

Youth Permanency Research

Prepared for:

April 2022



Dave Thomas
Foundation
for Adoption[®]

Forever Families for Children in Foster Care



Objectives

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption wants to elevate positive attitudes about youth permanency within the child welfare community. They commissioned this research study to provide a benchmark of current attitudes about youth permanency as well as inform a marketing and communications strategy. Detailed objectives of the research were as follows:

- Define what permanency means to those in the child welfare community – note that we ensured everyone has the same DTFA provided definition of permanency in mind when proving their opinions – and get their perspective on it.
- From the perspective of those in the child welfare community, identify the overarching goals and areas of focus around youth permanency. Pinpoint the perceived existing effective strategies to achieve permanency and ways to increase belief that permanency is the correct/an important goal.
- Determine the biggest issues/barriers impacting permanency for youth in foster care, including establishing the likelihood of attaining permanency.
- Find effective communications strategies to reach child welfare professionals.
- Determine what messages resonate the most with this audience.



Methodology

- The research was conducted online in the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption among 872 currently employed Child Welfare Professionals. The survey was conducted between January 24th and February 24th, 2022.
- Respondents were recruited from multiple sources including: the Child Welfare League of America, Court Appointed Special Advocates, Wendy's Wonderful Kids, North American Council on Adoptable Children, National Adoption Association, the Center for Adoptions Support and Education, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the National Child Welfare Workforce Initiative, and public listings of State Officials and Child Attorneys.
- In order to encourage participation, select respondents were offered a \$5 gift card to one of four popular retailers.
- Raw data were not weighted and are therefore only representative of the individuals who completed the survey.
- All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.
- Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within ± 3.3 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.



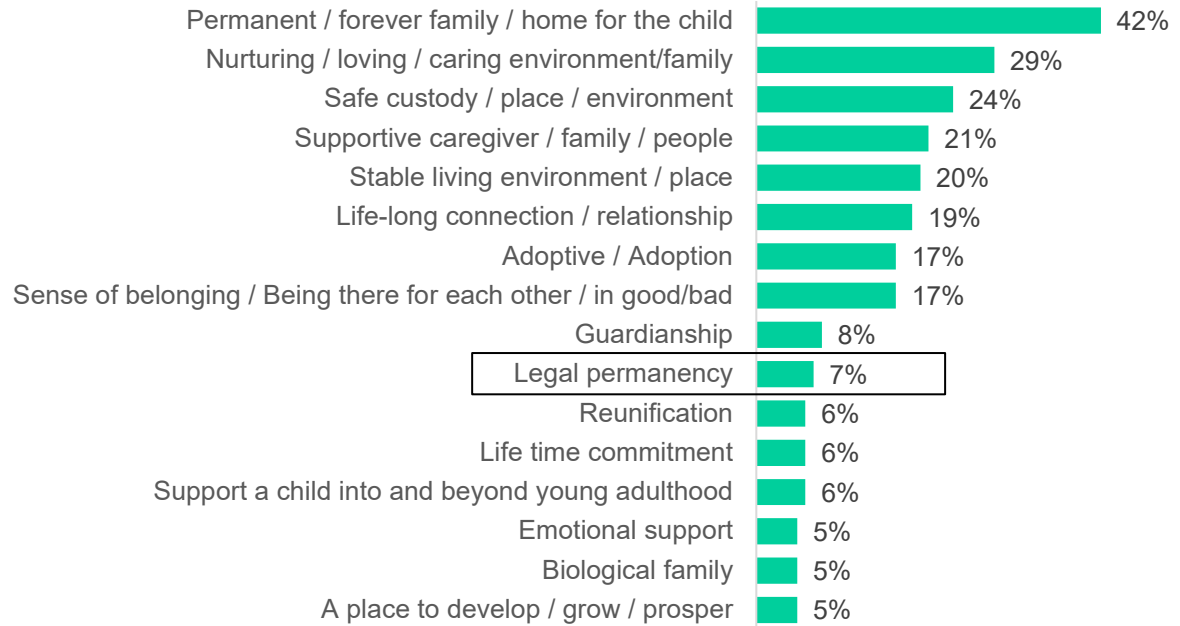
Defining Youth Permanency



While there are nuances to the definition (emotional/legal), most professionals think of permanency very positively, as a child being able to permanently remain in a loving family.

“I do see a difference between legal permanency and emotional permanency. In an ideal world, everyone would get both. If we fail to achieve legal permanency for some of the youth we are working with, hopefully we have managed to create enough emotional permanency that they have the supports they need to be successful”.
 Family Visiting Supervisor, W, 49

