☐1	☐2	☐1	☐2	
4. Some type of halfway house?	☐1	☐2	☐1	☐2	
5. A Residential Treatment Program? (RTC)	☐1	☐2	☐1	☐2	
6. A group home?	☐1	☐2	☐1	☐2	
7. A hospital for psychiatric help?	☐1	☐2	☐1	☐2	
8. Transitional housing?	☐1	☐2	☐1	☐2	
9. An emergency shelter?	☐1	☐2	☐1	☐2	
10. A battered women's shelter?	☐1	☐2	☐1	☐2	
11. Homeless (in car or on the streets)?	☐1	☐2	☐1	☐2	
12. Juvenile detention (at least one night)?	☐1	☐2	☐1	☐2	
13. Juvenile corrections facility?	☐1	☐2	☐1	☐2	
14. Detox (at least overnight)?	☐1	☐2	☐1	☐2	

34. Have you ever run away from foster care, a group home, treatment center, or other placement?

☐1 Yes

☐2 No

☐8 Don't know

35. How long has it been since you have had contact with any of your birth family or relatives?

☐1 Less than 1 month

☐2 More than 1 month but less than 1 year

☐3 1 year or more

☐4 Not applicable, no birth family/relatives

36. **ASK YOUTH**: Is there currently any adult in your life that you trust and have regular contact with?

☐1 Yes

☐2 No

☐8 Don't know

37. **ASK YOUTH**: How satisfied are you with the quality of care that you have received in the foster care system? Would you say. . .

☐[1] Very satisfied

☐[2] Satisfied

☐[3] Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

☐[4] Dissatisfied

☐[5] Very dissatisfied

ITEMS FROM FILE IF AVAILABLE

38. When youth first left home or placed outside of the home was it because (of) . . . **(PLEASE CHECK A RESPONSE FOR EACH ITEM)**

		Yes	**No**	**Don't know**
1.	Drug or alcohol abuse by a parent or household member?	☐[1]	☐[2]	☐[8]
2.	Physical abuse?	☐[1]	☐[2]	☐[8]
3.	Sexual abuse?	☐[1]	☐[2]	☐[8]
4.	Emotional abuse?	☐[1]	☐[2]	☐[8]
5.	Youth was kicked out or told to go, or an adult in the household would not tolerate youth being around?	☐[1]	☐[2]	☐[8]
6.	Parents incarcerated?	☐[1]	☐[2]	☐[8]
7.	Domestic violence in the home?	☐[1]	☐[2]	☐[8]
8.	Mental illness of parent?	☐[1]	☐[2]	☐[8]
9.	Mental illness of youth?	☐[1]	☐[2]	☐[8]
10.	Neglect?	☐[1]	☐[2]	☐[8]
11.	Abandonment?	☐[1]	☐[2]	☐[8]
12.	Homelessness/parents unable to house child?	☐[1]	☐[2]	☐[8]
13.	Death or serious physical illness of parent?	☐[1]	☐[2]	☐[8]
14.	Any other reasons? **(DESCRIBE)** _____	☐[1]	☐[2]	☐[8]

FROM FILE IF AVAILABLE

39. Has youth had a sexual relationship that resulted in pregnancy?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

☐[8] Don't know

Homecoming Project Closing Information form

**Homecoming Project
Closing Information**

Youth name:

Date of birth: Age:

THP Worker name:

Date form completed: THP Referral date:

Select either Reduction in Intensity of Services or Case Closed, and provide reason

REDUCTION IN INTENSITY OF SERVICES

1.   Reason for reduction in intensity of services

☐[1] Finalized Adoption, things going smoothly

☐[2] Youth matched with family, and currently in residential placement (won't move home for at least 6 months)

☐[3] Youth Turned 18, but desires continued recruitment support from THP

CASE CLOSED

THP Closing date:

2.   Reason for closing

Youth initiated

☐[1] Youth ambivalence towards permanency work

☐[2] Youth wants to remain in foster home, exhausted efforts to facilitate foster-adopt

    Comments:

☐[3] Youth Emancipated from Care, no longer wanting THP Services

County initiated

☐[4] After youth began work with THP

    Comments:

☐[5] Youth ordered into LTFC

    Comments:

THP initiated

☐[6] Not 'allowed' to actually begin work (moves, youth 'unstable, lack of county or provider follow-through)

☐[7] THP provided consultation to workers, recruitment services not needed and/or not requested

☐[8] County workers uncooperative, resistant or unwilling to participate in efforts to 'team' cases

☐[9] Foster parent ambivalence to placement

END OF PROGRAM, 2008

3.   Status at End of THP, September 2008

  ☐[1] Finalized Adoption

  ☐[2] Pre-Adopt Placement

  ☐[3] Matched with family, not yet moved in

  ☐[4] Still waiting, no solid leads

  ☐[5] Well connected with supportive, lifelong connection/s

  ☐[6] Without identifiable supportive, lifelong connection/s

Date of final CAFAS _____ at close or no more than three months after date of finalization

4.   CAFAS scores

  Home Role performance

  School/Work Role performance

  Community Role Performance

  Behavior Towards Others

  Moods/Emotion

  Self-Harmful Behavior

  Substance Use

  Thinking

  Total on all 8 scales

5.   CAFAS- Risk Behaviors (check all that apply for 3 month period prior final CAFAS assessment)

  ☐[1] Has made a serious suicide attempt or is considered to be actively suicidal

  ☐[2] Has been or may be harmful to others

    ☐[a] at school

    ☐[b] at home

    ☐[c] in the community

    ☐[d] behavior in general

  ☐[3] sexual behavior

  ☐[4] fire setting

  ☐[5] Runaway behavior

  ☐[6] Psychotic or Organic symptoms in the context of severe impairment

  ☐[7] Severe Substance use

  ☐[8] Youth's needs far exceed caregiver's resources

    Explanation:

6. THP worker assessment of success with case…

☐[1] Very satisfied

☐[2] Satisfied

☐[3] Neither satisfied or dissatisfied

☐[4] Dissatisfied

☐[5] Very dissatisfied

7. Narrative of work on case:

PHYSICAL PERMANENCE

8. THP worker satisfaction with related outcomes

☐[1] Very satisfied

☐[2] Satisfied

☐[3] Neither satisfied or dissatisfied

☐[4] Dissatisfied

☐[5] Very dissatisfied

9. Living situation at time of THP closing

Address:

Phone:

☐[1] In an Adoptive family

☐[2] In a foster home or group home

☐[3] Living 'independently' (apt., ILS program)

☐[4] With permanently committed family

☐[5] With birth family/kin

☐[6] Institutional placement (residential treatment, correctional placement)

☐[7] Temporary shelter/couch hopping/homeless

☐[8] Unknown or on run

Notes:

LEGAL PERMANENCE

10. THP worker satisfaction with related outcomes…
    - ☐[1] Very satisfied
    - ☐[2] Satisfied
    - ☐[3] Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
    - ☐[4] Dissatisfied
    - ☐[5] Very dissatisfied

    - ☐[1] Finalized Adoption
    - ☐[2] Under age 18, LTFC ordered
    - ☐[3] Under age 18, still waiting
    - ☐[4] Emancipated from care, still waiting
    - ☐[5] Emancipated from care, LTFC

    Notes:

EMOTIONAL PERMANENCE

11. THP worker satisfaction with related outcomes…
    - ☐[1] Very satisfied
    - ☐[2] Satisfied
    - ☐[3] Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
    - ☐[4] Dissatisfied
    - ☐[5] Very dissatisfied

    - ☐[1] Connected with formally committed permanent family
    - ☐[2] Increased connections to birth parent/s
    - ☐[3] Increased connections with sibling/s
    - ☐[4] New adult connection/s
    - ☐[5] Strengthen existing support network
    - ☐[6] Establish new support network (other than individual adults)
    - ☐[7] Other (SPECIFY:)

    Notes:

SIBLING INFORMATION

12. THP worker satisfaction with related outcomes…
    - ☐[1] Very satisfied
    - ☐[2] Satisfied
    - ☐[3] Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
    - ☐[4] Dissatisfied
    - ☐[5] Very dissatisfied

MEMBERSHIP IN SIBLING GROUP

13a. Member of a sibling group *referred at the same time with county intention to* recruit homes to placement **together**?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No **(GO TO QUESTION 14a)**

13b. How many youth are members of this group?

