



## Star View Children and Family Services

### ★TEAMMATES Wraparound Family Search and Engagement★

**BRIEF REPORT** from the Department of Research and Program Practices

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At the end of 2011, Star View TEAMMATES Wraparound started a special program called Family Search and Engagement (FSE). Many children served by TEAMMATES have contact with only a few biological family members. Without the comfort of family, children experience deep fear and loneliness; and, without the anchor of family, children can drift toward negative paths, including criminality and drug addiction. The FSE coordinator searches for undiscovered family members and reconnects the child with family. Family and child together are then supported to develop bonds that can help to prevent such negative outcomes. This **BRIEF REPORT** provides an overview of the 98 children and youth served by our Family Search and Engagement (FSE) efforts from 2013 on, when we systematized data collection, and highlights outcomes of the 27 children who exited from that time to the present.

#### ***Children, Youth and their Families***

When starting FSE children typically (median) had connections with three members of their biological family. Over 20% had a connection with no family members. The median age at entry into the program was about 14 years; 32% of the children were 11 years and under, 34% were between 12 and 15 years, and 32% were 16 years and over (transitional age youth or TAY). Most were African American (66%), others were Latino (32%) or Caucasian (2%). 72% of the children and youth were male and 28% female.

***Criteria for the FSE Program*** (any of the following):

- Clients in extended foster care without a permanency plan
- TAY in emancipation process with few or no family connections
- Clients who lost a family member or guardian placement, or where their placement is unstable
- Clients with a failed adoption (rare)

Most children and youth in the FSE program were court dependents at some time. Of those who were still in foster care (47%), 83% of cases were continuing to work toward reunification, while in 17% of cases reunification had failed. For those for whom reunification had failed, 43% were working on emancipation, while the remaining were exploring other permanency plans.

Like all children and youth in TEAMMATES, FSE children and youth have behavioral issues that affect their functioning at home and their transition to independent life as an adult. Behavioral risks such as physical aggression toward others (52% of youth), dangerous impulsivity (53%), substance use (16%) and even gang-involvement (5%) were present. Many children and youth in the FSE program also struggled with functioning at school (65%).

#### ***The Program***

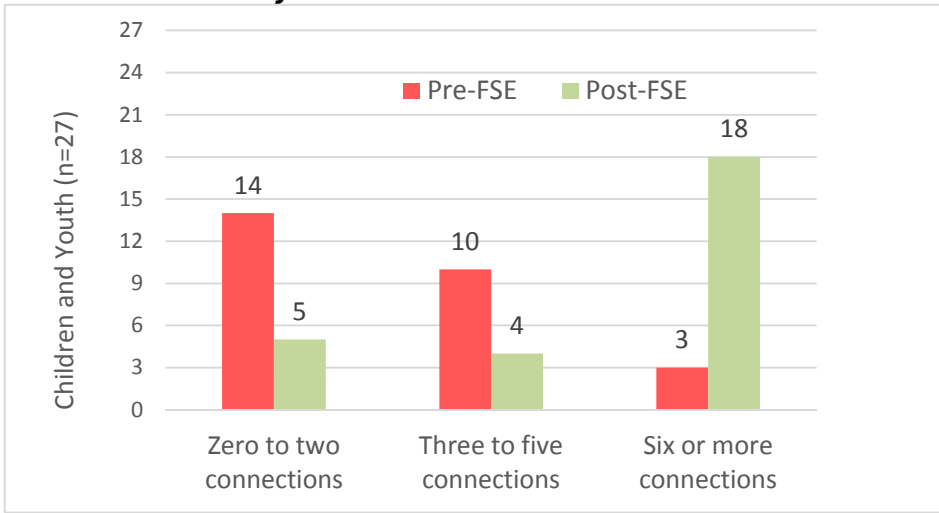
##### ***Steps of the Family Search and Engagement Process:***

The FSE process follows six steps -- Engagement, Discovery, Decision Making, Planning, Evaluation, and Follow-on Support -- to maximize the chances of connecting youth with lasting and appropriate family relationships.