What Permanency Means To Child Welfare Professionals

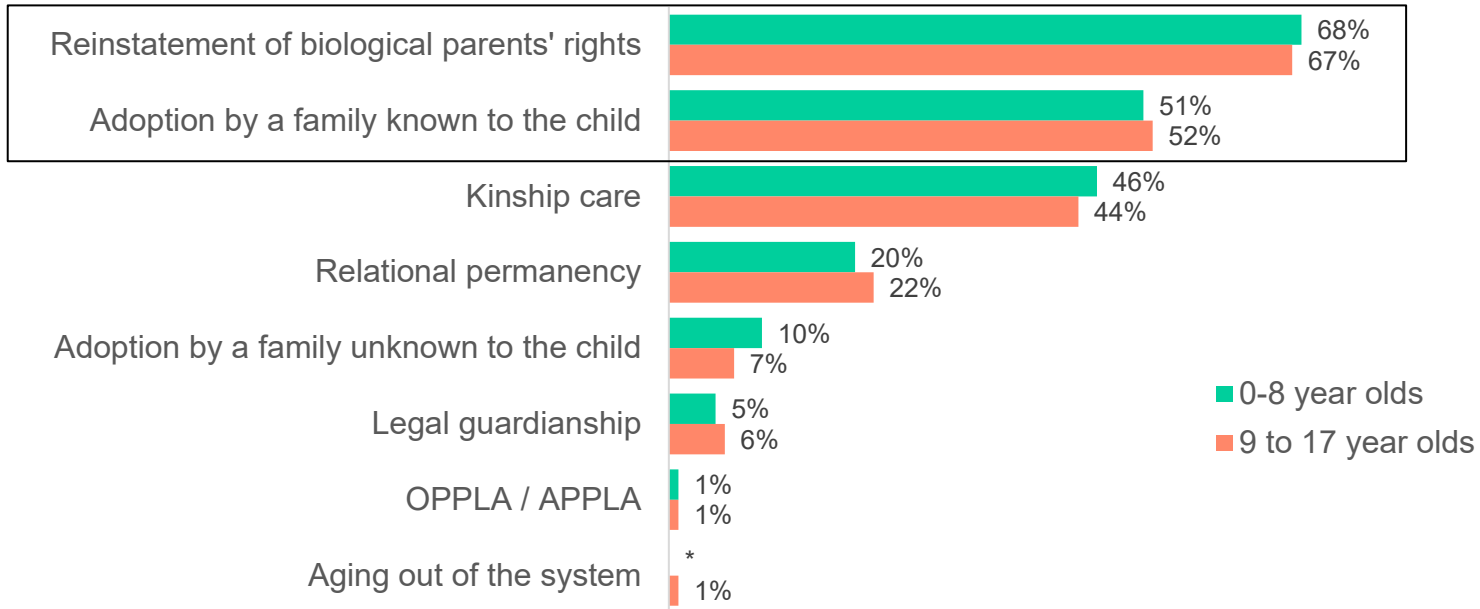


Only mentions receiving 5%+ are shown



Reinstatement of parental rights and adoption by a family known to the child are considered the most ideal outcomes for a child waiting in foster care.

Most Ideal Outcome For Children In The Foster Care System (T2B)

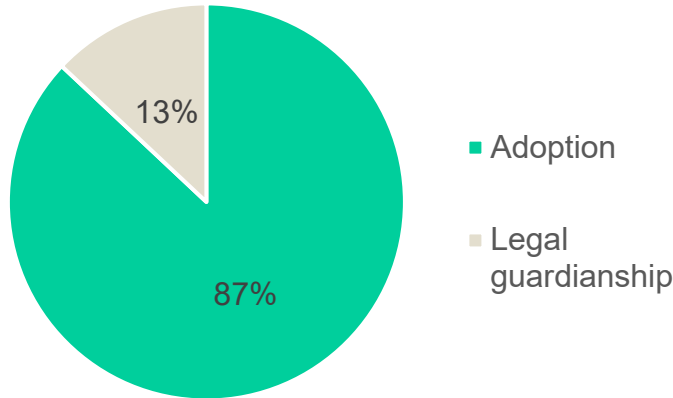


Q306/7 Please rank the following outcomes from most ideal to least ideal for children ages 0-8/children ages 9 and older who are waiting in the foster care system. Acknowledging that there are always exceptions, please consider most instances when answering this question.

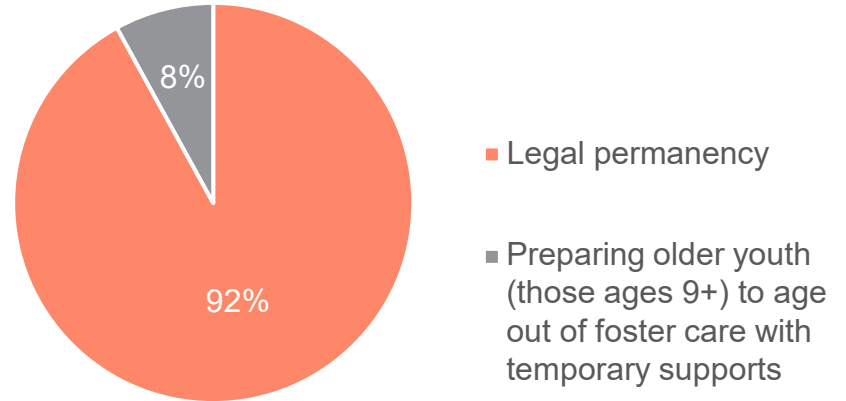


If it is not possible to reinstate parental rights, adoption is preferable to legal guardianship, and achieving legal permanency is far more desirable than preparing older youth to age out of foster care.

Adoption Vs.
Legal Guardianship



Preparing Older Youth To Age Out Vs.
Legal Permanency



Q335 For each of the following paired statements, please tell us which outcome you think should be prioritized.



Prioritizing Permanency



Overall, the majority of child welfare professionals agree legal permanency should be the goal for every child in foster care. Few say aging out is acceptable even for older youth/teenagers.

Reactions To Statements

92% Agree

“Legal Permanency should be the goal for every child in foster care”
(69% strongly agree)

8% Agree

“Aging out is an acceptable outcome for older youth (those ages 9+) in foster care”
(76% strongly disagree)