13c. Were all referred siblings living together at time of referral to THP?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

14a. Member of sibling group *referred at the same time*, with county intention to recruit homes to place each **separately**?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No **(GO TO QUESTION 15a)**

14b. How many youth are members of this group?

14c. Were all referred siblings living together at time of referral to THP?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

15a. Did this youth have one or more sibling also in THP, who was *referred to THP at a different time*?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No **(GO TO QUESTION 16a)**

15b. Including this youth, how many siblings were referred to THP?

15c. Were all referred siblings living together when the first youth was referred to THP?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

SIBLINGS NOT REFERRED TO THP

16a. Did this youth have one or more siblings under age 18 that were *not referred to THP*?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No **(GO TO QUESTION 17)**

16b. How many siblings under age 18 does s/he have?

16c. Did all siblings under age 18 live together at the time this youth was referred to THP?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

17. Where did other siblings under age 18 live at the time this youth was referred to THP? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.)

☐[1] In an Adoptive family

☐[2] In a foster home or group home

☐[3] Living 'independently' (apt., ILS program)

☐[4] With permanently committed family

☐[5] On run

☐[6] With birth family/kin

☐[7] Institutional placement (residential treatment, correctional placement)

☐[8] Temporary shelter/couch hopping/homeless

☐[9] Unknown or on run

SIBLING PLACEMENT OUTCOME

18. *All* members of this referred sibling group were *placed together*

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

19. *Some* members of this referred sibling group were *placed together*

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

20. *None* of the member of this referred sibling group were *placed together*

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

21. *None* of the members of this group were placed while with THP (kinship/foster care conversion count as 'placed')

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

SIBLING SEPARATION

22. For sibling groups referred at the same time, to be placed separately, had sibling separation already been approved by the time of referral to THP?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

23. For sibling groups *referred at different times*, to be placed separately, had sibling separation already been approved by the time the first youth was referred to THP?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

SIBLING CONTACT

24.   Comment on the frequency and quality of sibling contact during the time THP worked with this youth.

BIRTH FAMILY CONTACT SINCE REFERRAL TO THP

25.   How long has it been since youth has had contact with any member of her/his birth family or relatives?

☐[1] Less than 1 month

☐[2] More than 1 month but less than 1 year

☐[3] 1 year or more

☐[4] Not applicable, no KNOWN birth family/relatives

Notes:

SIGNIFICANT OUTCOMES RELATED TO THP EFFORTS WITH THIS YOUTH

26.   Youth- related

☐[1] Youth engaged in process/permanency decisions

☐[2] OVM/Leadership participation

☐[3] Birth family engaged

☐[4] Life book completed

☐[5] Heart Gallery photos

☐[6] Increased contact with siblings

27.   Provide a vignette demonstrating youth's increasing sense of self-efficacy, hope for the future or sense of belonging.

28.   Foster home-related

☐[1] Foster care providers engaged in conversation about permanency

☐[2] Foster parents actively participated in recruitment and/or matching efforts

☐[3] Foster parents demonstrated meaningful consideration of potentially adopting this youth

☐[4] THP staff advocated for services for youth

29.   Residential facility -related

☐[1] Staff engaged in conversation about permanency

☐[2] Staff participated positively in recruitment and/or matching efforts

☐[3] Staff reported that this youth was first teen adoptive placement they'd been involved with in their role at residential placement

☐[4] Staff

30. Prospective Family-related

☐[1] Recruitment materials produced for/with this youth generated more than ten prospective family inquiries

☐[2] One or more families report completing their home study process as a result of seeing recruitment efforts for this youth

☐[3] One or more families that completed their home study influenced by recruitment for this youth have moved forward with adoption of another teen

☐[4] This youth demonstrated leadership and helped promote teen adoption by speaking with prospective families and adoption agency staff

SYSTEM-RELATED

31. Case provided opportunities for THP staff to advocate for improved systemic practice at…

☐[1] County

☐[2] Adoption agency

☐[3] Foster care agency

☐[4] Residential program

☐[5] Clinical professional

32. THP staff advocacy was required to keep adoption process moving efficiently forward to finalization

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

33. County Social Worker updated social history and case file at the county in order to provide necessary documents for prospective families

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

34. This case was an example of good teamwork between THP, the county and other professionals

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

35. THP staff were given the 'lead' on permanency work for this youth, at least in part due to county worker's lack of experience in teen adoption

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

36. **Narrative regarding other outcomes** resulting at least in part from THP work with this youth.

CURRENT EDUCATIONAL STATUS

36a. Currently enrolled in school?

☐[1] Yes (GO TO QUESTION 36b)

☐[2] No (GO TO QUESTION 36d)

36b. Regularly attending school?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

☐[3] Other (SPECIFY:)

36c. What type of school?

☐[1] Mainstream

☐[2] Alternative

☐[3] School in a treatment facility

☐[4] Other (SPECIFY:)

36d. Last grade competed:

37. Any current (within last 3 months) issues in school with…

a. Truancy?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

b. Suspensions/expulsions?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

CURRENT EMPLOYMENT STATUS

38a. Currently employed?

☐[1] Yes (GO TO QUESTION 38b)

☐[2] No (GO TO QUESTION 38d)

38b. Total hours worked in average week:

38c. How long in current position:

☐[1] Less than 2 weeks

☐[2] At least 2 weeks, but less than 3 months

☐[3] 3 months to 1 year

☐[4] 1 year to 2 years

☐[5] 2 years or longer

38d. Ever been employed?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

SINCE REFERRAL TO THP

39.   How many county adoption social workers has this youth had since referred to THP?

40.   How many times has this youth moved since referral to THP? (Do not count short term respite. All other moves count)

41.   Types of placements since referral to THP

	Yes	**No**
a. Foster home	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
b. Pre-adoptive home	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
c. Finalized adoptive home	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
d. Drug or alcohol treatment facility	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
e. Hospital for psychiatric help	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
f. Group home	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
g. Juvenile detention (at least one night)	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
h. Juvenile corrections facility	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
i. Residential treatment program? (RTC)	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
j. Sexual offender-specific program at residential treatment (RTC)	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
k. Halfway house	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
l. Place for people with physical disabilities	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
m. Transitional housing	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
n. Emergency shelter	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
o. Battered women's shelter	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
p. Homeless (in car or on the streets)	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
q. Detox (at least overnight)	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No
r. On their own in a setting not listed above	☐[1] Yes	☐[2] No

