ACF PERFORMANCE PROGRESS REPORT
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11. Other Attachments *(attach other documents as needed or as instructed by the awarding Federal Agency)*

12. Certification: I certify to the best of my knowledge and belief that this report is correct and complete for performance of activities for the purposes set forth in the award documents.

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12b. Signature of Authorized Certifying Official	12e. Date Report Submitted *(Month, Day, Year)* December 29, 2010
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Department of Health and Human Services

Children's Bureau

Discretionary Grants Program

FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

The New York Council On Adoptable Children

THE ROAD/EL CAMINO

Project/Grant Period: 9/30/2005 through 9/30/2010

Federal Grant Number: 90CO1016

DUNS: 08-258-6322

EIN: 23-7269678

Recipient Organization:

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Children's Bureau Discretionary Grants Program
Final Evaluation Report

The New York Council On Adoptable Children
THE ROAD/EL CAMINO

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Children's Bureau Discretionary Grants Program
Final Evaluation Report

The New York Council On Adoptable Children
THE ROAD/EL CAMINO

Part I: Executive Summary

The New York Council On Adoptable Children (COAC), a 40-year-old adoption specialty organization, successfully sought the Administration for Children and Families'(ACF) support to test a new program model designed to improve the permanency outcomes of youth age 12 and over residing in the custody of the New York City foster care system. With ACF's support, COAC successfully launched The ROAD/El Camino (Realizing Open Adoption Dreams/El Camino Hacia Un Futuro Mejor) with the goal of serving 96 youth and their biological, kinship and adoptive families during the five year grant period.

During the last five years, The ROAD/El Camino has launched and fine-tuned a model of open adoption that successfully facilitates permanency planning for youth ages 12 and over, a youth demographic that has traditionally been considered "hard-to-place." The ROAD's design has been informed since its inception by a number of important considerations, key among them:

- Knowledge of attachment/separation/loss issues related to the foster care/adoption youth population, especially as these issues pertain to older adolescents;

- Knowledge of family/cultural issues in African American and Hispanic communities, which is of critical importance considering that the overwhelming majority of children in New York City's foster care system are African American and Hispanic;

- An unyielding belief that it is never too late for a child to set off on a journey that will result in a permanent adoptive home;

- A thorough understanding of the special nature of open adoption;

- The need for well-trained, bilingual/bicultural staff who firmly buy into the core tenet of the program: that older adolescents can be successfully matched with loving adoptive families; and

- A deep appreciation of the challenges and benefits that pertain to the open adoption of older adolescents as a permanency solution.

As such, The ROAD has succeeded beyond expectations at ending a large number of foster care caseworkers' misconceptions regarding the "adoptability" of hard-to-place youth; engaging the youth themselves in the permanency planning process; providing intensive recruitment and

training to potential adoptive families; supporting the adoptive families before and after placement; and meeting the targets outlined in the proposal.

The ROAD has been staffed primarily by a Project Director, a Youth Services Coordinator and a Youth Services Assistant, and has received support from other established COAC staff such as the Program Director over Adoption Programs and the Executive Director. In addition, an External Evaluator was hired to evaluate the effectiveness of the program so as to inform the child welfare community of practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. Since the staff's qualifications and experience were instrumental to the success of the project, we have included job descriptions for the various positions in Appendix B

The success of The ROAD is due in large part to the following program activities:

1. Conducting outreach, initiating, establishing, and maintaining relationships with staff from the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and from its contract foster care agencies serving youth targeted by the Project, as well as with other partner agencies in the community (e.g., "independent living" programs throughout the city that teach life skills to youths who will soon "age out" of the foster care system).

2. Recruiting, enrolling, and providing adoption-related case management to 232 youth who were at-risk of aging out of the foster care system without permanency plans. This involved:

    a. working with youths on a one-to-one basis to educate them about the benefits of open adoption;
    b. providing examples of successful adoptions for older youths and explaining how family connections can be maintained even after one is adopted;
    c. working with the youth to map out their family and non-family connections/networks;
    d. examining case records to identify persons who could serve as a permanent resource for the youth;
    e. obtaining support from the youth for the renewed effort to find a permanent adoptive family;
    f. making family matches and providing intensive, ongoing support to ensure the success of these matches; and
    g. working closely with the youth's agency-based caseworkers in order to measure progress and solve problems (these services were in place until the transfer of the family's case to the case planning agency).

3. Recruiting, enrolling, and providing adoption-related case management to the birth families of these youth and to prospective adoptive families. This involved:

    a. connecting with the youth's birth parents and/or other family members, kin, extended family or other significant adults;

b. working closely with COAC's successful Virginia Butler Family Recruitment Program (VBFRP) program to recruit, prepare, and support prospective adoptive parents interested in adopting older youth in foster care;
c. co-conducting orientations with VBFRP staff (in both English and Spanish) for prospective adoptive parents, focusing on the need for homes for youths and the need for families willing to keep open birth family connections;
d. preparing prospective adoptive families through the Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP) Program and helping them complete home studies;
e. providing special training for prospective adoptive parents regarding the benefits and challenges associated with open adoption and adoptions of older adolescents;
f. teaching prospective adoptive parents about negotiation and communication skills vis-à-vis birth parents;
g. participating in ACS's Recruitment Matching Meetings;
h. exploring matches between the family and the pool of youth in the target population and making appropriate matches;
i. providing intensive, ongoing support to ensure the success of these matches; and
j. working closely with the youth's agency-based caseworkers in order to measure progress and solve problems.

4. Collaborating closely with COAC's New York City Adoption Resource Center (NYCARC) after matches were made to support the cohort of adoptive families.

5. Coordinating with directors of other COAC programs [Virginia Butler Family Recruitment Program (VBFRP), formerly Every Child Counts or ECC, and NYCARC] to ensure cross-referrals, minimize duplication of services, and maintain ongoing collaborative efforts.

At the conclusion of the funding period, The ROAD reached the following milestones:

a. COAC collaborated with 55 agencies throughout the Metropolitan New York City Area; 36 of these were foster care agencies and two of them government partners (the New York City Administration for Children and Families and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services);

b. 642 individuals/families were oriented on the benefits of open adoptions of older adolescents;

c. 277 individuals/families were MAPP certified;

d. 232 youth were served;

e. 149 matches were completed; and

f. 85% of the matches (n=126) resulted in an actual placement; the target outlined in the proposal was 96, so we exceeded our target by 30 youth.

Two major, consistent challenges encountered by The ROAD were:

- Availability and access to youth records. Even when issues of confidentially and access were resolved, youth records were often incomplete, especially with regard to school and medical records. As a result, it was often difficult to fully prepare prospective adoptive families for the challenges ahead. Addressing this issue involved constant communication with multiple providers and securing access to the foster care system's database, which was difficult since The ROAD's caseworkers were not "officially" the youth's caseworkers. Close collaboration with the New York City Administration for Children's Services was integral to the success of The ROAD. Similar projects must partner with their local child welfare providers.

- Inability to provide services during the period between the initial match and the finalization of the adoption. The foster care agencies were often unable to provide appropriate comprehensive services to maintain placements, and The ROAD did not have adequate resources to monitor the match and implement support services once the child was placed in the home. As a result, matches often encountered challenges and even disrupted due to breakdowns in communication, generational gaps, and developmental disabilities. Again, close, ongoing case management and support through another COAC program (the New York City Adoption Resource Center or NYCARC) enabled The ROAD's staff to identify and address many post-placement issues before the matches' disrupted. Similar projects must budget for provision of services in the post-match/pre-adoption period.

In conclusion, The ROAD/El Camino has successfully demonstrated that older youth in the foster care system can attain permanency placement via open adoptions, ensuring continuity with their biological families and forging strong, healthy new bonds that will enable them to become successful adults.

Children's Bureau Discretionary Grants Program
Final Evaluation Report

The New York Council On Adoptable Children
THE ROAD/EL CAMINO

Part II: Introduction and Overview

Overview of the community, population and problem

Description of the community. The New York Council On Adoptable Children (COAC) is located in New York City, the most populous city in the United States. The city's 2009 estimated population was approximately 8.4 million, making it also the most densely populated major city in the United States. New York City is also the seat of the New York metropolitan area, one of the most populous metropolitan areas in the world. New York City has a significant impact on global commerce, finance, media, culture, art, fashion, research, education, entertainment, and international affairs. New York City consists of five boroughs: The Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, Queens, and Staten Island.