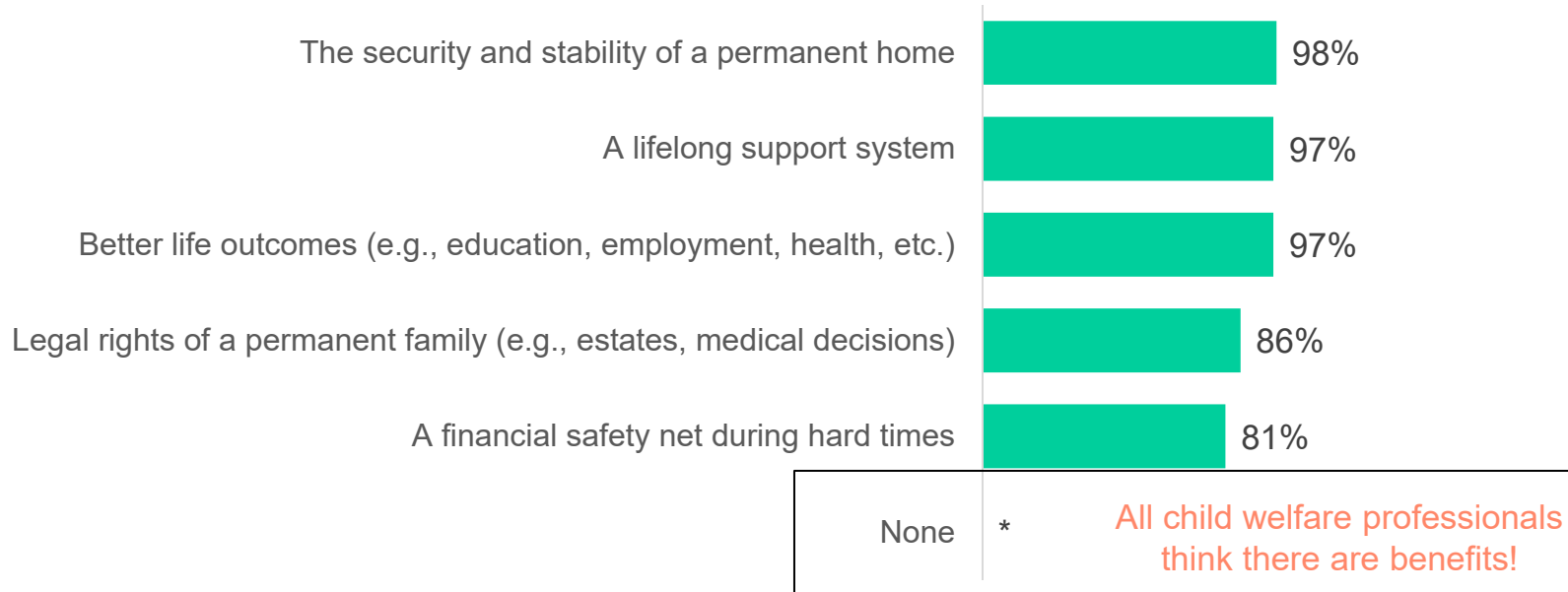
3% Agree

“Teenagers in foster care are too old to be adopted”
(92% strongly disagree)



Better life outcomes/a lifelong support system with stability and security are considered positive outcomes for permanency by nearly all child welfare professionals, more so than the financial safety net that comes with it.

Benefits To Achieving Legal Permanency For Children In Foster Care Before They Reach Adulthood



Q320 Which of the following, if any, are benefits to achieving legal permanency for children in foster care before they reach adulthood?



The key to achieving permanency is having a great team that will work together to ensure engagement/proper support and enhanced recruitment.

Successful Strategies To Move Youth Out Of Foster Care And Into Permanent Families



Overall themes:
 Recruitment/Support
 Transparency/Engagement
 Teamwork

Only mentions receiving 5%+ are shown

Q505 In your work as a child welfare professional, what strategies have you seen be successful in moving youth out of foster care and into permanent families?

Note: Respondents provided their own answer that was then grouped by theme.



Immediate and efficient recruitment, as well as the willing involvement of the child and all other parties, leads to the most successful permanency results.

Recruitment/Support

“I have seen better outcomes when a child considered hard to place has a dedicated adoption recruiter (i.e. WWK or state recruiter).”

Case Worker, W, 52

“Training for permanent families mental health care.”

Advocacy Coordinator, W, 25

“Doing a lot of family finding and family engagement on the front end of a case, as soon as a child enters foster care, and encouraging/maintaining those relationships while the child is in care.”

Family Finder For Kids, M, 28

Transparency/Engagement

“Working within the child’s network of influence. Seeking the desired results from the child. Working with teenagers, asking their definition of a permanent family.”

Case Worker, M, 52

“Complete honesty about the level of need of a child.”

State Government Leader, M, 48

“Talking directly to youth. Engaging with them prior to permanence, during the permanency process, and after legal permanence.”

Researcher, W, 60

Teamwork

“Permanency is achieved faster when the entire team agrees on the plan (if it should be return to birth family, kinship, adoption, etc.).”

Case Worker, W, 29

“Soliciting input from all interested parties (county social worker, youth, birth family (if appropriate), guardian ad litem, foster provider, other providers, etc.).”

CASA/Guardian ad Litem, M, 51

“Collaboration and good working relationships between all parties.”

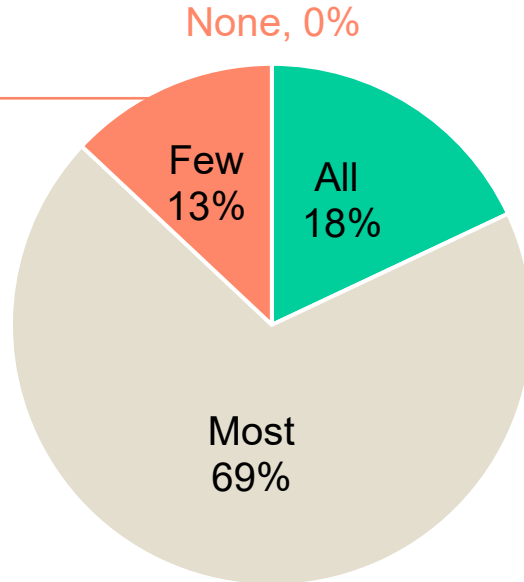
CASA/Guardian ad Litem, M, 40



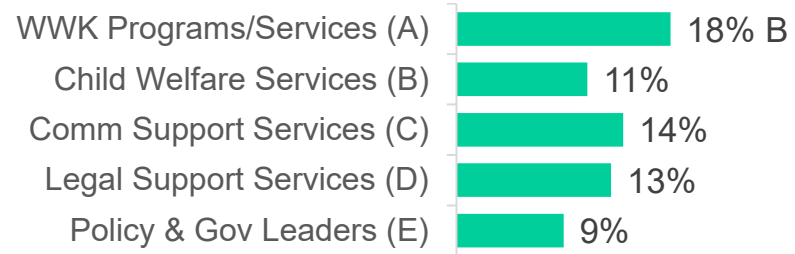
While nearly all child welfare professionals agree permanency is the best outcome for all children, many professionals don't think *all* their colleagues are prioritizing it.