HIGH RISK BEHAVIORS SINCE REFERRAL TO THP

42.   Since referral to THP, has youth run away (at least overnight) from any placement or adoptive home?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

☐[8] Don't know

43a.   Since referral, has this youth been identified as abusing drugs or alcohol?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No   **(GO TO QUESTION 44)**

☐[8] Don't know   **(GO TO QUESTION 44)**

43b.   Type, if known:

43c. Is youth currently in treatment or recovery?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

☐[8] Don't know

44. Has youth attempted suicide since referral to THP?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

☐[8] Don't know

45. Has youth been pregnant or made someone pregnant since referral to THP?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

☐[8] Don't know

CORRECTIONAL INVOLVEMENT SINCE REFERRAL TO THP

46a. Has youth been arrested by the police since referred to THP?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No   **(GO TO QUESTION 47a)**

☐[8] Don't know   **(GO TO QUESTION 47a)**

46b. Number of times, if known:

47a. Has youth been charged with a status or delinquency offense since referred to THP?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No   **(GO TO QUESTION 48)**

☐[8] Don't know   **(GO TO QUESTION 48)**

47b. Number of times, if known:

47c. Most serious offense:

47d. Does youth currently have a probation officer?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

☐[8] Don't know

Questions to ask youth directly

48. How satisfied are you with the quality of care that you have received in the foster care system? Would you say…

☐[1] Very satisfied

☐[2] Satisfied

☐[3] Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

☐[4] Dissatisfied

☐[5] Very dissatisfied

49. How satisfied are you with the quality of work that you have received from The Homecoming Project? Would you say...

☐[1] Very satisfied

☐[2] Satisfied

☐[3] Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

☐[4] Dissatisfied

☐[5] Very dissatisfied

50a. Is there currently any adult in your life that you trust?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No   **(GO TO QUESTION 51)**

☐[8] Don't know   **(GO TO QUESTION 51)**

50b. Do you have contact with that adult at least once a month (by phone, mail, email, text, IM or in person)?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

☐[8] Don't know

51. Anything else you'd like to say about The Homecoming Project?

FOLLOW-UP CONTACT INFORMATION

Please provide us with a name of someone who will know how to get a hold of you a year from now. You have probably completed at least one phone interview with Wilder Research Center while you worked with THP. They will try to follow-up to see how things are going for you in a year.

Name of someone who will know how to contact you in a year:

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Phone Number:

Do we have your permission to contact this person to help us find you in a year?

☐[1] Yes

☐[2] No

Signature   Date

Survey of Youth in Care, final follow-up

Project Code: 70477

Long Distance Code: 70477

Youth ID: _____

<div align="center">

Survey of Youth in Care
Youth FINAL Follow-up Survey

</div>

Hello, my name is _____ and I am calling from the Wilder Research. I am calling about a telephone survey that we are doing with teenagers and young adults who have been in foster care or placements. You may remember talking to us about one year ago. We are calling for the last time on this study, to ask some of the same questions about what youth need and how things have been going for you. We want to learn more about how services have worked for teens.

This survey takes about 20 minutes over the phone. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. If you participate, you will receive a $20 gift card to your choice of either Target or Wal-Mart for your time. You are free to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. Anything you say will be confidential and will not be seen by anyone but Wilder Research staff working on the study. You will not be identified or singled out in any way. Would you be willing to do the survey?

Yes→ Great. Before we start, I need to let you know that if, during this phone survey, you tell me about a situation that may be of danger either to you or to others, we are required by state law to report this to the Department of Human Services. This includes abuse or neglect that has happened to you but that has **not** been reported.

(AS NEEDED: "Abuse" is defined as being physically hurt, for example if someone hit or slapped you.

"Neglect" is defined as going without care or services.)

Let's start, then.

No→ FILL OUT A REFUSAL REPORT

Thank you for your time.

1. Where do you currently live? [LET YOUTH ANSWER AND THEN CODE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE, READ LIST IF CLARIFICATION IS NEEDED; IF YOUTH SAYS "FOSTER HOME" CLARIFY WHAT TYPE OF FOSTER HOME IT IS]

Relative/kinship foster home, ... 1

Non-relative foster home (not treatment/therapeutic), ... 2

Group home, ... 4

Residential Treatment Facility, ... 5

Corrections facility, ... 6

Hospital, ... 7

Shelter, ... 8

Pre-Adoptive home, ... 9

Adoptive home, ... 10

On their own, or 11

Other? (DESCRIBE: _____). 12

IF YOUTH HAS RETURNED TO BIRTH FAMILY NOTE AS "OTHER." IF YOUTH NAMES ANOTHER RELATIVE, ASK IF IT IS A FOSTER HOME

Refused .... -7

Don't know .... -8

2. How long have you lived there? Has it been… (READ CATEGORIES AS NEEDED.)

Less than 3 months, ... 1

3 to 5 months, ... 2

6 to 11 months, ... 3

1 to 2 years, ... 4

3 to 5 years, or 5

More than 5 years? 6

Refused 7

Don't know 8

3. Do any of your biological brothers or sisters live with you? [**PROBE IF NEEDED:** Brothers or sisters that share the same birth mom or dad as you.]

Yes 1

No ....(GO TO Q. 5) 2

VOLUNTEERED: Youth doesn't have <u>any</u> brothers or sisters

....(GO TO Q. 5) 3

Refused ....(GO TO Q. 5) 7

Don't know ....(GO TO Q. 5) 8

4.   What are the ages of your brothers or sisters who are living with you? (LIST FROM OLDEST TO YOUNGEST)

_____   _____   _____   _____   _____   _____   _____   _____

5.   How long has it been since you had contact with any of your birth family or relatives? Would you say…

Less than one month, ... 1

More than 1 month but less than 1 year, ... 2

1 year or more, or 3

Not applicable, no birth family/relatives? 4

Refused 7

Don't know 8

6.   We are interested in knowing about youth in care who have been adopted. Are you currently adopted?

Yes 1

No .... …2

Refused 7

Don't know 8

7.   Are you currently enrolled in school?

Yes ....(GO TO Q. 10) 1

No 2

Refused ....(GO TO Q. 10) 7

Don't know ....(GO TO Q. 10) 8

8.   What is the highest grade that you have completed?

8th 1

9th 2

10th 3

11th 4

12th 5

Post-secondary/college 6

Refused 7

Don't know 8

9.   Did you graduate high school or receive a GED?

Graduated high school ....(GO TO Q. 13)......................1

Received a GED ....(GO TO Q. 13)......................2

Neither ....(GO TO Q. 13)......................3

Refused ....(GO TO Q. 13)......................7

Don't know ....(GO TO Q. 13)......................8

Not applicable...(GO TO Q. 13)......................9

FOR THOSE CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN SCHOOL
10. What grade are you in?