As with all large cities, life in New York City can be stressful. The extremely high cost of living, incredibly fast pace, urban living conditions, and multitude of psychosocial stressors, can and often do exact a toll on many families, especially those residing in the inner city. The New York City child welfare population is one of the largest in the country. According to City of New York's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) there are currently approximately 16,000 children in foster care in New York City. A report created for COAC by ACS shows that 1,005 of these are children 12 years of age and older who are freed for adoption as of December 20, 2010. The state's Child Case Review Service System (CCRS) database shows that 622 of these children have a goal of Adoption, 293 have a goal of Independent Living, and 90 have "other" goals. Table 1 (below) shows a further breakdown. These numbers show a decrease in the number of older youth without a goal of adoption since The ROAD's inception. For instance, in 2005, the number of children ages 12 and over freed for adoption was 1,856; 1,143 had the Permanency Planning Goal (PPG) of Adoption; 653 had the goal of independent living and 60 had the goal of other. While we cannot attribute these changes to The ROAD, we are nonetheless certain that our program has contributed to this improved situation.

Table 1: Characteristics of Children Ages 12 and Older in Foster Care in NYC (2010)

Children ages 12 and older freed for adoption:	1,005	
With Permanency Planning Goal (PPG) of Adoption	622	
With PPG of Independent Living	293	
With PPGs of "other"	90	
With PPG of Adoption and placed with adoptive resource	432	
With PPG of Adoption and NOT placed with adoptive resource	190	
Black/African American	544	54.1%

Hispanic	237	24.6%
White/Caucasian	26	2.6%
No/Other ethnicities	198	19.7%

Older youth in foster care are an especially vulnerable population, with research showing that within 12 to 18 months after aging out of foster care without permanent placement many of these youth are involved with the criminal justice system or dealing with unplanned pregnancies. However, they have traditionally been considered "hard-to-place." Much of this difficulty lies in erroneous beliefs on the part of case workers (e.g., "older youth don't want to be adopted", or "adoptive parents only want infants"); misperceptions on the part of the youth themselves about adoption (e.g., "if I agree I'm betraying my biological family" or "nobody wants an older kid"); lack of information on the part of prospective adoptive parents about the benefits and challenges associated with adopting an older child; and lack of information and misinformation on the part of case workers, youth, and prospective adoptive families regarding open adoptions.

The ROAD/El Camino enabled ACF to develop and implement a new adoption reform strategy that features strong cross-agency collaborations designed to overcome these barriers to open adoption, with a particular focus on youth ages 12 and over that are legally free for adoption and have goals of: Independent Living; Adoption, but with no identified adoptive family; or Adoption, already been placed with an adoptive family.

Description of Organization. Founded in 1970 on the belief that every child deserves such a family, the New York Council on Adoptable Children (COAC) is an adoption services agency whose mission is to insure that legally freed older and special needs children in the New York City foster care system, and children affected by HIV/AIDS, are placed with permanent, loving and nurturing families. COAC is recognized as a national leader in the adoption field.

COAC has developed and maintained several highly successful programs which were instrumental to the success of The ROAD/El Camino. These include:

- The New York City Adoption Resource Center (NYCARC), which provides a host of services to help adoptive families with special needs children adjust and remain intact.

- The Kinship Connections Program, which helps adoptive and kinship families headed by grandparents and other older adults to manage the challenges encountered by caring for children with special needs.

- The Family Circle of Support, which helps parents with HIV/AIDS create permanency plans for their children's future care, including stand-by guardianship arrangements with relatives or friends to provide care for their children when they are no longer able to do so directly. Supportive counseling and legal services are also made available to family members of the Family Circle of Support clients.

Description of the children and/or families in the project. When COAC was founded in 1970, children over the age of two were seen as unadoptable. COAC has been challenging that notion ever since. One of the key goals of The ROAD was to show that children 12 and older can, in fact, be matched with loving adoptive families. When the initial proposal was written, there were 1,856 children ages 12 and older who were freed for adoption in the New York City foster care system. Out of those children, 1,143 had a goal of adoption, 653 had a goal of independent living, and 60 had other goals. Our target population for The ROAD came from the first two groups.

As for the prospective adoptive families, the families recruited through COAC's Virginia Butler Family Recruitment Program (VBFRP), formerly known as Every Child Counts, came from the five boroughs of New York City and the surrounding counties (Nassau, Suffolk and Westchester). These families included single parents, families with biological children, and families that had previously fostered and adopted. The families came from different ethnic and racial backgrounds and a broad age spectrum. All families fulfilled the requirements set forth in the New York City regulations to foster and/or adopt a child from the New York City foster care system. Information about The ROAD clients was presented to these families during training and matching meetings.

At the conclusion of the funding period, The ROAD reached the following milestones:

1. COAC collaborated with 55 agencies throughout the Metropolitan New York City Area; 36 of these were foster care agencies and two of them government partners (the New York City Administration for Children and Families, and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services);

2. 642 individuals/families were oriented on the benefits of open adoptions of older adolescents;

3. 277 individuals/families were MAPP certified;

4. 232 youth were served;

5. 149 matches were completed; and

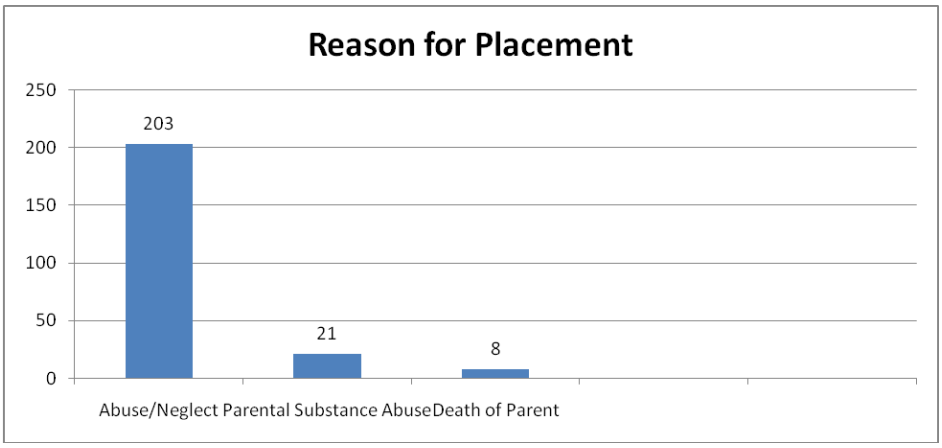
6. 85% of the matches (n=126) resulted in an actual placement; the target outlined in the proposal was 96, so we exceeded our target by 30 youth.

The summary characteristics of the youth served since The ROAD's inception are as follows:

1. 232 youth were served at the conclusion of the project.

2. Three quarters (n=174, 75%) were referred by foster care agencies, while 50 (21.6%) were referred to COAC directly from ACS; 8 (3.4%) were referred from other sources.

3. Most were placed in foster care due to abuse and/or neglect (n=203, 87.5%). Other reasons for placement included parental substance abuse (n=21, 9.1%) and death of parent or caregiver (n=8, 3.4%). From case notes and other documents and conversations with the youth, parental substance abuse played a role in the majority of the placements (i.e., it was the key reason behind the abuse and/or neglect), but it was not always identified as the "reason for placement".



4. Previous Placement: Data on previous placement was available for a third (n=75, 32.3%) of the youth. Of these, most (n=64, 27.6%) were previously in a foster home and 11 (4.7%) were previously in residential placement.

5. Age: the youth ranged in age from 6 to 23 years old, with a mean age of 16 and a median age of 17. The modal age was also 17.

6. Gender: 156 males (67.2%) and 76 females (32.8%).

7. Place of Birth: almost all (n=217, 93.5%) were born in New York State.

8. Forty-five of the 232 youth (19.4%) had an ACS goal of Independent Living; 91 (39.2%) a goal of Adoption, but no family identified yet; and 96 (41.4) were Already in Placement.

9. Race/Ethnicity: More than half of the youth (n=126, 54.3%) were African American, while just over a quarter (n=64, 27.6%) were Hispanic, consistent with the overall demographics of youth in New York City's foster care system. Eight youth were White, Non-Hispanic, 3 Asian, and 6 Bi-Racial. Race data was missing for 25 (10.7%) of the youth; these were most likely minority youth based on other indicators.

10. Two-thirds of the youth (n=149, 64.2%) have no known siblings, meaning siblings could not be identified from existing records or the youth had no knowledge of siblings. For those with known siblings, the number of siblings ranges from 1 to 10. Forty-eight (20.7%) of the youth have between 1 and 3 siblings; 23 (9.9%) between 4 and 6 siblings; and 12 (5.2%) have 7 to 10 siblings.

To amplify the quantitative information collected, we included a qualitative data collection approach via two focus groups with youth. The first focus group was comprised of youth who had completed the program or were at the end of their participation (that is, they had been adopted or were with the family that would be adopting them). The second focus group included youth that had recently started in the program or were mid-way through their participation. Nine youth participated, ranging in age from 13 to 21. Four youth were in the first group and five in the second group. Two females—a 13- and 21-year-old—were in the first group.