Those Who Say Their Colleagues Believe Permanency Should Be A Priority For Every Child

This 13% (Few/None Net) indicates that these professionals are not aware that others prioritize permanency as likely aligned with their own.



Breakout by Role
Those Who Say Few/None



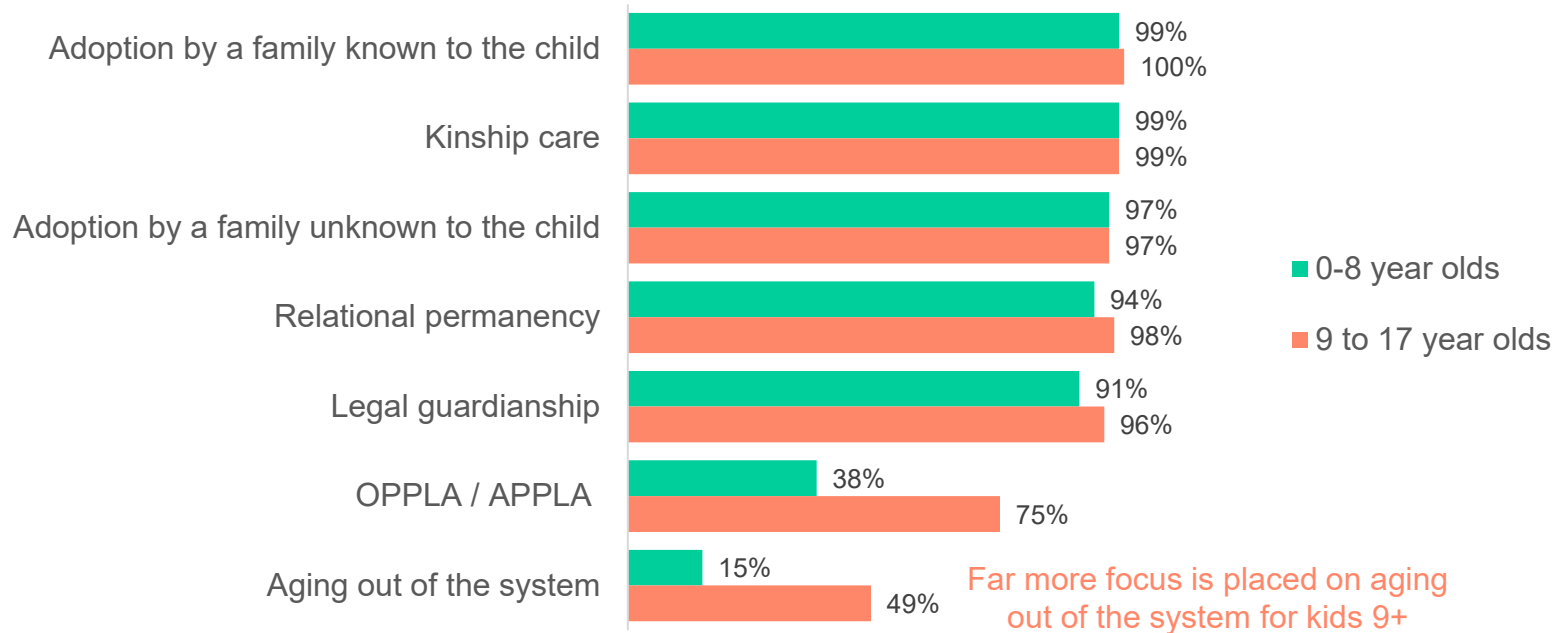
WWK workers are most likely to believe this is the case for the child welfare professionals with whom they work. And are significantly more likely than child welfare services workers to believe this is the case.

Q330 In your experience, how many of the child welfare professionals with whom you work believe that legal permanency should be a priority for every child in foster care?



If reinstating parental rights is not an option, there is far more focus on relational permanency than aging out of the system, but again, less so than adoption by family known to child or kinship care.

Place At Least Some Focus On Each Outcome (T3B)



Q308/9 Assuming reinstatement of parental rights is not a possibility for a child aged 0-8/9 and older in foster care, how much focus do you place on each of the following outcomes?



Permanency Barriers



Reactions To Statements

99%

Strongly Agree

“Every child deserves a permanent home and a loving family”