6th ....(GO TO Q. 12)......................1

7th ....(GO TO Q. 12)......................2

8th ....(GO TO Q. 12)......................3

9th ....(GO TO Q. 12)......................4

10th ....(GO TO Q. 12)......................5

11th ....(GO TO Q. 12)......................6

12th ....(GO TO Q. 12)......................7

Post-secondary/college 8

Refused ....-7

Don't know ....-8

11. Did you graduate from high school or receive a GED?

Graduated high school 1

Received a GED 2

Neither 3

Refused 7

Don't know 8

Not applicable...9

12. In the last 4 weeks (of school), how many times did you miss either all or part of the day? Would you say…

None,..1

One to two days, ...2

Three to six days, or..3

Seven or more days?...4

Refused 7

Don't know 8

Not applicable...9

13. In a typical week, how many hours do you spend doing each the following activities?

How many hours do you spend …	Would you say…								
	0 hours,	**1-2 hours,**	**3-5 hours,**	**6-10 hours,**	**11-20 hours, or**	**21 hours or more?**	**REF**	**DK**	**NA**
a. Homework or studying?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
b. Band, choir, orchestra, music lessons, or practicing voice or an instrument?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
c. Clubs or organizations outside of school (such as the YMCA or scouts)?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
d. Playing sports on a school team?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
e. Other sports or exercise activities?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
f. Attending services, groups, or programs at a church, synagogue, or mosque?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
h. Volunteer work?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
i. Chores or babysitting at home?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

14. How many hours in a typical week do you spend, working for pay? Would you say…

0 hours-not working,... 1

1-2 hours, ...(GO TO Q. 16)...................... 2

3-5 hours, ...(GO TO Q. 16)...................... 3

6-10 hours, ...(GO TO Q. 16)...................... 4

11-20 hours, ...(GO TO Q. 16)...................... 5

21-34 hours, or...(GO TO Q. 16)...................... 6

35 or more hours? ....(GO TO Q. 16)...................... 7

Refused ....-7

Don't know ....-8

15. Have you ever been employed?

Yes.. 1

No 2

Refused 7

Don't know 8

Not applicable... 9

16. Have you ever been pregnant or made somebody pregnant?

Yes 1

No ....(GO TO Q. 20)..................... 2

Refused 7

Don't know 8

Not applicable 9

17. Do you have any children?

Yes 1

No ....(GO TO Q. 20)...................... 2

Refused ....(GO TO Q. 20)...................... 7

Don't know ....(GO TO Q. 20) 8

Not applicable ....(GO TO Q. 20)...................... 9

18. How many children do you have?

_____

Refused ....-7

Don't know ....-8

19. How old were you when your first child was born?

_____

Refused ....-7

Don't know ....-8

20. I am going to read a list of things that might have happened to you. Please tell me if any of these things happened since we last talked with you in [MONTH AND YEAR OF PREVIOUS INTERVIEW FROM FACE SHEET]

Since we last interviewed you, have you...	Yes	No	REF	DK	NA
a. Run away (left without permission for at least an overnight) from any place you were living?	1	2	7	8	9
b. Had problems or gotten into trouble because of your alcohol or drug use?	1	2	7	8	9
c. Been arrested by the police?	1	2	7	8	9
d. Been charged with a crime or delinquency offense?	1	2	7	8	9
e. Had a probation officer?	1	2	7	8	9
f. Attempted suicide?	1	2	7	8	9

21. I am going to read a list of places you may have lived.

Have you ever lived in a. . .	IF YES, ASK 21, b, <u>AND</u> c➜ ➜		20b. Since we last talked?		20c. How many times since we last talked?
	Yes	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**Number**
a. Foster home that **was** a relative of yours?	1	2	1	2	
b. Foster home that was **not** a relative of yours?	1	2	1	2	
c. Group home?	1	2	1	2	
d. Adoptive home?	1	2	1	2	■■■■■
e. Residential Treatment Facility?	1	2	1	2	
f. Corrections facility or overnight detention?	1	2	1	2	
g. A hospital for psychiatric help?	1	2	1	2	
h. Detox (at least overnight)?	1	2	1	2	
i. A halfway house?	1	2	1	2	
j. An emergency shelter or battered women's shelter?	1	2	1	2	
k. Homeless (in car or on the streets) or couch hopping?	1	2	1	2	
l. Transitional housing program?	1	2	1	2	
m. In your own apartment or housing?	1	2	1	2	

22. I am going to read several statements about some things that may or not be true of you or your life. I would like you to tell me how much you agree or disagree with each statement. If you neither agree or disagree with each statement, you can tell me that. The first statement is:

	Would you say you…					
	Strongly agree,	**Agree,**	**Disagree, or**	**Strongly disagree?**	**REF**	**Neutral or DK**
a. I take action to avoid problems when I see them coming.	4	3	2	1	7	8
b. Everyone knows that luck or chance determines one's future.	4	3	2	1	7	8
c. When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work.	4	3	2	1	7	8
d. My problems will dominate or rule me all my life.	4	3	2	1	7	8
e. My mistakes and problems are **my** responsibility to deal with.	4	3	2	1	7	8
f. My life is controlled by outside actions and events.	4	3	2	1	7	8

	Would you say you…					
	Strongly agree,	**Agree,**	**Disagree, or**	**Strongly disagree?**	**REF**	**Neutral or DK**
g. To continually manage my problems, I need professional help.	4	3	2	1	7	8
h. I am confident of being able to deal successfully with future problems.	4	3	2	1	7	8
i. There **are** people who **value** my skills and abilities.	4	3	2	1	7	8
j. I **am** able to do things as well as **most** other people my age.	4	3	2	1	7	8
k. I am happy with myself.	4	3	2	1	7	8

23. Next, I am going to read some statements about how people sometimes feel. Again, there are no right or wrong answers. Just tell me if you feel this way often, sometimes, rarely, or never.

	Would you say…					
How often do you feel…	**Often,**	**Some-times,**	**Rarely, or**	**Never?**	**REF**	**DK**
a. that the people most important to you understand you?	1	2	3	4	7	8
b. lonely?	1	2	3	4	7	8
c. that you have as many close relationships as you want?	1	2	3	4	7	8

24. I am going to read a list of kinds of adults some youth feel connected to or close to.

	Yes	**No**	**REF**	**DK**	**NA**
a. Current or former foster parent, residential or group home staff?	1	2	7	8	9
b. A parent? (IF YES, ASK, Was that a birth parent or adoptive parent or both?_____)	1	2	7	8	9
c. An adult relative?	1	2	7	8	9
d. A current or former social worker or case manager?	1	2	7	8	9
e. A teacher or professor?	1	2	7	8	9
f. A psychologist, therapist, or counselor?	1	2	7	8	9
g. A pastor, rabbi or other church or spiritual leader?	1	2	7	8	9
h. An adult friend, mentor, or sponsor?	1	2	7	8	9
i. Some other adult who you look up to (other than the ones you have already mentioned)? (Please describe: _____ _____)	1	2	7	8	9

25A. Now, I would like you to think about the adult that you feel closest to. How are you connected to that person? [SEE QUESTION 25 FOR LIST OF CATEGORIES IF NEEDED. IF YOUTH MAINTAINS THAT THERE IS NO ADULT IN HIS/HER LIFE THAT THEY ARE CLOSE TO, SKIP TO QUESTION 27]?

_____

25B. Have you had any contact with this adult in the last four weeks? By contact, we mean in-person, phone, or mail/ email contact.

Yes	1
No ....(GO TO Q. 27)......................	2
Refused ....(GO TO Q. 27)......................	7
Don't know ....(GO TO Q. 27)......................	8

25C. What type of contact have you had with this adult in the last four weeks. Did you...