A content analysis of the focus groups transcripts revealed several important themes. Below we report these themes and briefly discuss their implications.

1. *Learning about The ROAD*. Youth learned of the program through their foster care agency caseworkers and there was great variability in what they were initially told, other than being told that it would help with finding an adoptive family. Most youth were enthusiastic about participating, however, regardless of what they were initially told or by whom. Some youth did express anxiety and reluctance. In the future, attention must be given to insuring that youth learn about these services project in a consistent manner. This would prevent variability in messages delivered and could reduce any anxiety or reluctance that youth might feel initially.

2. *Youth knowledge and feelings about open adoption*. Youth also learned about the term "open adoption" initially from their caseworkers. Although it was initially a new term for them, they quickly came to understand its meaning and unanimously expressed some initial ambivalence and later positive feelings about open adoptions. Some youth expressed the concern that sometimes the biological family had issues with the adoption process and tried to talk them out of it. Teaching youth about the terminology of the activity should be introduced as early as possible. This will result in a better informed participant who could then consider the possibilities of open adoption by understanding what it means. Also, caseworkers can help youth during this period by understanding and helping them deal with the push and pull of the two families.

3. *Participation in the program*. Without exception, the individual sessions with their The ROAD workers were the most significant program activity that youth identified. They looked forward to these meetings and used them for status updates on the progress of finding an adoptive family; to express frustration with how long it was taking; to discuss issues or mixed feelings they were experiencing or conflicts with their biological family; and to learn about other program activities. What came across from their statements was the strong "therapeutic alliance" or working relationship that they established with their workers. In general, the youth in The ROAD truly trusted and valued their workers and one came away with the impression of the fondness they felt for their workers. This finding alone is a tribute to the quality of work and the human bonds that workers and youth formed. Youth expressed frustration with the often slow pace of the process and with the scarcity of adoptive parents for older kids. Other popular activities mentioned

were television "getting to know you" spots (i.e., "Wednesday's Child"); "meet and greet" events where the youth interact with potential adoptive families; pre/post placement services (i.e., "Bridges to Health"); and Youth Speakers Bureaus.

4. *Post adoption feelings*. Some of the focus group participants who were already adopted or close to the end of the process also spoke about their feelings post-adoption. The sense of permanence—what they had long awaited—was evident in many of their comments. Youth also spoke of fears that their new adoptive parents might change, especially in the way they felt toward the youth. Another concern expressed involved loss of entitlements and other benefits. It was evident that youth, especially the older ones, have misinformation about which benefits continue post-adoption and which new benefits they are eligible for. They expressed a desire for group meetings with other youth at the end of the program or program graduates, to learn more about being on the other side.

Youth who participated in the focus groups reported in several ways that The ROAD had helped them with their feelings about adoption, in getting them placed with adoptive families, and in maintaining their sense of hope for a better future. Many of them spoke poignantly about their experiences in waiting for years to be adopted or of the attachments they had made to foster families. They confirmed the high esteem and fondness they held for their ROAD workers. Their words also conveyed the frustrations of systems of care that did not always seem caring, or of biological families that caused the youth to question the open adoption or to become ambivalent about it. What we heard in the focus groups also was that these youth had become very savvy about what they would lose in benefits and entitlements as they got older and "aged out" of the foster care system.

Several recommendations emerged from these two focus groups:

1. Youth require more information about practical matters pertaining to their adoptions, such as time-frames for their adoption or planning, and changes in benefits and entitlements.

2. Youth need specific coaching on how to discuss open adoptions with their biological and prospective adoptive families, and help negotiating appropriate boundaries with members of both their families of origin and their new adoptive families. It may be worth preparing scripts and role-playing that will empower them in the discussions with family.

3. Youth requested having "Speakers' Bureaus" where youth who have already been adopted come and share their experiences with them. These Speakers' Bureaus could be a useful tool to achieve both the transfer of timely and relevant information, and to help maintain the high hopes of youth awaiting adoptive families.

On-going, clinician-facilitated group meetings could be a great forum to help these youth express their frustrations and deal with their emotions in a productive manner. In fact, more opportunities for the kinds of discussions that were opened up by the focus groups can help achieve many of the recommendations made.

Finally, below are three excerpts from semi-annual reports that highlight some of the children enrolled in The ROAD. All names used are fictitious to protect the confidentiality of the families served.

First Excerpt. One of our proudest accomplishments this reporting period was finding a family for Julian. Julian was referred to The ROAD project by his foster care agency in August, 2008. Our Youth Services Coordinator met with Julian on a bi-weekly basis, getting to know him and getting a clearer understanding of what Julian was looking for in a family. We learned that Julian's birth mother surrendered her rights in 1996. His maternal aunt came forward as a resource for Julian. ACS certified her home as a kinship foster home. Julian lived with his aunt for two years until an incident in which he stabbed his cousin in the head with a pencil. He had previously displayed some violent and aggressive behavior and for this reason had been psychiatrically hospitalized several times. Julian was finally placed in a residential treatment facility and prescribed medication to help him maintain more appropriate behavior. With much focus and hard work, The ROAD staff identified a single parent who wanted to work with Julian. This particular parent was identified during a MAPP training session. The parent's home study was forwarded to Julian's Adoption Coordinator and was approved by his foster care agency's treatment team. After a few meetings between the foster parent and the treatment team, the opinion of the team was that the parent did not have the experience needed to be effective in handling a child with exceptional needs. The parent was not discouraged by this and wanted to mentor Julian. The treatment team not only decided against the parent being a mentor, but also suspended Julian's involvement with The ROAD. His treatment team felt that he was in an emotionally fragile state and there were too many individuals involved in his planning. We felt that Julian was in a fragile state because he had no connections, no visits and nowhere special to go for the holidays. Based on our interactions with him, we observed that he was not motivated to do anything or even wanting to get out of bed. ROAD staff started to feel defeated but decided to push forward. We decided to not close Julian's case and continued to follow up with his adoption permanency coordinator. A short time after these developments, Julian was sent to a psychiatric facility and his case was transferred to ACS. Once Julian's case was with ACS, they re-evaluated his case and the parent's home study and referred Julian's case back to The ROAD. ACS re-evaluated Julian case based on their annual updates of all children free for adoption. ACS felt that Julian would be an ideal candidate for The ROAD Project, based on our success rate in placing hard-to-place children with families. Visits between Julian and the prospective parent then began, leading to a placement.

Second Excerpt. Brad was identified by The ROAD project as a potential match for a family that had been one of our prospective adoptive families for over two years. Initially this family was only interested in adopting a baby, but after consistent education from The ROAD Staff about the benefits of adopting an older child, the family decided to give an older child an opportunity. Our attention then turned to identifying a child that met the family's criteria. The ROAD Project identified children in twenty-two different states, and Brad emerged as an ideal match. Brad is a fourteen year old child and has been in foster care since the age of eight, due to his biological mother's history of substance

abuse. Brad also has a 9 year old sister who was adopted, but the family that adopted his sister was unwilling to adopt Brad, due to his past sexualized behaviors. The ROAD identified Brad through the Connecticut Department of Children and Family Services (CDCFS) website, and we immediately contacted CDCFS to inquire about Brad. We were provided the e-mail address for the adoption recruiter that was recruiting families for Brad. Two weeks later, we received a call from the recruiter, stating that Brad was currently being matched with a family from Connecticut and that his profile was added to the website by mistake. The week after that, The ROAD received a call from Brad's recruiter stating that the match had failed, and they were currently looking for families for him. We immediately forwarded the home study of the family we had been working with. A match was made, visits begun, and Brad finally moved in with his new family on the 30th of September 2010. This is a perfect example of a family that was adamant on adopting an infant, and with education and persistence opened their home to an older child instead.

Third Excerpt. Alexandra, a 12-year-old young lady of Russian background, was born in New York City, but when she was two months old her mother was deported to Russia and took Alexandra with her. Alexandra's mother became ill and passed away, and eventually her maternal grandparents were unable to continue providing for her and had no other option than to place her in an orphanage. She had spent four years in this orphanage when, during an audit, the Russian government became aware that she was a US citizen by birth. They contacted the US Embassy, which contacted the US State Department, and the State Department contacted ACS as Alexandra was born in New York City. ACS retrieved Alexandra from Russia and placed her in foster care. The case planning agency was having difficulty in finding an appropriate permanency resource for Alexandra due to her traumatic experience in the orphanage. The ROAD was contacted and within a couple of days a match was identified for Alexandra. After several pre-placement visits, Alexandra was placed with her adoptive family in September 2007.