#### ***Family Search and Engagement Works!***

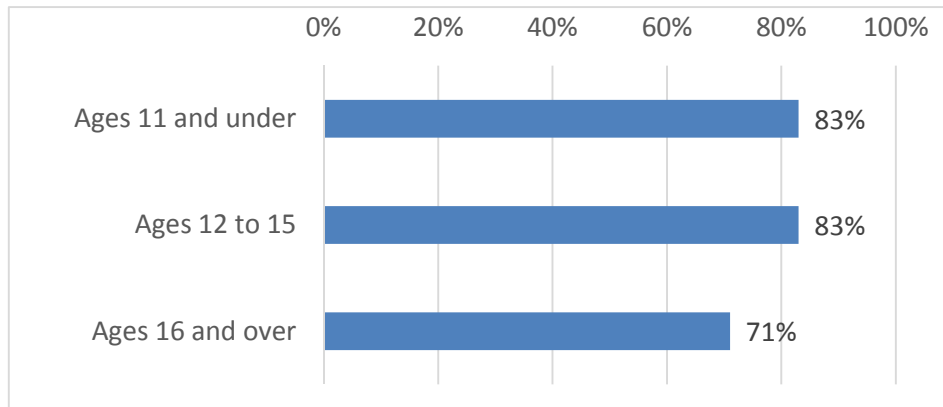
- **FSE is successful at reconnecting children and youth with their families.** Children and youth typically started with connections to three family members; through the FSE process, they entered into relationships with 10 additional family members on average! Of the children and youth who exited the program from 2013 on (n=27), 79% successfully formed new connections to family.

**Children and youth discharged from FSE (n=27): Number of family connections before and after FSE**



- **TAY, youth and young children all benefit!** Children and youths of all ages were successfully connected to family members. This outcome is due in part to the individual attention given to each family and child or youth. Through the FSE process, we find ways to engage disconnected family members, using innovative approaches such as video-taped messages by family and youth to foster communication.

**Percent FSE children and youth with new family connections by age (n=26)**



- **Family Reunification was achieved in two cases!** Two children have found permanent homes with family thanks to the new connections formed in the FSE program.

**Case Study: D, age 19**

D and his mother fled from Hurricane Katrina in 2005, leaving Louisiana when he was 10 years old. While they were living out of state, his mother passed away. D was placed in foster care. He had no connection with his family in New Orleans.

No placement lasted long. D became involved in drug use and gangs. Then he entered Star View TEAMMATES Wraparound, where he learned that he could do better. However he still missed a sense of belonging.

**In his words:**

*“When I was in Cali, I be friends with a lot of people and call them my family.... But at the end of the day they all go back to their real families.... I just be left out in the cold.*

*When I was in a group home or a foster home, I didn't care about anything. I was just trying to survive. You're in that shell all day.”*  
 - D, age 19, personal video log

D entered the FSE program. Soon, his family from New Orleans was found (37 members) and contact was made. They were willing to meet D and the FSE coordinator, and the FSE program funded the travel. D made a moving video diary of the time leading up to his journey and during his visit home.

*“At first, landing in New Orleans, it seemed like a dream.... When I first seen my auntie – back then I was just a little boy – now I am bigger than her! My little brother, he looks up to me. I like that. When I seen him, I was proud of him that he made it so far without me. It ain't going to be like that no more, I am on him now.*

*I got this little fire in my heart of happiness or joy.... I used to always chase that feeling of family in my heart. Now it's real. To me family is everything.*

*They still love me. That was just crazy to me, how much they love me! That motivates me to do more, to make them happy by... well, by making it.”*

D has turned nineteen and is working toward emancipation. When he is able, he plans to move to New Orleans so he can be close to the family he has missed all those years.