	Yes	No	REF	DK	NA
1. See each other (face-to-face visits)?	1	2	7	8	9
2. Call each other and talk on the phone?	1	2	7	8	9
3. Leave voice mail messages or text messages for each other?	1	2	7	8	9
4. Email or write to each other?	1	2	7	8	9

IF NO TO 1 (NO FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT), SKIP TO 26i
26. I am going to read a list of activities. During the past four weeks, how often did [CLOSEST ADULT] do these activities for you or with you:

During the past four weeks, how often…	Would you say…						
	Not at all,	Once or twice in the past 4 weeks,	About once a week,	Several times a week, or	About every day?	REF	DK
a. Was that adult right there with you (in-person) in a stressful situation?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
b. Did s/he tell you what s/he did in a situation similar to yours?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
c. Did s/he do some activity with you to help you get your mind off of things?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
d. Did s/he tell you that you are OK just the way you are?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
e. Did s/he comfort you by giving you a hug?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
f. Did s/he give you a ride somewhere?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
g. Did s/he help you understand why you did not do something well?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
h. Did s/he loan you or give you something that you needed?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8

ASK THE NEXT QUESTIONS OF **ALL WHO HAVE** ANY FORMS OF **CONTACT** IN THE PAST 4 WEEKS

	Would you say…						
During the past four weeks, how often…	**Not at all,**	**Once or twice in the past 4 weeks,**	**About once a week,**	**Several times a week, or**	**About every day?**	**REF**	**DK**
i. Did s/he listen to you talk about your personal feelings?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
j. Did s/he talk with you about some interests of yours?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
k. Did s/he let you know that you did something well?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
l. Did s/he help you in setting a goal for yourself?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
m. Did s/he check back in with you about an issue or about a conversation that two of you had?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
n. Did s/he give you information to help you understand a situation you were in?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8

27. I want you to think about a group of people who you **really like** to be with, because they are a lot like you. What do you have in common with this group?

_____

_____

_____

28. How often are you with them? Would you say…

Every day, ... 1

At least once a week, ... 2

At least once a month, or 3

Less than once a month? 4

Refused 7

Don't know 8

29. When you think about the next five years of your life, do you have any plans?

Yes 1

No .... (GO TO Q. 31) 2

Refused 7

Don't know 8

30. What are your plans? How are you working to make them happen?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

31. As you think about it now, how satisfied are you with the quality of care that you received in the foster care system? Would you say...

Very satisfied,	1
Satisfied,	2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied,	3
Dissatisfied, or	4
Very dissatisfied?	5
Refused	7
Don't know	8
Not applicable	9

32A. Again, as you think about it now, do you have any ideas about how to make foster care, or other placements, or the adoption process work better for teenagers?

Yes		1
No	(GO TO Q. 33)	2
Refused	(GO TO Q. 33)	7
Don't know	(GO TO Q. 33)	8
Not applicable	(GO TO Q. 33)	9

32B. What are your ideas?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

32C. IF I MAY ASK: What is your age

_____ Age
IF R IS UNDER 18 SKIP TO QUESTION 39.

Now, I just have a few final questions about your income and service use.

33. **This month**, <u>have you or will you</u> receive income or financial support from...
(CIRCLE A RESPONSE FOR EACH ITEM)

	Yes	**No**	**REF**	**DK**
a. Employment?	1	2	7	8
b. MFIP, the Minnesota Family Investment Program?	1	2	7	8
c. General Assistance or Emergency Assistance?	1	2	7	8
d. SSDI or SSI (Social Security Disability Insurance or Supplemental Security Income)?	1	2	7	8
e. Unemployment benefits?	1	2	7	8
f. Educational financial aid, grants or scholarships for college?	1	2	7	8
g. Parents or other relatives?	1	2	7	8
h. Friends, including boyfriends or girlfriends?	1	2	7	8
i. IF VOLUNTEERED: former foster parents?	1	2	7	8
j. IF VOLUNTEERED: adoptive parents?	1	2	7	8
k. Any other sources? (SPECIFY: _____)	1	2	7	8

34. What is or will be your total income this month from all sources?

_____ Total income

Refused ....-7

Don't know..-8

	Yes	**No**	**REF**	**DK**
35. Do you currently have **public** medical coverage, like Medical Assistance, MinnesotaCare, GAMC, or Medicare?	1	2	7	8
36. Do you currently have **private** medical insurance, like from an employer or covered under parents insurance?	1	2	7	8
37. Are you able to afford medical care when you need it?	1	2	7	8

38. Are you **currently** receiving, or have you received in the **past month**…(CIRCLE A RESPONSE FOR EACH ITEM)

	Yes	No	REF	DK
a. Food stamps?	1	2	7	8
b. Child care assistance?	1	2	7	8
c. WIC (Women, Infant, & Children food program)?	1	2	7	8
d. Free bus or free bus cards?	1	2	7	8
e. Food from a food shelf?	1	2	7	8
f. Help from a county social worker to get needed services?	1	2	7	8

39. As I said at the beginning, this is the last time we are contacting you as part of this particular study. However, because this **was a unique study**, we may try to do another study in a couple of years to find out how things are going. If this happens, we will call you to ask your permission. So, we are, once again, gathering names and addresses of people who might know how to reach you, if you are no longer at this location. Can you give us a few names and phone numbers of people we can call who will always know how to get in touch with you?

Person 1: Name_____

Relationship to youth: _____

Address _____

Phone number _____

Is there anyone else that you feel might be helpful if we are trying to find you a year or two?

Person 2: Name_____

Relationship to youth: _____

Address _____

Phone number _____

40. Those are all of the questions I have not only today, but for this study. Thanks for taking the time to be interviewed again today. We really appreciate your help and your time. I have a $20 gift card to send to you. Would you prefer that this gift card be for [CIRCLE ONE] Target or for Wal-Mart?

Target... 1

Wal-Mart... 2

41. We have your address as (FACE SHEET ADDRESS). Is this still correct?

Yes..(GO TO Q. 40)...................... 1

No 2

42. What is your correct address?

_____

_____

_____

43. Your gift card will be sent by certified mail within the next week or two. This means that the mail carrier will bring it to your door for someone to sign for it, so we know that it isn't lost or stolen. INTERVIEWER; IF CERTIFIED MAIL IS A PROBLEM, GIVE R A CHOICE OF HAVING IT SENT ELSEWHERE OR HAVING IT SENT BY REGULAR MAIL AT HIS/HER OWN RISK. THIS MEANS THAT IF THEY DON'T RECEIVE IT, WE WILL NOT REPLACE IT.

Certified 1

Regular mail.. 2

Thank you so much for your time. We really appreciate your help with this project!

Interviewer: _____   Date: _____

Interviewer Employee #: _____   End Time: _____

INTERVIEWER

Do you have comments about this case? Please include anything that you think the supervisor or the coder should know about this case. If you are unsure how to code a particular response, note the item name and the problem here.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Survey of Youth in Care, baseline 2004-2005

Project Code: 70477

Long Distance Code: 360

The Homecoming Project
Youth Survey

Hello, my name is _____ and I'm calling from the Wilder Research Center. I am calling about a telephone survey that we are doing with teenagers in placement. Your social worker knows that we are talking to you about participating in the study. This survey is to help us learn more about what youth need. We want to learn more about how well services work for teens.

> **FOR NON-PROGRAM KIDS ONLY:** Did you receive a letter with a notice of privacy practices from us in the mail?