Description of Problem Being Addressed. Various barriers to the adoption of older children are reflected in the data reported in the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), a system that collects case level information on all children in foster care for whom State child welfare agencies have responsibility for placement, care or supervision, and on children who are adopted under the auspices of the State's public child welfare agency. These barriers include:

1. Insufficient exploration with youth of the long-term implications of adoption versus Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) so they can be involved in an informed, decision-making process about future plans for their life;

2. The level of difficulty perceived by some child welfare professionals and court personnel in finding an adoptive home for youth; and

3. Assumptions made by caseworkers, attorneys and judges that youth don't want to be adopted, that no one is interested in adopting them, and that adoptive placements of teens are unsuccessful.

As a result of these barriers, youth age out of foster care without families they can turn to once they are discharged from the foster care system. The ROAD/El Camino was created to address these barriers to adoption of youth directly though its approach to engaging youth and caseworkers. The approaches and services that COAC designed to service the target population was supported by the literature, as outlined in the proposal itself.

Overview of Program Model

During the last five years, The ROAD/El Camino has launched and fine-tuned a model of open adoption that successfully facilitates permanency planning for youth ages 12 and over, a youth demographic that has traditionally been considered "hard-to-place." The ROAD's design has been informed since its inception by a number of important considerations, key among them:

1. Knowledge of attachment/separation/loss issues related to the foster care/adoption youth population, especially as these issues pertain to older adolescents;

2. Knowledge of family/cultural issues in African American and Hispanic communities, which is of critical importance considering that the overwhelming majority of children in New York City's foster care system are African American and Hispanic;

3. An unyielding belief that it is never too late for a child to set off on a journey that will result in a permanent adoptive home;

4. A thorough understanding of the special nature of open adoptions;

5. The need for well-trained, bilingual/bicultural staff who firmly buy into the core tenet of the program: that older adolescents can be successfully matched with loving adoptive families; and

6. A deep appreciation of the challenges and benefits that pertain to the open adoption of older adolescents as a permanency solution.

As such, The ROAD has succeeded beyond expectations at ending foster care caseworkers' misconceptions regarding the "adoptability" of hard-to-place youth; engaging the youth themselves in the permanency planning process; providing intensive recruitment and training to potential adoptive families; supporting the adoptive families before and after placement; and meeting the targets outlined in the proposal.

The ROAD has been staffed primarily by a Project Director, a Youth Services Coordinator and a Youth Services Assistant, and has received support from other established COAC staff such as the Program Director over Adoption Programs and the Executive Director. In addition, an

External Evaluator was hired to evaluate the effectiveness of the program so as to inform the child welfare community of practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. Since the staff's qualifications and experience were instrumental to the success of the project, we have included job descriptions for the various positions in the appendix.

Project's specific goals, activities/interventions and outcomes

The ROAD was created to serve youth and their biological, kinship and adoptive families. Specifically, the major goals of the program were to place 96 "hard-to-place" youth in loving, stable adoptive homes through open adoptions, and to show that these homes could indeed be found. The idea of open adoption was incorporated into COAC's outreach and training methods to ensure more stable placements. The rationale for open adoption is for important relationships with the biological family to continue even after adoption. While a child may have been removed from the birth family, it does not mean that all relationships should be severed. In fact, open adoption decreases the questioning adolescents may have later in life about their past. For adopted adolescents, these questions are compounded if they have no connection to their birth families. By not knowing anything about their past, these adolescents may seek to find out information and may resent their adopted parents for severing vital ties.

There were different methods used to achieve these goals. Once The ROAD was established, the partnership between The ROAD and ACS became fundamentally strong because of the common goal of preventing youth from aging out of foster care without permanent family arrangements. The support of ACS was essential to get the project started. A letter was written from ACS on behalf of The ROAD introducing the program to agencies and describing how The ROAD could assist agencies in finding families for children 12 and older, legally freed for adoption, and with goals of independent living or adoption. Outreach continued through presentations by ROAD staff to dozens of foster care and other agencies throughout New York City, so The ROAD's goals and procedures could be understood. Once children were referred to The ROAD, case mining or a thorough review of case materials was conducted to identify any possible planning resource. Appointments were set up with the youth in order to start The ROAD process and if successful, one on one counseling with the teen commenced soon thereafter. (See Appendix A for a copy of the Logic Model.)

Working with the Youth

Table 2 (below) summarizes the process followed by The ROAD, and a more detailed discussion of these steps follows.

Table 2: Summary of Process

Step	Content
1	Obtain background information about youth.
2	Establish relationship with Caseworker.
3	Initial visit with youth.
4	Develop and strengthen relationship with youth.
5	Identify the right time to speak about adoption.

6	Discuss benefits of adoption and identify potential resources.
7	Continuous follow-up with youth and Caseworker.
8	Maintain the interest of the potential match family.
9	Disclosure meeting.
10	Implementation of services (i.e., match).

Detailed Discussion of Process

Step 1: Background Information. We requested a picture, psycho-social, and some documentation regarding current functioning and likes and dislikes of the child. This information provided us with the opportunity to learn about the child and to strategize on how to maximize the initial contact. This initial contact was critical, because it is where the child developed the first impression of The ROAD staff member and in this age range, first impressions are crucial and difficult to change.

Step 2: Creating a relationship with the case worker. The ROAD staff contacted the child's agency worker the day before a visit was scheduled, to remind the worker of the visit and confirm the child's availability. During this step, we reiterated to the worker the role we would be playing in the process. It was important to assure the worker that we were not there to evaluate his/her performance or to take control of the youth's case. This also gave The ROAD staff the opportunity to begin to establish a positive working relationship with the agency worker. During this stage we got the particulars about the case and updates about any changes.

Step 3: The initial visit with the youth. During the first visit between the youth and The ROAD staff nothing about adoption was mentioned. This initial meeting was strictly a "getting to know you" meeting, and an opportunity for The ROAD worker to make a good impression on the child and begin to earn his/her trust. The ROAD worker talked with the child about the child's interests to create a level of comfort which would be essential as the relationship took shape. Once a common interest was identified the worker had a foundation to build a relationship. NOTE: all initial visits were conducted in a public area. Children in care often have histories of serious neglect and/or abuse and difficulty trusting adults. Until the youth gains a sense of who the worker is and the worker's reason for interacting with them, it is best to meet in a public arena.

Step 4: Developing & Strengthening the Relationship. Once the initial visit was completed with the child, The ROAD staff contacted the agency worker to update our involvement in the case, strengthen their role as the case planner, and seek further guidance on any areas that may trigger a strong or negative response in the child. During the next visit with the child, we usually identified one positive thing about the initial visit and followed-up on anything that was shared by the child.

Step 5: Identifying the level of comfort (ability to open up and speak freely). The ROAD Staff had to be able to identify the appropriate time to discuss adoption; define what open adoption is; how it would affect the child and discuss other factors which could help the child come to a decision. This timing was critical.

Step 6: Benefits of adoption/identifying an adoption resource. During this period we discussed with the youth the benefits of adoption. For instance, The ROAD worker might have provided the youth with examples of how adoption would benefit and enhance their current life situation. Some examples of questions posed by ROAD staff to encourage discussions are:

a. Why are you in the foster care system?
b. When did you come into care?
c. What do you see as an impediment towards being adopted?
d. Who do you see as a viable resource that would be willing to adopt you, and is it realistic?
e. Where would you like to live?
f. How do you feel about adoption in general?

Should a resource be identified by the child, we shared this information with the agency worker to see if this was in fact a possible resource. If there was no resource, then we searched through the pool of prospective adoptive families of COAC's Virginia Butler Family Recruitment Program (VBFRP), to see if there was a family that met the criteria of what the child would like as a family.

Step 7: Follow-Up. It was extremely important to follow-up with the worker and especially the child to make sure they were involved in every step of the decision making process. This also ensured a level of trust. These youth have a history of being disappointed by the adults in their lives, so it was critical that the worker followed through as planned.

Step 8: Keeping the families' interest. Once a possible match between a child and family was made (see below for the process of recruiting and working with prospective adoptive families), it was extremely important that the worker always remain in a professional, empathic, and understanding role, and to be polite to the family even if they became difficult. The ROAD worker checked in on a weekly basis at the minimum, to keep the family's interest going. The worker also accentuated the positive things the child was doing, while at the same time being honest about the challenges a particular child had and the resources available to help the child and the family.

Step 9: Disclosure Meeting. At the disclosure meeting, the family received full details of the child's background and current functioning. This meeting was usually when the family either opted out of pursuing adoption of the child or decided to continue forging ahead. We encouraged both agency staff and the family to be as honest as possible because that would help identify what resources would be needed to lead to a sustained match.

Step 10: Implementation of services: This is when we spoke with the family to identify any additional services they felt they might need and we discussed any findings with the case worker.