72%

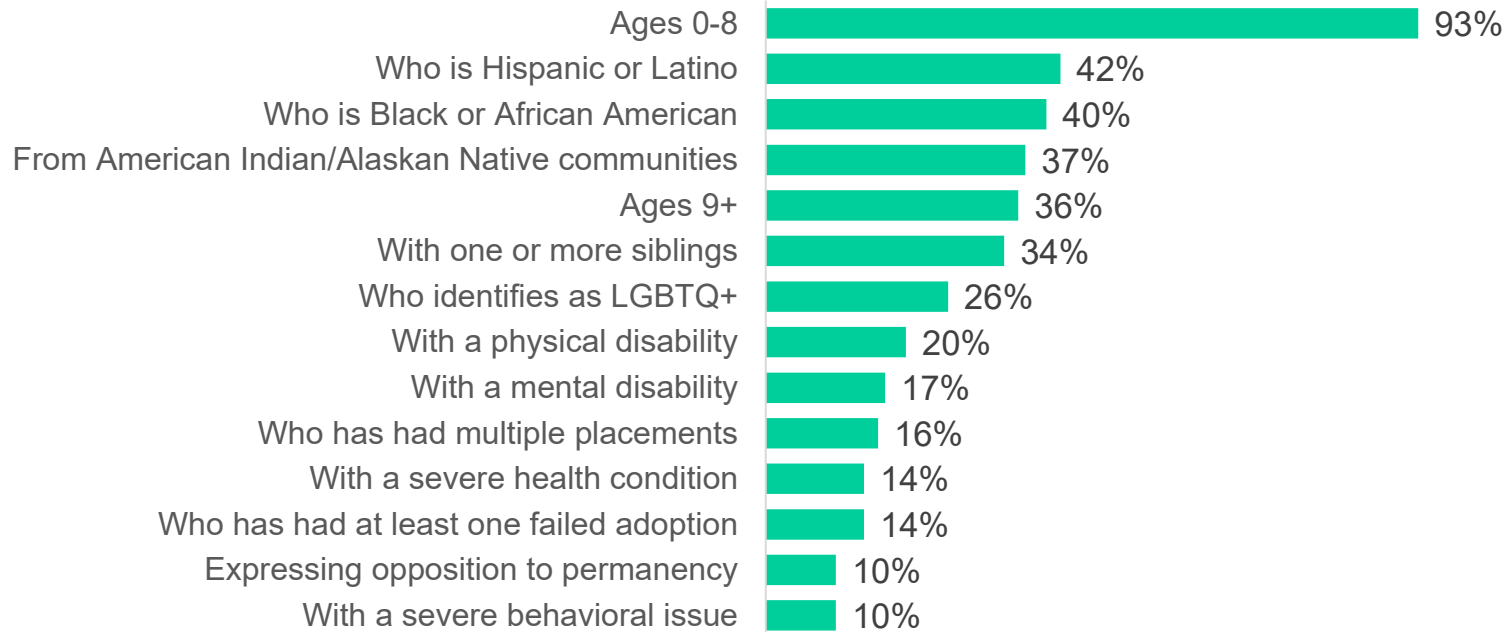
Strongly Agree

“Every child is adoptable”



Acknowledging that the likelihood of getting adopted greatly varies based on factors like age, health, behavior, etc.

Very Likely To Achieve Legal Permanency For A Child...

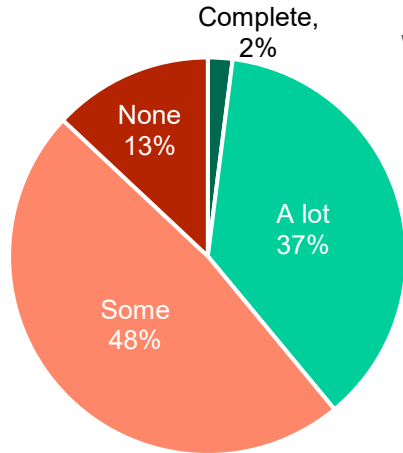


Q400 How likely, if at all, is achieving legal permanency for each of the following groups of children in foster care?

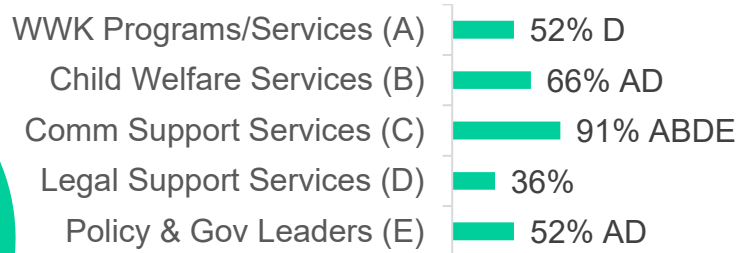


Barriers to attaining permanency need to be removed and child welfare professionals need to be given more power to help youth achieve legal permanency. Currently most professionals have only some (48%) or no (13%) influence on achieving permanency.

Influence Over Achieving Legal Permanency In Current Role

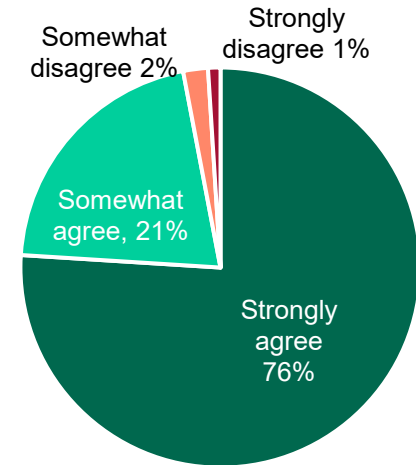


Breakout by Role % Some/No Influence



The majority of WWK Programs/Services Workers along with those in Policy & Gov (52%) say they have some or no influence on achieving legal permanency for youth in foster care. Legal support services seem to have the most influence.

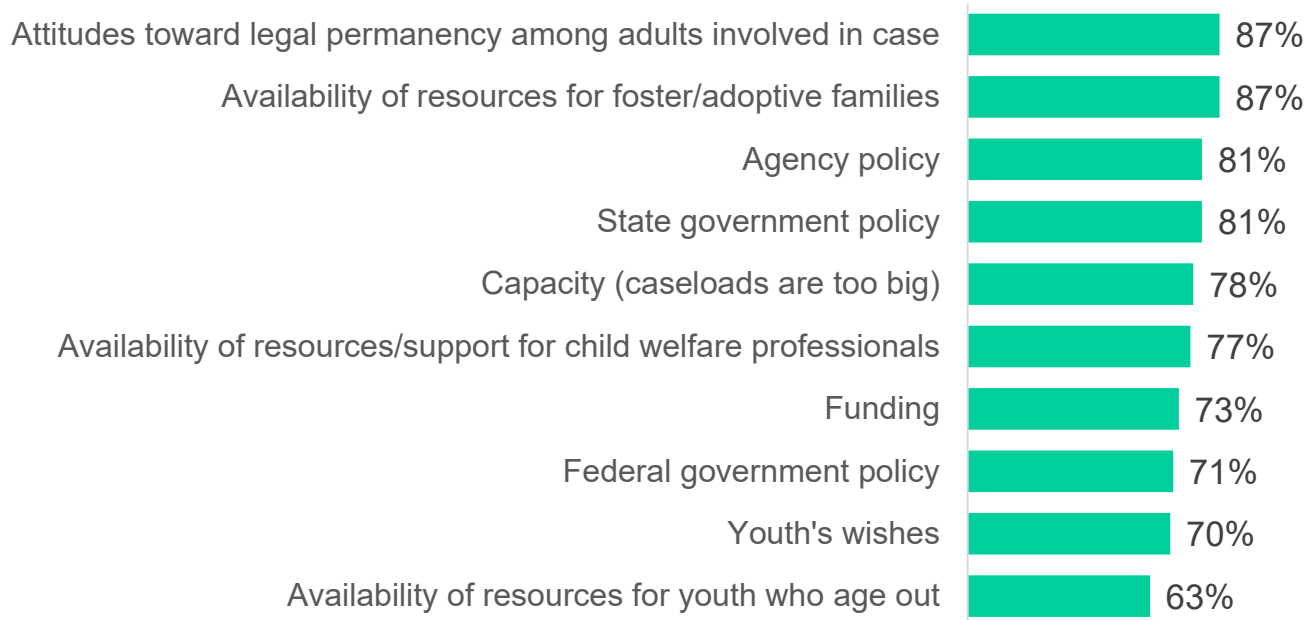
Believe We Should Be Doing More To Remove Barriers To Legal Permanency For Children In Foster Care