> **Yes→** [CONTINUE]

> **No→** We have a letter that we can send to you that tells about the study. I can explain the letter over the phone and send you a copy. Is that okay?

> **Explain over the phone→** [READ THE ATTACHED CONDENSED VERSION OF LETTER AND CONTINUE]

> **Send letter→** Okay, I will send out a letter to you. Can I verify your address? [VERIFY] I will call you back in a week or so after you have a chance to look at the letter to see if you are interested in participating. Youth who participate will receive a $10 gift certificate in thanks for their time. Thanks!

(As the letter said,) We are calling you to do a survey that takes about 15 minutes over the phone. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. If you participate, you will receive a $10 gift certificate to Target or Kmart for your time. You are free to skip any questions that you don't want to answer. Anything you say will be confidential and will not be seen by anyone but the Wilder Research Center staff working on the study. You will not be identified or singled out in any way. Would you be willing to do the survey?

Yes→ Great. Before we start, I need to let you know that if, during this phone survey, you tell me about a situation that may be of danger to you or others, we are required by state law to report this to the Department of Human Services. This includes abuse or neglect that has happened to you but that has **not** been reported.

> (AS NEEDED: [Abuse] is defined as being physically hurt, for example if someone hit or slapped you.
> [Neglect] is defined as going without care or services.)

Let's start then.

No→ FILL OUT A REFUSAL REPORT

> Thank you for your time.

---

1. According to our records, you are currently living in a [NAME OF PLACEMENT TYPE]? Is this correct?

    Yes ....(GO TO Q. 3)......................1

    No 2

    　　　　Refused 7

    　　　　Don't know 8

2. Where do you currently live? [LET YOUTH ANSWER AND THEN CODE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE, READ LIST IF CLARIFICATION IS NEEDED; IF YOUTH SAYS "FOSTER HOME" CLARIFY WHETHER IT IS A RELATIVE OR NOT]

    Relative/kinship foster home 1

    Non-relative foster home (not treatment/therapeutic)..2

    Treatment foster home 3

    Group home 4

    Residential Treatment Facility..5

    Corrections facility 6

    Hospital...7

    Shelter...8

    Pre-Adoptive home 9

    Adoptive home...10

    On their own 11

    Other? (Please describe: _____) . 12

    　　　　Refused ....-7

    　　　　Don't know ....-8

3. How long have you lived here? (Read categories as needed.)

    Less than 3 months 1

    3 to 5 months 2

    6 to 11 months 3

    1 to 2 years...4

    3 to 5 years, or 5

    More than 5 years?...6

    　　　　Refused 7

    　　　　Don't know 8

4. Do you have any of your biological brothers or sisters living with you? [PROBE IF NEEDED: Brothers or sisters that share the same birth mom or dad as you]

Yes 1

No (GO TO Q. 6).. 2

VOLUNTEERED: Youth doesn't have <u>any</u> brothers or sisters (GO TO Q. 6) 3

Refused (GO TO Q. 6).. 7

Don't know (GO TO Q. 6) 8

Not applicable (GO TO Q. 6) 9

5. What are the ages of your brothers or sisters that are living with you?

_____   _____   _____   _____   _____   _____   _____   _____

6. During the school year, how many hours in a typical week do you spend doing the following activities?

How many hours do you spend …	0 hours	1-2 hours	3-5 hours	6-10 hours	11-20 hours	21 hours or more	REF	DK
a. Homework or study?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
b. Band, choir, orchestra, music lessons, or practicing voice or an instrument?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
c. Clubs or organizations outside of school (such as the YMCA or scouts)?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
d. Playing sports on a school team?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
e. Other sports or exercise activities?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
f. Attending services, groups, or programs at a church, synagogue, or mosque?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
h. Volunteer work?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
i. Chores or babysitting at home?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
j. Work for pay, including babysitting for pay?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

7. Have you run away (left without permission for at least an overnight) from any place you were living in the past year?

Yes 1

No 2

Refused 7

Don't know 8

8. I am going to read a bunch of statements about how various topics affect your personal beliefs. I want you to know that there are no right or wrong answers. For every item there are a large number of people who agree or disagree. If you feel neutral about a statement (neither agree or disagree), let me know and I can mark that.
The first statement is:

	Would you say you…					
	Strongly disagree,	**Disagree,**	**Agree, or**	**Strongly agree?**	**REF**	**Neutral or DK**
a. I take action to avoid problems when I see them coming.	1	2	3	4	7	8
b. Everyone knows that luck or chance determines one's future.	1	2	3	4	7	8
c. When I make plans, I am almost certain that I can make them work.	1	2	3	4	7	8
d. My problems will dominate or rule me all my life.	1	2	3	4	7	8
e. My mistakes and problems are my responsibility to deal with.	1	2	3	4	7	8
f. My life is controlled by outside actions and events.	1	2	3	4	7	8
g. To continually manage my problems, I need professional help.	1	2	3	4	7	8
h. I am confident of being able to deal successfully with future problems.	1	2	3	4	7	8
i. There are people I <u>know</u> will help me if I really need it.	1	2	3	4	7	8
j. <u>There are people who</u> like the same social activities I do.	1	2	3	4	7	8
k. Other people do not think I am good at what I do.	1	2	3	4	7	8
m. I do not think that <u>other people</u> respect what I do.	1	2	3	4	7	8
n. <u>There are people who</u> value my skills and abilities.	1	2	3	4	7	8
o. There is no one who has the same interests and concerns as me.	1	2	3	4	7	8

	Would you say you…					
	Strongly disagree,	**Disagree,**	**Agree, or**	**Strongly agree?**	**REF**	**Neutral or DK**
p. There is no one I can count on for help if I really need it.	1	2	3	4	7	8
q. There is no one who likes to do the things I do.	1	2	3	4	7	8
r. I am able to do things as well as most other people my age.	1	2	3	4	7	8
s. On the whole, I am happy with myself.	1	2	3	4	7	8

9. Next, I am going to read some statements about how people sometimes feel. Again, there are no right or wrong answers. Just tell me if you feel this way often, sometimes, rarely, or never.

	Would you say…					
How often do you feel…	**Often,**	**Sometimes,**	**Rarely, or**	**Never?**	**REF**	**DK**
a. that the people most important to you understand you?	1	2	3	4	7	8
b. lonely?	1	2	3	4	7	8
c. that you are wanted by the people or the groups that you like belonging to?	1	2	3	4	7	8
d. that you have as many close relationships as you want?	1	2	3	4	7	8
e. emotionally satisfied in your relationships with people?	1	2	3	4	7	8

10. I'm going to read a list of kinds of adults some youth feel connected to. Please let me know if you feel that you can count on these adults for support when you need it.

	Yes	**No**	**REF**	**DK**	**NA**
1A. Residential or group home staff?	1	2	7	8	9
1. A foster parent or former foster parent?	1	2	7	8	9
2. An adult relative?	1	2	7	8	9
3. A county social worker?	1	2	7	8	9
4. A teacher?	1	2	7	8	9
5. A psychologist, therapist, or counselor?	1	2	7	8	9
6. A pastor, Rabi or other church leader at your place of worship?	1	2	7	8	9
7. An adult friend?	1	2	7	8	9
8. Some other adult? (Please describe_____)	1	2	7	8	9

11. Now, I'd like you to think about the adult that you are closest to. What is that person's relationship to you? [SEE QUESTION 10 FOR LIST OF CATEGORIES IF NEEDED. IF YOUTH MAINTAINS THAT THERE IS NO ADULT IN HIS/HER LIFE THAT THEY ARE CLOSE TO, SKIP TO QUESTION 13]?