Working with Prospective Adoptive Families

Recruitment of prospective adoptive families for the youth was conducted by ROAD staff and COAC's Virginia Butler Family Recruitment Program (VBFRP) staff. General descriptions of

the children were provided as well as information about open adoption. Orientation and MAPP (Model Approaches to Partnership in Parenting) training was provided to prospective families in accordance to the New York City certification process. MAPP is an intensive 30 hour training in which participants delve into issues they potentially would deal with when having children from the foster care system. The MAPP approach to foster parenting encourages open communication and trust among foster families, adoptive families, birth families and casework staff.
The MAPP program examines 12 criteria or skills necessary for successful foster/adoptive parenting. Through role-playing, personal profiles, and other techniques, the home finder and the applicant make mutual decisions about foster parenting.

Objectives of the training for prospective foster and adoptive parents are:

- Learning what to expect and what services are available.
- Looking at one's own strengths and needs.
- Developing skills in giving love and attention to a troubled child.
- Learning about stages of child development.
- Helping children manage behavior.
- Understanding the roles and responsibilities of teamwork.
- Helping foster parents develop a good understanding of the child's parents.
- Learn about the different stages of loss and grief.

Once the families were MAPP certified (which includes background criminal, neglect and abuse checks, medical recommendations, references and a home study, among other requirements), the certified families were invited to caseworker dialogue meetings held at COAC. These meetings brought agency staff, families and COAC staff together to discuss waiting children as well as legally at risk children which agencies were trying to find pre-adoptive/permanent homes for. ROAD staff also participated in case reviews conducted by ACS and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). At these case reviews, agency, family court, ACS and OCFS personnel reviewed all the children who had a goal of adoption.

Once an agency indicated interest in a COAC client, ROAD staff would accompany the family to the disclosure meeting in which information was shared about the child and the family. If the child and family were matched, ROAD staff would monitor for a short period of time until the time of the transfer from COAC to the case planning foster care agency.

The ROAD was integrated within an experienced organization which provided, through existing programs, the essential wraparound services of adoptive parent recruitment and training (through COAC's Virginia Butler Family Recruitment Program) and intensive post-placement support services (through COAC's New York City Adoption Resource Center.)

Description of collaborative partners involved in implementing the project. The ROAD/El Camino collaborated with over 55 agencies throughout the metropolitan New York City region. Key among these were:

1. The New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS). This is the local child welfare agency and had legal custody of the majority of The ROAD clients. ACS was the main government partner of The ROAD.

2. The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) was the other government partner which was of great assistance. The OCFS New York City Regional Office was very familiar with The ROAD's work and encouraged agencies to refer youth for ROAD services.

3. Private foster care agencies under contract with ACS. These agencies have case planning responsibilities for the youth. By the end of the project, The ROAD had collaborated with a total of 36 foster care agencies as listed below:

    a. Abbott House
    b. Angel Guardian Home (now closed)
    c. Brookwood Child Care (now closed)
    d.Cardinal McClosky
    e. Catholic Guardian and Home Bureau (formed from the merger of Catholic Guardian Society and Catholic Home Bureau in June 2006)
    f. Children's Aid Society
    g. Children's Village
    h. Coalition for Hispanic Family Services
    i. Community Counseling and Mediation
    j. Edwin Gould Services for Children and Families
    k. Episcopal Social Services
    l. Family Support Systems Unlimited, Inc.
    m. Forestdale
    n. Good Sheppard Services
    o. Graham-Windham
    p. Green Chimneys
    q. Harlem Dowling Services for Children and Families
    r. Heartshare
    s. Inwood House
    t. Jewish Child Care Association
    u. Jewish Board of Children and Family Services
    v. Lakeside Children and Family Services (now closed)
    w. Leake and Watts
    x. Little Flower Services for Children and Families
    y. Lutheran Social Services
    z. Mercy First (merged comprised of Angel Guardian and St. Mary's)
    aa. Miracle Makers
    bb. New Alternatives for Children
    cc. New York Foundling
    dd. OHEL
    ee. Salvation Army (now closed)
    ff. Protestant Board of Guardians

gg. SCO Family Services
hh. St. Christopher's Inc (now closed)
ii. St. Dominic's, St. Vincent's
jj. Seamen's Society for Children and Families.

4. In addition, COAC collaborated with many community-based agencies, faith-based organizations, local elected officials, and other entities with either a vested interest in the goals of the program, that were providing services to ACS youth, or who were in a position to refer youth or prospective adoptive families. Below is a sample of these organizations.

    a. Hostos Community College (Bronx NY)
    b. Harvest Fields Community Church (Bronx NY)
    c. Wakefield Baptist Church, Bronx NY
    d. Assemblyman William Boyland, his staff and community residents
    e. Brooklyn Democratic Office (Pitkin Office)
    f. Springfield High School Parent Association
    g. Brownsville CPI (Community Partnership Initiative)
    h. Jamaica, Queens CPI (Community Partnership Initiative)
    i. Bronx Borough President's Office
    j. Queens Child Psychiatric Center
    k. James Sander Jr (Queens Councilman)
    l. East Ward Missionary Baptist Church
    m. East River Landing Community Center
    n. Wake-Eden Baptist Church (Bronx)
    o. Circle of Support (Bronx-Mott Haven, Brooklyn-Bedford Stuyvesant, Queens-Jamaica)

5. The ROAD also collaborated closely with two other programs within COAC. These programs provided wrap-around services that enhanced the effectiveness of The ROAD by enabling the recruitment of adoptive parents for youth with no resource family (COAC's Virginia Butler Family Recruitment Program and AdoptUsKids) and enabling youth and families to receive support in the post-placement period (COAC's NYC Adoption Resource Center).

Overview of the Evaluation

Program Evaluation

The ROAD included a thorough evaluation component that sought to inform the child welfare community of practitioners, researchers, and policymakers. Luis H. Zayas, PhD, was the external evaluator. Dr. Zayas is Shanti K. Khinduka Distinguished Professor in the George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University in St. Louis, and Professor of Psychiatry in the Washington University School of Medicine. He is also the Director of the Center for Latino Family Research at Washington University in St. Louis. A distinguished scholar, Dr. Zayas' clinical and research experiences have focused on Hispanic and other

minority families and their children. Also integrating the evaluation team was Luis R. Torres, PhD, Assistant Professor in the Graduate College of Social Work at the University of Houston and Research Scientist in the University of Houston's Center for Drug and Social Policy Research. Dr. Torres is a clinical psychologist with broad experience in child and adolescent mental health and in program evaluation.

The program design included specific objectives and outcomes and called for evaluating the progress of both outputs (e.g., number of youth participating, and number of sessions) and outcomes (e.g., extent to which participants agreed to move forward with a process of open adoption, and extent to which youth achieved their permanency goals or were matched and placed with an adoptive family). The ultimate criterion for program success was the placement of youth within adoptive homes or other appropriate permanent resource families. As illustrated in the last two columns of the Logic Model (Appendix A) the performance measures are clearly related to the intended outcomes of the project.

Initially, the evaluation also sought to examine which youth characteristics were related to a higher or lower likelihood of successful placement. For example, the evaluation intended to look at variables such as presence vs. absence of developmental or learning disabilities, medical or psychiatric diagnoses, placement history, history of trauma, etc. However, obtaining this information proved to be an enormous, and ultimately insurmountable, challenge.

The evaluation process entailed collecting evaluation data on the adolescents referred to the project (from available records and progress notes) and on individuals/families attending MAPP sessions (via a pre- and post- questionnaire; see appendix C), entering this data into a Microsoft Access database, and then submitting the database via email to our evaluators in St. Louis. All data was de-identified prior to submission to the evaluation team. In addition, we had monthly conference calls with the evaluation and project team, and quarterly in-person, multiple day meetings in New York City. During the visits to New York, the evaluation team providing evaluation-related technical assistance to the project team, helped trouble-shoot data related issues, and also attended MAPP sessions and visited some of the agencies with the project's youth workers, to get a better sense of process-related issues, activities, and challenges.

The evaluation team implemented an additional evaluation tool aimed at measuring the development of the relationship between the youth worker and the youth. The team secured permission from Dr. Mark T. Greenburg, Bennett Endowed Chair in Prevention Research and Professor of Human Development and Psychology at Pennsylvania State University to modify and utilize his Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment to measure the development of trust between the youth and the worker (see Worker-Youth Trust Scale in Appendix D). This was done during the final year of the project, following many discussions with youth workers pointing to the emerging relationship between workers and youth as a key element in the youth's willingness to consider an open adoption and their openness to engage in the process ahead. We were only able to collect a limited amount of data with the scale, however, since by the final year of the project most of the 232 youth served had already been recruited and enrolled. This scale or one similar to it could be used in similar projects in an attempt to quantify and improve on the worker-youth relationship.