Both emotional and structural elements (such as attitudes toward permanency and availability of resources) have great influence on the ability to achieve it.

Factors With Complete/A Lot Of Influence On Likelihood Of Achieving Legal Permanency

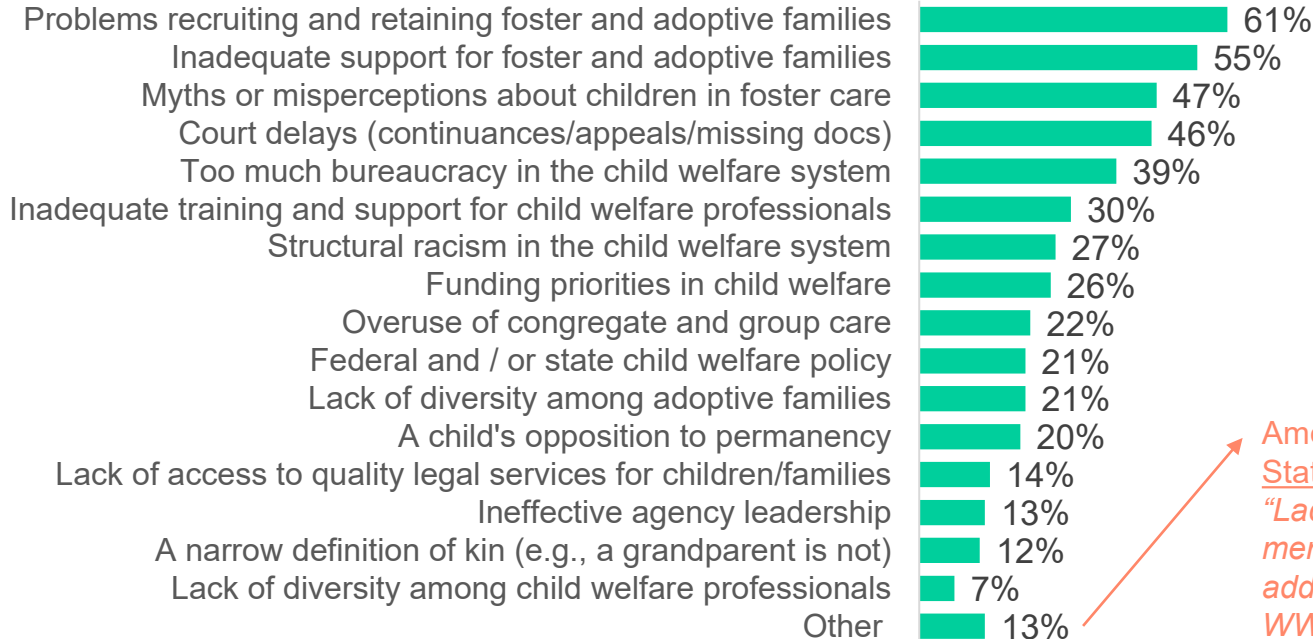


Q420 In your experience, how much do each of the following factors influence the likelihood of achieving legal permanency for a child in foster care?



Additional structural barriers and outside influences like problems recruiting/retaining/supporting foster and adoptive families, to myths about children in foster care, hinder the ability of professionals to attain permanency.

Barriers To Achieving Legal Permanency



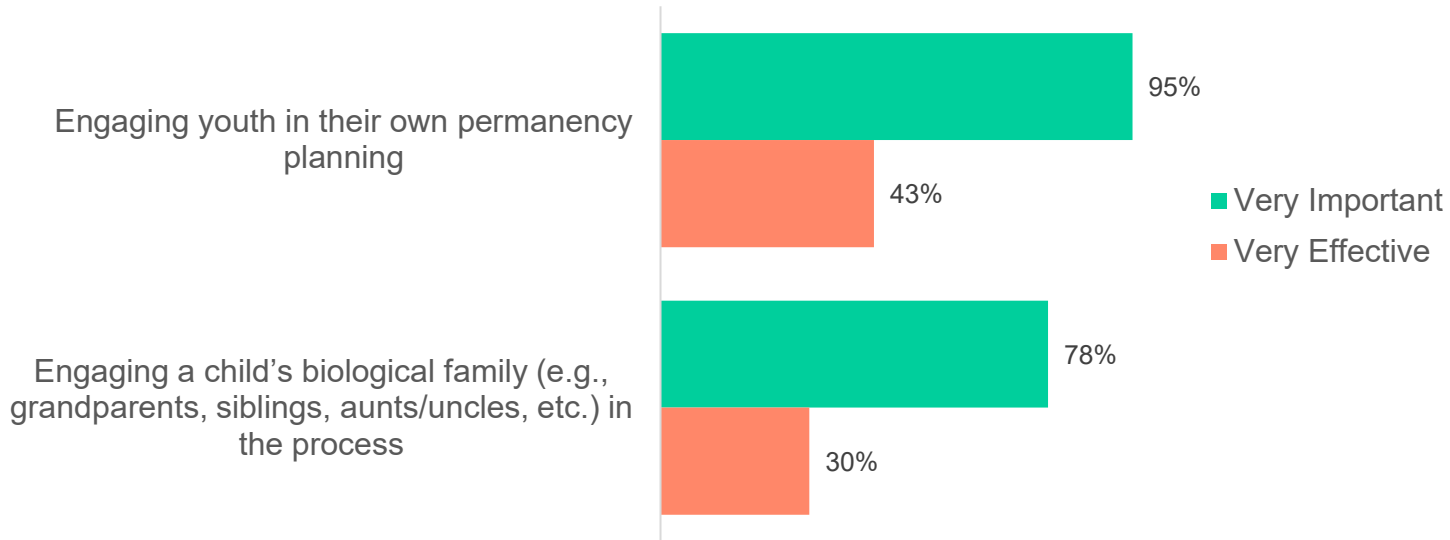
Among other mentions:
State of child's mental health:
 "Lack of stability, and qualified mental health professionals to address child's needs."
 WWK recruiter/supervisor, W, 45