_____

_____

11B. Have you had any contact with this adult in the last four weeks? By contact we mean physical, phone, or mail/email contact.

Yes 1

No ……(GO TO Q13) 2

Refused……(GO TO Q13) 7

Don't know……(GO TO Q13) 8

12. I am going to read a list of activities. During the past four weeks, how often did [CLOSEST ADULT] do these activities for you or with you:

During the past four weeks, how often…	Would you say…						
	Not at all,	Once or twice in the past 4 weeks,	About once a week,	Several times a week, or	About every day?	REF	DK
a. Was this adult right there with you (physically) in a stressful situation?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
b. Did s/he tell you what s/he did in a situation similar to yours?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
c. Did s/he do some activity with you to help you get your mind off of things?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
d. Did s/he talk with you about some interests of yours?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
e. Did s/he let you know that you did something well?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
f. Did s/he tell you that you are OK just the way you are?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
g. Did s/he help you in setting a goal for yourself?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
h. Did s/he comfort you by giving you a hug?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
j. Did s/he give you information to help you understand a situation you were in?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
k. Did s/he give you a ride somewhere?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
l. Did s/he check back in with you about an issue or conversation you had?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8

During the past four weeks, how often…	**Would you say…**						
	Not at all,	Once or twice in the past 4 weeks,	About once a week,	Several times a week, or	About every day?	REF	DK
m. Did s/he help you understand why you didn't do something well?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
n. Did s/he listen to you talk about your personal feelings?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
o. Did s/he loan or give you something that you needed?	1	2	3	4	5	7	8

13. I want you to think about a group of people who you **really like** to be with because they are a lot like you. What do you have in common with this group?

_____

_____

_____

14. How often are you with them? Would you say…

Every day, ... 1

At least once a week, ... 2

At least once a month, or 3

Less than once a month? 4

Refused 7

Don't know 8

15. Do you have a goal for your future (that is in the next couple of years)?

Yes 1

No ....(GO TO Q. 18)...................... 2

Refused 7

Don't know 8

16. What is that goal [IF MORE THAN ONE, ASK RESPONDENT TO TALK ABOUT THE 2 **MOST IMPORTANT** GOALS]?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

17. What are you doing now to reach your goal(s)?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

18. Do you have any ideas about how to make out-of-home care or the adoption process work better for teenagers?

Yes 1

No ....(GO TO Q. 20) 2

Refused ....(GO TO Q. 20)……………7

Don't know ....(GO TO Q. 20)……………8

Not applicable ....(GO TO Q. 20)……………9

19. What are your ideas?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

20. As part of the study, Wilder Research Center interviewers will interview you two more times, in the spring/summer of 2006, and in the spring/summer of 2008. The interviews will take about 15 to 20 minutes. You will be interviewed over the phone, and another Gift Certificate will be provided to you each time. We are gathering names and addresses of people who might know how to reach you if you are no longer at this location. Can you give me a few names and phone numbers of people that we can call that are likely to know where you are in a few years?

Person 1: Name_____

Relationship to youth: _____

Address _____

Phone number _____

Is there anyone else that you feel might be helpful if we are trying to find you a year or two from now and you are not living in the same place?

Person 2: Name_____

Relationship to youth: _____

Address _____

Phone number _____

21. Those are all of the questions I have. Thanks for taking the time to be interviewed today. We really appreciate your help and your time. I have a $10 gift certificate to send to you. Would you prefer [CIRCLE ONE] Target or Kmart?

                Target 1

                Kmart 2

22. We have your address as (FACE SHEET ADDRESS). Is this correct?

                Yes ....(GO TO Q. 24)......................1

                No...2

23. What is your correct address?

_____

_____

_____

24. Your gift certificate will be sent by certified mail within the next week or two. This means that the mail carrier will bring it to your door for someone to sign for it so we know that it isn't lost or stolen. INTERVIEWER; IF CERTIFIED MAIL IS A PROBLEM, GIVE R A CHOICE OF HAVING IT SENT ELSEWHERE OR HAVING IT SENT BY REGULAR MAIL AT HER OWN RISK. THIS MEANS THAT IF THEY DON'T RECEIVE IT, WE WILL NOT REPLACE IT.

Certified 1

Regular mail...2

Thank you so much for your time. We really appreciate your help!

Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Interviewer Employee #: _____ End Time: _____

INTERVIEWER

Do you have comments about this case? Please include anything that you think the supervisor or the coder should know about this case. If you are unsure how to code a particular response, note the item name and the problem here.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Homecoming Project

Baseline adoption workers' survey, December 2003

The Minnesota Department of Human Services has received federal funding for a five-year demonstration project, under which they will work with the Minnesota Adoption Resource Network (MARN) to field-test innovative practices in adoption. We are asking public and private adoption workers across the state to complete this survey to help understand current practices. Your participation is completely voluntary and confidential.

Answers will be collected and reported by Wilder Research Center. All information will be kept completely confidential, and no reports will be made that allow an individual respondent to be identified.

Section 1
Please give us some background on your experiences working with adoptions

Please indicate the frequency with which you have done each of the following:

1. During 2003, how many cases have you been directly involved with that resulted in finalizing an adoption for a child under state guardianship?
    - ☐[1] None
    - ☐[2] 1 or 2 cases
    - ☐[3] 3 to 5 cases
    - ☐[4] 6 to 10 cases
    - ☐[5] 11 to 19 cases
    - ☐[6] 20 or more cases

2. Since you began working on adoptions, have you ever received help from the Minnesota Adoption Resource Network (MARN) for a case?
    - ☐[1] Never
    - ☐[2] Yes, but not in the past two year
    - ☐[3] Yes, once or twice in the past two years
    - ☐[4] Yes, three or more times in the past two years

3. Have you ever helped to place a teen (age 13 or older) in an adoptive family?
    - ☐[1] Never
    - ☐[2] Yes, but not in the past two year
    - ☐[3] Yes, once or twice in the past two years
    - ☐[4] Yes, three or more times in the past two years

4. Have you ever worked directly with a teen to get his or her ideas about specific people who might adopt him or her?
    - ☐[1] Never
    - ☐[2] Yes, but not in the past two year
    - ☐[3] Yes, once or twice in the past two years
    - ☐[4] Yes, three or more times in the past two years

Section 2
Please tell us what you think

For each of the statements below, please indicate the response that most closely matches your opinion.

5. It is hard to find adoptive families for teens (children age 13 or older).
   ☐¹ Strongly agree   ☐² Agree   ☐³ Disagree   ☐¹ Strongly disagree

6. People don't want to adopt teens because teens have a lot of problems.
   ☐¹ Strongly agree   ☐² Agree   ☐³ Disagree   ☐¹ Strongly disagree

7. Teenagers in the foster care system can be effective partners in their own adoption process.
   ☐¹ Strongly agree   ☐² Agree   ☐³ Disagree   ☐¹ Strongly disagree

8. It is harder to find placement for teens today than it was five years ago.
   ☐¹ Strongly agree   ☐² Agree   ☐³ Disagree   ☐¹ Strongly disagree

9. Most teenagers want to be adopted.
   ☐¹ Strongly agree   ☐² Agree   ☐³ Disagree   ☐¹ Strongly disagree

10. Long-term foster care is better than adoption, because families receive more benefits as foster parents than as adoptive parents (such as reimbursement rate, medical coverage, services).
    ☐¹ Strongly agree   ☐² Agree   ☐³ Disagree   ☐¹ Strongly disagree

Section 3:
Finally, please answer a few questions about yourself to help Wilder Research Center group responses. No individual information will be shared.