Children's Bureau Discretionary Grants Program
Final Evaluation Report

The New York Council On Adoptable Children
THE ROAD/EL CAMINO

Part III: Project Implementation/ Process Evaluation

Activity 1: Identifying and locating the youth to be served.

Outputs: There were a total of 232 youth recruited and enrolled in The ROAD/El Camino Project.

Contextual Events or Community Changes influencing Activity 1

There were some major changes at ACS during The ROAD's tenure. ACS restructured itself in 2007 and implemented Improved Outcomes for Children (IOC). A major policy change in the IOC initiative was to place more responsibility on the private contract agencies and to reduce ACS case management responsibilities. As a result of ACS' restructuring, the New York State Office of Children & Family Services (OCFS) also gained additional responsibilities and played a more active role such as hosting the adoption case reviews. As mentioned previously, the adoption case reviews were extremely effective, especially for identifying children who were free to be adopted.

Facilitators to implementing Activity 1

Through the duration/length of the project, ROAD staff used COAC's monthly Caseworker Dialogue Meetings (CDM) to identify children throughout New York City who met project criteria and might be ready to engage in working toward making a placement. These meetings took place at COAC on a monthly basis and were always attended by caseworkers from various foster care agencies, an ACS representative, prospective adoptive parents, and COAC staff including The ROAD. Agency caseworkers as well as ROAD staff presented all of the children that were legally freed and currently eligible for adoption. Prospective adoptive parents then introduced themselves, spoke about child characteristics they were interested in, and discussed with caseworkers any child that may have awakened an interest in them. Staff from The ROAD kept records of all children presented at CDMs and then followed up with calls to the agency caseworker to set up appointments to meet with youth that fit project criteria. COAC's ACS liaison was an integral part of the project by securing additional information required for our case files, addressing barriers which arose with individual foster care agencies, keeping us abreast of changes in official ACS policies, and expediting the implementation of services.

Case reviews were a second method for identifying and locating youth that were legally freed within the foster care system. Semi-annual case review meetings were held at the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) offices for many years, until 2009 when the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) took on this important responsibility. At these reviews, the NYC foster care agencies submitted a full listing of all of the children that

were legally freed within their agency. They discussed the plan for each child as well as highlighted those who did not have a viable resource. The youth ages 12 and older and in need of a resource were the ones that The ROAD focused on. ACS and OCFS encouraged agencies to refer clients to The ROAD. ROAD staff then made a list of the youth and contacted the caseworker assigned to these children in order to receive pertinent information such as the child's psychosocial, psychological, psychiatric, educational and medical evaluations (unfortunately, there were always long delays in securing these assessments and records were often incomplete). After receiving the available information, ROAD staff would seek a meeting with the child through the agency caseworker. Once the meeting took place, we were able to connect with the youth and assisted them with various aspects of achieving their goal of adoption. If open adoption had not been discussed, ROAD staff waited until about the third meeting to discuss this topic. ROAD staff also took note of any family members the youth may wish to maintain contact with.

ACS Child Protective Services (CPS) workers also made direct referrals. We received calls from the CPS workers for assistance in the placement of children who had special circumstances or needs such as requesting a gay/lesbian family, a family with certain pets, a family residing in a particular area of the city, and/or a family willing to foster with a view toward adoption. In addition, the project assisted personnel from CPS and foster care agencies in locating a particular birth family member that was identified as a placement resource but was difficult to locate. Toward the end of the project, we received a few requests from ACS for families willing to adopt or be a visiting resource for Developmentally Disabled children, specifically older ones.

Direct referrals from agencies that were familiar with our project were also an important source for identifying and locating youth in need of a permanent home. Because of aggressive outreach at the beginning of the project, numerous foster care agencies in New York City were aware of our project and were able to send us referrals of children that fit our project criteria. Since these were direct referrals, it made the transition easier because the child's worker was directly requesting our expertise in the area of adoption. Given the high staff turnover in foster care agencies, ROAD staff also went back to the agencies at regular intervals to make presentations about the program, to make new agency staff aware of The ROAD's services. ROAD staff also received referrals from other state adoption exchanges such as Texas, Massachusetts and New Jersey for which we had successful matches.

COAC also sponsored two Professional Meet and Greet events toward the end of the Project, to which professionals from different social service backgrounds were invited to introduce or re-introduce them to all of COAC's Programs, including The ROAD. It was our intention to distribute information to different professionals should they come across a situation in which ROAD services would have been helpful.

ROAD staff were also invited by planning agencies and other organizations to conduct workshops to educate children and families about the benefits and impact of permanency. The ROAD presented at the main offices of these agencies and organizations, and staff members from other agency components like residential facilities and group homes were invited. A comprehensive list of these agencies was previously presented (Section II, page 19).

Challenges/Barriers regarding Activity 1

One barrier is the sheer size of the New York City foster care system, which is one of the largest in the country. Although we were very successful in promoting The ROAD and engaging dozens of agencies with which we worked closely, it was not possible to reach or work closely with every single agency in the system. In addition, the rapid staff turnover within the foster care system also made it challenging to keep agency staff abreast of our program, and necessitated repeated presentations at each agency throughout the year. The size of the ACS bureaucratic structure also represented a formidable challenge and made the forging of close personal relationships an absolute necessity.

A continuing challenge we faced during the duration of the project was receiving timely and complete pertinent information about the youth from the agencies for our database. We made attempts to retrieve the information through CONNECTIONS (the legal electronic child welfare case record for New York State) but remained unsuccessful due to our limited level of access to CONNECTIONS. As a recruitment agency instead of the planning agency we had very limited access to the CONNECTIONS database and could only access it in coordination with our ACS liaison, who had limited time to assist us in this endeavor. We discussed this issue with the CONNECTIONS administrator at our local OCFS office and another administrator in the OCFS Albany office, but our level of access remained unchanged.

Lessons Learned about how to deal with challenges regarding Activity 1

We learned that we needed to continue an aggressive approach towards the agencies through informative packets as well as face to face outreach. Once the agencies were familiar with our project, they began referring youth to us which increased the amount of youth we served.

After the implementation of IOC at ACS, we noticed a decrease in referrals compared to the year prior. Our explanation for this drop in referrals was that the contracted agencies were undergoing an adjustment period with the new case demands that were previously handled by ACS.

Activity 2: Counseling Youth about the benefits of open adoption

Outputs: Of 232 youth served by The ROAD/El Camino Project, 149 were matched with adoptive families and 126 of these matches (85%) resulted in a successful placement.

Contextual Events or Community Changes influencing Activity 2

A decision was made at the beginning of the project to open COAC's post-adoption program to those youths whose adoptions had not been finalized, those who did not as yet have an identified resource, and those who remained ambivalent about adoption in general. We made this provision because we believed that the youth who attend the support groups would be able to connect with others who could either share their positive feelings towards adoption or could help them realize the importance of a permanent adoptive family for their future. Also, as reported

earlier we conducted two focus groups with youth who had completed the program or were near the completion, and with youth recently enrolled.

Facilitators to implementing Activity 2

Counseling sessions were held at the child's residence, which was either a foster home or a residential facility. ROAD staff felt that the children were more likely to engage in conversation if they were in their own environment. These sessions took place over a period ranging from a few months to over a year. Usually at the initial stage, face-to-face visits were conducted weekly for the first three weeks to establish a level of trust and comfort. (As stated previously, during the final year of the project we instituted an instrument to measure the development of trust between the worker and the youth.) Subsequently, face-to-face contacts became bi-weekly with regular telephone contacts between visits. We also conducted workshops at the request of the planning agencies as a part of their independent living workshops as mentioned previously. This opportunity helped enlighten youth who originally had goals of adoption and had requested these goals to be changed to Independent Living because of unfavorable perceptions of adoption in the past.

One of our main goals was to introduce the notion of open adoption to youth who may have been ambivalent about adoption for a variety of reasons and to dispel the belief that they would have to sever ties to their birth family. The sessions also afforded the youth the opportunity to inform the project staff of their needs, questions and concerns through The ROAD worker. Children in foster-care go through many emotions and our experience during this project showed one-on-one counseling was the most effective way to connect with our youth and develop relationships with them. One-on-one counseling also became a learning tool for our staff. It provided us with greater insights on what was affecting the teen population and the current trends. This enabled us to connect with the youth on their level, gradually teaching them how to communicate effectively, to express their feelings, and get the results they sought.

Challenges/Barriers regarding Activity 2

One of the challenges was to set up the meetings with the foster parents, the teens, and their caseworkers. Many of the older youth were ambivalent towards adoption and reticent to set up the initial meeting to discuss adoption. When the meeting was finally set, one or more parties would cancel or not show up. Scheduling subsequent meetings also proved to be difficult. Many youth felt that they had already listened to the initial discussion on adoption and that there was nothing that would change their minds regarding adoption. Gentle insistence and determination on the part of ROAD staff made it possible for the meetings to take place. Finally, the initial meeting had to be very engaging, capture the attention and imagination of the youth, and make them want a second meeting. If the youth's interest was not captured, he or she became less motivated to participate in further discussions.