Q500 Which of the following, if any, do you believe are the biggest barriers to achieving legal permanency for children and youth in foster care? Please select up to 5 items.



Organizations are not as effective as they could be in engaging youth (or their biological families) with their permanency process...hence dropping the ball on these important factors that are needed to achieve permanency.

Factors That Are Important In Achieving Permanency Vs. How Effective Organizations Are In Actually Doing Each





Permanency Communication Strategies

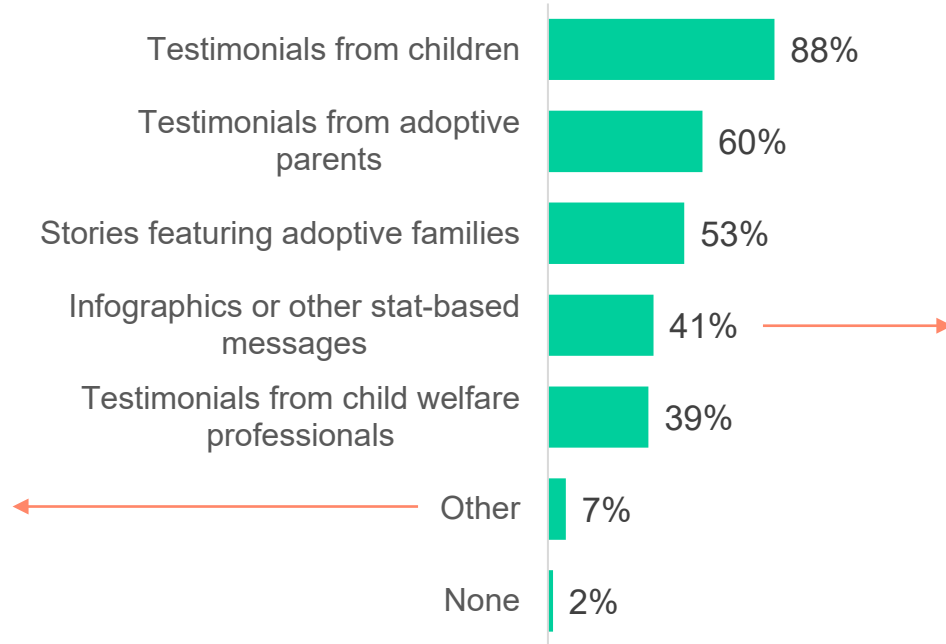


Testimonials from children and adoptive parents resonate the most with child welfare professionals.

Also mentioned:

“A message that only paints the perfect family, adoptive, guardianship and is not realistic about the ups and downs of finding permanency really bothers me. Testimonials tug at the heart, but the heart can not promise permanency. Make sure that any family that has the desire to help a child find a permanent home is realistic, well trained in trauma and child brain development and is willing to never give up.”
 CASA/Guardian ad Litem, W, 68

Types Of Messaging That Resonates The Most

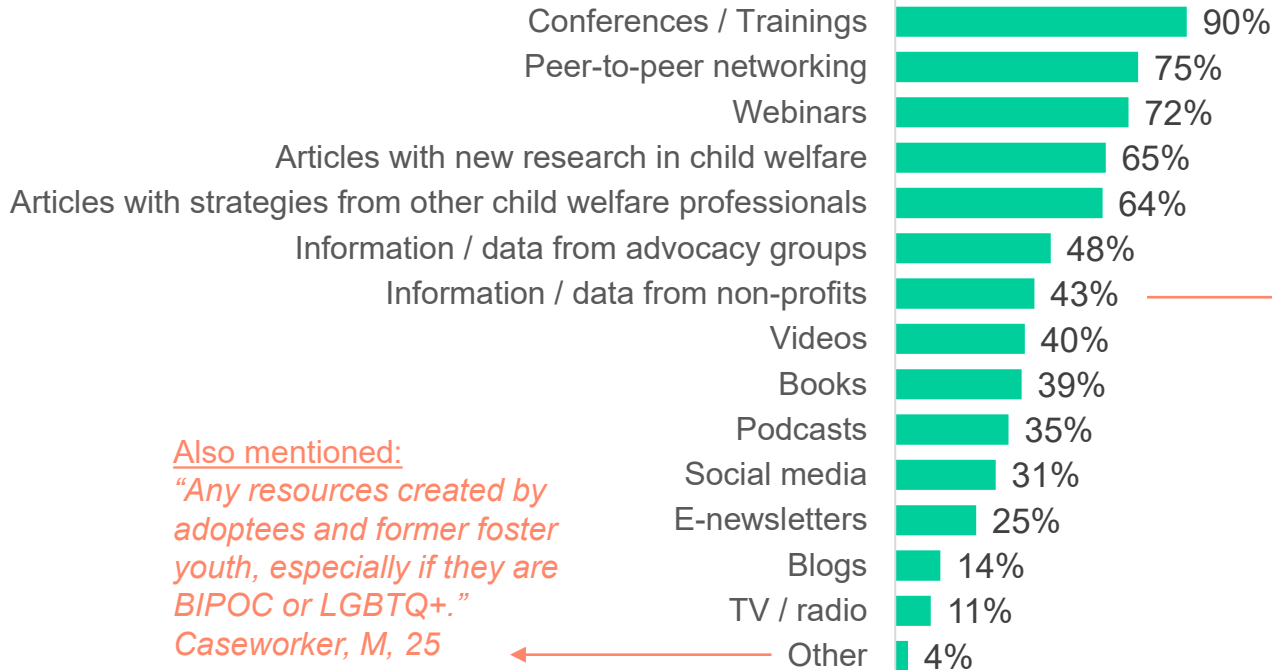


Younger professionals (those 18-40, 49%) are significantly more likely than their older counterparts to say infographics or other stat-based messages resonate with them. Those 41-54, 37% Those 55+, 38%



Resources such as trainings/conferences, peer to peer networking, and webinars are most valuable to this audience’s professional learning.