11. Which of the following roles do you have in the adoption process? **(Check Yes or No for each item)**
- ☐¹ Yes   ☐² No   A. Placing children
- ☐¹ Yes   ☐² No   B. Home studying and/or licensing families
- ☐¹ Yes   ☐² No   C. Recruiting families
- ☐¹ Yes   ☐² No   D. Other (Please describe): _____

_____

12. Which *one* of these roles would you say is your *main* role? **(Check <u>one</u> category)**
- ☐¹ Placing children
- ☐² Home studying and/or licensing families
- ☐³ Recruiting families
- ☐⁴ Other – adoption is not the main role of my job
- ☐⁵ Other – adoption is the main role of my job, and my main role in that process is

_____

13. Please indicate where you work:
- ☐¹ County agency
- ☐² Private agency

14. In what part of the state do you work?
- ☐¹ 7-county Twin Cities metropolitan area
- ☐² Greater Minnesota

15. How long have you worked in the adoption field?
- ☐¹ Less than one year
- ☐² At least one year but less than three years
- ☐³ At least three years but less than five years
- ☐⁴ Five years or more

16. Have you yourself ever been any of the following? **(Check Yes or No for each item)**
- ☐¹ Yes   ☐² No   A. A foster child
- ☐¹ Yes   ☐² No   B. A foster parent
- ☐¹ Yes   ☐² No   C. An adopted child
- ☐¹ Yes   ☐² No   D. An adoptive parent

Thank you very much for your help.

The Homecoming Project

Adoption workers' survey

The Minnesota Department of Human Services is in the final year of a five-year, federally-funded demonstration project, under which they are working with the Minnesota Adoption Resource Network (MARN) to field-test innovative practices in adoption. We are asking public and private adoption workers across the state to complete this survey to help us understand current practices. Your participation is completely voluntary and confidential.

Answers will be collected and reported by Wilder Research. All information will be kept completely confidential, and no reports will be made that allow an individual respondent to be identified.

Section 1
Please give us some background on your experiences working with adoptions

Please indicate the frequency with which you have done each of the following:

17. During the last year, how many cases were you directly involved with that resulted in finalizing an adoption for a child under state guardianship?
    - ☐[1] None
    - ☐[2] 1 or 2 cases
    - ☐[3] 3 to 5 cases
    - ☐[4] 6 to 10 cases
    - ☐[5] 11 to 19 cases
    - ☐[6] 20 or more cases

18. In the last three years, what kind of contact have you had with The Homecoming Project? **(Check Yes or No for each item)**
    - ☐[1] Yes ☐[2] No   A. Referred a child
    - ☐[1] Yes ☐[2] No   B. One of my cases is a project youth
    - ☐[1] Yes ☐[2] No   C. Heard them present at Taskforce
    - ☐[1] Yes ☐[2] No   D. Heard them present elsewhere
    - ☐[1] Yes ☐[2] No   E. Other contact:_____

19. Have you ever helped to place a teen (age 13 or older) in an adoptive family?
    - ☐[1] Never
    - ☐[2] Yes, but not in the past five years
    - ☐[3] Yes, once or twice in the past five years
    - ☐[4] Yes, three or more times in the past five years

20. Have you ever worked directly with a teen to get his or her ideas about specific people who might adopt him or her?
    - ☐[1] Never
    - ☐[2] Yes, but not in the past five years
    - ☐[3] Yes, once or twice in the past five years
    - ☐[4] Yes, three or more times in the past five years

21. Are there any youth on your caseload that you wanted to refer to The Homecoming Project, but you didn't because they did not meet eligibility requirements?
    - ☐[1] Yes (Please describe why you would have liked to refer them and why they didn't qualify):

    _____

    _____

    - ☐[2] No

Section 2
Please tell us what you think

For each of the statements below, please indicate the response that most closely matches your opinion.

22. It is hard to find adoptive families for teens (children age 13 or older).
    ☐[1] Strongly agree   ☐[2] Agree   ☐[3] Disagree   ☐[4] Strongly disagree

23. People don't want to adopt teens because teens have a lot of problems.
    ☐[1] Strongly agree   ☐[2] Agree   ☐[3] Disagree   ☐[4] Strongly disagree

24. Teenagers in the foster care system can be effective partners in their own adoption process.
    ☐[1] Strongly agree   ☐[2] Agree   ☐[3] Disagree   ☐[4] Strongly disagree

25. It is harder to find placement for teens today than it was five years ago.
    ☐[1] Strongly agree   ☐[2] Agree   ☐[3] Disagree   ☐[4] Strongly disagree

26. Most teenagers want to be adopted.
    ☐[1] Strongly agree   ☐[2] Agree   ☐[3] Disagree   ☐[4] Strongly disagree

27. Long-term foster care is better than adoption, because families receive more benefits as foster parents than as adoptive parents (such as reimbursement rate, medical coverage, services).
    ☐[1] Strongly agree   ☐[2] Agree   ☐[3] Disagree   ☐[4] Strongly disagree

28. In the last five years, have you changed how you think about permanency options for teens?

    ☐[1] Yes (Please describe): _____

    _____

    ☐[2] No

29. Do you have any other comments about how the child welfare system supports teen permanency? Please describe:

    _____

    _____

    _____

Section 3
Finally, please answer a few questions about yourself to help Wilder Research group responses.
No individual information will be shared.

30. Which of the following roles do you have in the adoption process? **(Check Yes or No for each item)**
    ☐¹ Yes ☐² No A. Placing children
    ☐¹ Yes ☐² No B. Home studying and/or licensing families
    ☐¹ Yes ☐² No C. Recruiting families
    ☐¹ Yes ☐² No D. Other (Please describe): _____

31. Which *one* of these roles would you say is your *main* role? **(Check __one__ category)**
    ☐¹ Placing children
    ☐² Home studying and/or licensing families
    ☐³ Recruiting families
    ☐⁴ Other – adoption is not the main role of my job
    ☐⁵ Other – adoption is the main role of my job, and my main role in that process is
    _____

32. Please indicate where you work:
    ☐¹ County agency
    ☐² Private agency

33. In what part of the state do you work?
    ☐¹ 7-county Twin Cities metropolitan area
    ☐² Greater Minnesota

34. How long have you worked in the adoption field?
    ☐¹ Less than one year
    ☐² At least one year but less than three years
    ☐³ At least three years but less than five years
    ☐⁴ Five years or more

35. Have you yourself ever been any of the following? **(Check Yes or No for each item)**
    ☐¹ Yes ☐² No A. A foster child
    ☐¹ Yes ☐² No B. A foster parent
    ☐¹ Yes ☐² No C. An adopted child
    ☐¹ Yes ☐² No D. An adoptive parent

36. Did you complete a similar survey to this three years ago? ☐¹ Yes ☐² No ☐⁸ Don't remember

Thank you very much for your help.