Lessons Learned about how to deal with challenges regarding Activity 2

We learned that persistence was essential when working with youth. ROAD staff tried innovative ways to reach out to them—for instance, humor, food, and concrete assistance. ROAD staff also

provided youth with adoption materials written by youth just like them. This information was helpful because they were able to read through the eyes of a child that had a situation similar to theirs. This material helped convince some clients to follow through with their appointments.

Activity 3: Working with foster care caseworkers to overcome beliefs regarding a youth's "adoptability".

Outputs: Caseworkers from over 55 agencies, including foster care agencies, state and local child welfare agencies, and other organizations, were able to challenge their biases about the adoptability of older youth, as evidenced by their conversations with ROAD staff and by the large number of referrals made to The ROAD.

Contextual Events or Community Changes influencing Activity 3

An important change pertained to agency caseworkers increasingly changing the permanency planning goal of youths on their caseloads from adoption to APPLA (Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement) without making any attempt to explore a permanent adoptive home for those children. Like "Independent Living", the APPLA goal does not provide the permanent legal stability of adoption. In response to this trend, the Administration for Children Services implemented stringent policies regarding changing a child's permanency goal without exhausting all available options.

However, a majority of the caseworkers who were approached about referring youth in their caseloads to The ROAD initially expressed a skeptical view regarding the youths' "adoptability". Many of them believed that once a child has reached a certain age, "they are no longer adoptable". In addition to this, if a child expressed that they did not want to be adopted, some workers considered the matter closed and would not try to educate the youth regarding the long term benefits of adoption. As the project proceeded, ROAD staff noticed a shift in the thinking of these caseworkers and an increase in the number of youth referred to The ROAD. Continuous education about the benefits of adoption vs. aging out of the foster care system, ongoing discussions about the adoptability of older youth, and the sharing of success studies, all done in the context of personal, non-judgmental relationships, was to account for this shift. Agency caseworkers were also able to reconcile the need for both independent living skills training and permanency planning.

Facilitators to implementing Activity 3

As stated previously, close working relationships between The ROAD youth workers and caseworkers from ACS and the contract foster care agencies was instrumental in helping shift caseworker misperceptions about youth's interest in adoption and about the adoptability of older youth in foster care. In addition, policy changes instituted by ACS (i.e., a mandate to explore all available options) made many caseworkers have to question their biases.

Challenges/Barriers regarding Activity 3

The main challenges were educating caseworkers about each child's level of adoptability and contending with the rapid staff turnover in the foster care field. It was also challenging to identify resources—both within and outside of their biological families—as the children grew older. Finally, it was a challenge to get agencies to continue to include The ROAD staff during the agency matching meetings after a match was completed.

Lessons Learned about how to deal with challenges regarding Activity 3

Helping caseworkers understand that adoption could be seen as a viable option for these older youth without ruling out independent living was important. Maintaining relationships with agency caseworkers and administrators and continuing to forge new relationships as staff turned over was critical. These relationships enabled ROAD staff to continue to work and advocate on the youths' behalf.

We also learned that while the caseworkers may be open to listening to The ROAD project concepts, it required more than just presentations, pamphlets and brochures to convey our message that adoption is beneficial regardless of the youth's age. Persistent outreach and advocacy was essential.

Activity 4: Mapping youth family networks in order to identify resource families and recruiting and preparing adoptive families for open adoption.

Outputs: 642 individuals/families were oriented on the benefits of open adoptions of older adolescents, and 277 individuals/families were MAPP certified.

Contextual Events or Community Changes influencing Activity 4

A new orientation curriculum was incorporated focusing on the need for homes for older youths and targeted toward families who are willing to maintain open birth family connections.

Toward the end of the project, we also incorporated a pre-/post- survey during Orientation which gauged the interest of prospective foster parents in adoption, open adoptions, and older youth. These surveys allowed us to see movement in the families' beliefs, attitudes and intentions toward more openness in their willingness to adopt an older child.

Facilitators to implementing Activity 4

The orientation sessions were critical. During orientations, conducted twice a month, once in English and the other in Spanish, the foster care and adoption process and requirements were described fully. In addition, ACS continuously sent COAC referrals of families interested in specific older youths. We followed up by inviting these families to the initial orientation sessions and inquiring further about their interest in adoption as well as their interest in specific

youths. During orientations we informed our families of COAC's mission and the services we provide; educated them about the various adoption choices (International, Private, etc.) that are available; and provided a step by step breakdown of the process. A question and answer session after each presentation provided time for specific questions from families/individuals present. Orientation is a critical first step in the entire process because it provides prospective families with knowledge about the adoption process and procedures.

In addition to orientation, ROAD staff was certified and co-facilitated training in MAPP/GPS (Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting/Group Preparation and Selection) classes. This 30-hour training program is a mandated part of the preparation that prospective adoptive parents need in order to be certified in New York State. The focus on older youth who wish to retain birth family connections was incorporated into MAPP training. We addressed the importance of decreasing the number of youth in care, especially teenagers. COAC received numerous accolades from our families who participated in our MAPP/GPS workshops. We were credited by our families with giving them a firsthand idea of what to expect from their adoption experience. For example, one couple told The ROAD Project Director "your staff really explained what the adoption process would be like; they talked about the good and bad experiences other parents have had in dealing with and adopting kids from the foster care system."

We also arranged meetings with youths and their caseworkers to explore case records and to map the youth's existing networks to identify possible resource families. This method known as "mining the cases" proved to be fruitful on some of the cases in which family members were contacted to see if they were interested in adopting their relatives or if caseworkers, mentors and teachers would be interested in adopting these youth.

As stated previously, COAC hosted (and continues to host) monthly matching meetings and invites adoption staff from the New York City foster care /adoption agencies to present their waiting children. During these meetings, older children were presented to COAC families by the agency representatives and The ROAD staff. All children presented were freed or in the process of being freed for adoption. The meetings are open with a very social, relaxed environment and refreshments are served. Parents were encouraged to speak to workers or among themselves before the presentations began. Once a family showed interest in a child that met the criteria for The ROAD, an interview was conducted directly with that family after the meeting. Their home study report was then forwarded to the agency with planning responsibility for the child. If the agency positively considered the prospective adoptive family, the agency provided a psychosocial assessment of the teen and then arranged a meeting with the family. The prospective adoptive family then had the opportunity to learn more about the child and the agency was able to assess whether the family was an appropriate match for the child.

The Circle of Support is a program designed by the NYC Administration for Children Services to enhance access and support for foster, kinship and adoptive parents in local communities. The ROAD staff attended some of these meetings to make presentations about The ROAD and its services. It was the intention to make more people aware of the possibility of open adoptions and older children waiting to be adopted.

Finally, COAC received referrals of families interested in specific older youths from The Administration for Children's Services. The ROAD Project Director has also developed a strong working relationship with the Wednesday's Child Coordinator at ACS, referring several youths identified by the project to be featured on the Wednesday's Child television segment (WNBC), and resulting in an increased assignment to COAC of featured adolescents, for follow up with interested families.

Challenges/Barriers regarding Activity 4

The ROAD did not encounter any problems recruiting families interested in adopting older children. What we did find, however, was that many families were not aware of open adoption and its ramifications. Many families are resistant to the idea and need more education regarding the process. While the term "open adoption" may be somewhat intimidating to some families because of their belief that it always involves birth parents and/or continuous face-to-face contact, once we informed them of the range of contact involved, some felt more at ease. We had to constantly educate and inform the prospective parents about the possible levels of contact and the availability of post-placement support, so that their decisions were based on an informed understanding of what an open adoption of an older youth truly entailed.

Several matches and placements were discontinued because the planning agencies were not providing sufficient support for the adoptive families. One particular case stands out as an example, that of a 14 year old Hispanic female with 13 siblings ranging in age from 9 to 24 years old. All her siblings were placed in foster care. She was diagnosed as developmentally disabled with an overall IQ of 68 which is in the range of mental retardation. During a CWD meeting, she was presented by a ROAD staff member to a family whose original intention was to adopt a younger child with no developmental issues. Upon realizing that this child was a good match for their family, the home study was forwarded to the planning agency, where a disclosure meeting was scheduled. During the disclosure meeting the planning agency concurred that it was a good match and visitation was approved. The youth was then placed in the home a few months later and we received sporadic reports from the agency as well as the family informing us that the match was going well. However, while attending the Adoption Case Review meeting for the youth's foster care agency, we were informed that the placement had been discontinued. We contacted the family to inquire why the placement disrupted and were told that the child had a lot more issues than first perceived and they did not receive any support from the planning agency, which made it even more discouraging. The family informed us that they would have continued to finalization if they had received the support and the resources from the agency. This has been an ongoing issue with some planning agencies not providing sufficient support to the families in order to reach finalization.