Types Of Resources Most Valuable To Professional Learning



Those who put more focus on aging out of the system (59%) are significantly more likely than those who focus on permanency (41%) to find information/data/ from non-profits valuable to their professional learning.

Also mentioned:
“Any resources created by adoptees and former foster youth, especially if they are BIPOC or LGBTQ+.”
Caseworker, M, 25

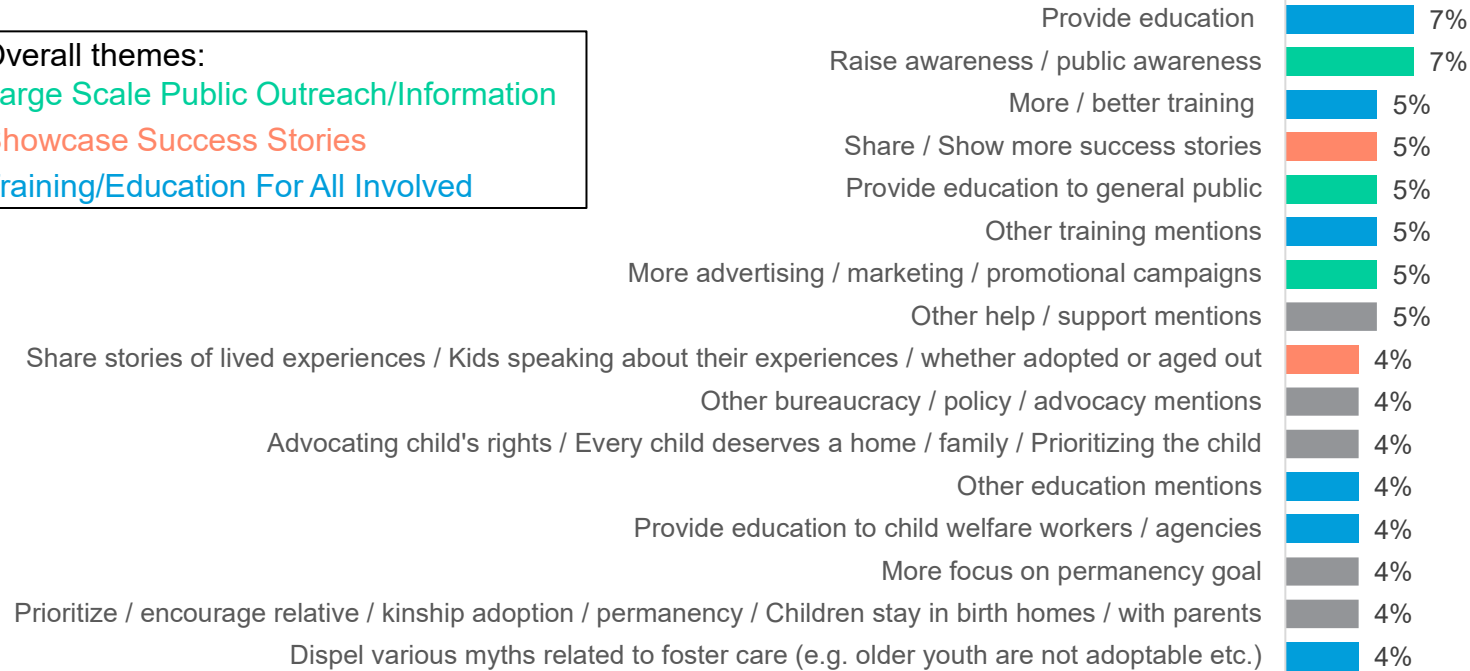
Q600 Which of the following resources, if any, do you find valuable to your professional learning?



The general public needs to be better educated about the foster care system, and kids in need, in order to stem real change.

How To Increase Belief That Permanency Is Important For All Children

Overall themes:
 Large Scale Public Outreach/Information
 Showcase Success Stories
 Training/Education For All Involved



Only mentions receiving 4%+ are shown



To increase perception of permanency importance, mass public outreach, ideally through success stories is needed.

Better education/training for welfare professionals will also increase this perception.

Large Scale Public Outreach/Information

“Advertising campaigns, more awareness of the number of children in the system.”

CASA Nonprofit Executive Director, W, 39

“Need to change perception: *We are looking for families for children not children for families.*

Community Coordinator, W, 61

“More public education of the risks and harms that come from a youth never achieving permanency and aging out.”

CASA/Guardian ad Litem, M, 51

Showcase Success Stories

“Success stories of previous foster care children that obtained legal permanency.

Case Worker, W, 30

“Highlight stories of families who have adopted the unadoptable children.”

WWK Recruiter/Supervisor, W, 29

“Sharing the child's story through social media.”

Youth Justice Supervisor, M, 57

Hearing from youth about their lived experience, both those who have permanency and those who do not.

Adoption/Permanency Policy and Consultant, W, 78

Training/Education For All Involved

“Training and education with workers, foster parents, and court officials.

WWK Recruiter/Supervisor, W, 40

“Some workers believe that allowing kids to age out provides them more financial and college benefits after age 18 than permanency does (not true). There is a lot of conflicting information provided and workers' jobs are compartmentalized.

Case Worker, W, 57

“Community education. Agency education. Social Worker education.”

Case Worker, M, 52