Lessons Learned about how to deal with challenges regarding Activity 4

Most families thought of birth parents and/or of continuous, face-to-face contact with birth parents when they heard the term open adoption. They were unaware that contact with a sibling or other family member, as well as varying degrees of contact with birth parents, could also constitute an open adoption. Education regarding open adoption was the key to a well-informed decision when the family adopted.

We also increased our efforts to recruit minority families, but these families often came with reservations based on their own biases, such as "older children are usually involved with gang related activities" or "older children are likely to make allegations when they are not given what they want". It was a challenge to change the mindset of the families who were once foster parents and had a negative experience with a challenging child. We counteracted this issue by providing more success stories of individuals who were adopted when they were older and the successful impact they made on their community and society as a whole.

Activity 5: Providing post placement services to the new adoptive families in which youth will be placed.

Outputs: The ROAD provided post-placement services to 18 of 126 youth/families placed.

Contextual Events or Community Changes influencing Activity 5

Once a child was matched, the family was referred for post-placement services. The New York City Adoption Resource Center (NYCARC) at COAC provided all of the necessary services in order to stabilize and strengthen placements and prevent disruptions and dissolutions. (These services continue to be provided.) The services include individual counseling, crisis intervention, support groups and recreational activities. Once the youth are referred to the program they can take advantage of any of the services that are offered. Post Adoption Services are usually utilized once a parent starts having difficulties with the child in the home. Families often feel that if they seek assistance it will be seen as their "not being good parents" or lacking the skills to become good parents. We encouraged our families to utilize post-adoption services preventively and on an ongoing basis, not just when they are having difficulties in the home or school.

Facilitators to implementing Activity 5

The seamless collaboration between The ROAD and NYCARC was made possible because both are COAC projects and staff from the two programs worked closely together.

Challenges/Barriers regarding Activity 5

As stated previously, sustaining matches was at times a major challenge, due primarily to the foster care agency's inability to provide the necessary support. Once a child was placed in an adoptive home the agency's efforts usually decreased, and The ROAD did not have the resources to monitor the match and implement any needed services. Collaboration with NYCARC made it possible to provide these services.

One initiative that remained in the planning stages due to multiple barriers was an effort by The ROAD and NYCARC to utilize master's level interns to assist in sustaining matches and placements until finalization of the adoption. The plan was that NYCARC Interns (at the initial point of their internship) would be assigned a ROAD participant's case that had been placed in a pre-adoptive home and the interns would follow the case until their internship was completed.

The case would then be transferred to NYCARC's Family Support Coordinator who would follow up through adoption and provide post-adoption services. The ROAD would triage the cases depending on their complexity. This would ensure continuation of services during placement and post-adoption.

Lessons Learned about how to deal with challenges regarding Activity 5

The post-placement services were an important addition to the project. Its benefits were highlighted from the onset to motivate the youth and families to utilize the post-placement services.

Part IV: Project Outcome Evaluation

Short Term Outcomes

Short Term Outcome 1: ACS and foster care agencies understand which youths could benefit from open adoption

The ROAD Project has greatly increased awareness among ACS and foster care agency personnel of the benefits of adoption for older adolescents at risk of aging out of the system without a permanent placement plan. The initial step was to inform the foster care and broader community of the disproportionate number of older children who remain in care without a viable permanency resource. We were surprised that a large percentage of the community assumed that younger children made up a greater number of placements than older children. The ROAD Project has created awareness and raised the visibility of older children in care.

The overall perception of caseworkers and adoption coordinators is that it is increasingly difficult to find adoptive homes for children 12 years old and older, especially males. The stigma on older males was related to the perception that they are overly aggressive and confrontational. We continued to challenge this blanket perception at Caseworker Dialogue Meetings and other meetings with contract agency and ACS staff.

We conveyed that open adoption can stabilize and strengthen the family. When the youth's birth connections are fully accepted he/she can begin to focus more positively on the present. The project made a positive impact on how foster care agencies and ACS view open adoption in general, and adoption of older males specifically.

The uniform view among all of the workers was that the 12-and-older population was very challenging. They all expressed that the older a child becomes, the more difficult it is to locate a permanent placement. In addition, given that sometimes there are severe histories of abuse and neglect, older youth are often encouraged by staff to distance themselves from their biological families or to sever ties completely. Based on verbalizations from agency personnel, at the conclusion of the project agencies have a more positive outlook on open adoptions and age is not seen as much of a major barrier to recruitment of families for a particular child as it once was. Furthermore, if a child has established family ties, there is now a greater understanding of the importance of maintaining and nurturing some of those relationships, rather than encouraging the older adolescent to sever those ties entirely.

We have worked closely with the agency staff to effect a positive change in their perceptions regarding open adoption and older youth. It is our belief that if these workers realized that they could indeed locate permanent families for youths of all ages, then they would work more

diligently towards achieving this goal. The sharing of success stories was instrumental in continuing to challenge biases and stereotypes.

Short Term Outcome 2: Changing youths' perceptions regarding the possibility of being placed in an adoptive family

All project participants stated they would like to be adopted. In the initial stage many participants were extremely ambivalent towards adoption, but with continuous individual counseling and building trust, our participants became more hopeful. Our participants were extremely afraid of changes. We challenged and changed the perception of our participants by building a level of trust, keeping our appointments and following through whenever we committed. This created an environment of security and understanding. All of these adolescents, especially those who were ambivalent towards adoption, continued to receive counseling about adoption from project staff, literature regarding the benefits of adoption as well as feedback from youth who were or had been in similar situations. While in some cases the counseling sessions produced a favorable change in youths' perceptions around adoption, we continued to be persistent with all of the youth. We also observed that the youths whose caseworkers favor adoption were more open to the idea of adoption, because their caseworkers were able to convey to them the benefits of having a stable and permanent home. With this finding we have determined that educating the caseworkers will have a long term positive effect on the youth.

Short Term Outcome 3: Caseworkers improve skills and collaborate with others

The Caseworker Dialogue Meetings and Adoption Case Reviews have been notable forums where we have been able to collaborate with numerous caseworkers from different agencies. The ROAD staff conducted workshops at agencies that did not participate in our Caseworker Dialogue Meetings, informing them about project criteria and our aim and mission, and addressing all areas of concern. These meetings resulted in additional case planning collaborations. Through the caseworker dialogues and the case reviews, we were able to document the number of caseworkers that are collaborating with our agency as well as being receptive to the idea of openness in adoption. There were a steady number of attendees at the caseworker dialogues and the caseworkers seemed determined to work with the families who are interested in the available children that were presented. Since certain caseworkers participated consistently, we had ongoing opportunities to discuss the idea of openness with these workers, challenging their beliefs and addressing their concerns. Furthermore, as new workers came to our agency for meetings, we took every possible opportunity to introduce The ROAD project to them in order to engage additional participants in the discussion of open adoption for older youth.

The participating caseworkers showed interest in some of the families who attended the dialogue meetings, and collaborated with us in an effort to match the older children on their caseload with our families. We elicited ideas of these participating caseworkers as to new ways to engage additional caseworkers in this productive collaboration.

Short Term Outcome 4: Identification of new potential adoptive families

When parents called the agency and inquired about adoption, we logged their pertinent information and invited them to our agency for orientation. When we held our monthly orientation meetings, we invited all of the families that inquired about the adoption process at our agency. A log of the attendees at orientation was kept, and from there when we began to receive the applications we were able to determine which families were still interested in the adoption process. There are many reasons why some families do not continue with the process after the orientation session. Some came for general information, others did not meet State requirements, and others wanted to take their time to consider their options before deciding whether to apply.

Short Term Outcome 5: Negotiation and communication skills taught to adoptive families involved in open adoptions

Through individual sessions, the project staff has assisted these families with understanding what an open adoption entails. Furthermore, the workers helped the families comprehend how to deal with challenging situations that may have arisen once the adolescent began to have continuous contact with their birth family.

All COAC prospective adoptive families learned effective negotiation and communication skills beginning with MAPP preparation. We utilized the five methods of learning to impart these skills through role playing, visual & verbal aids. We invited all project families in for pre- and post-placement services to develop skills to deal with challenging situations that arose in relation to ongoing birth family contact. For instance, one participant's maternal aunt had an issue with regard to a ROAD participant's adoption. She was adamantly opposed to the adoption going forward, stating that if this happened, the youth would no longer be a part of her family. The aunt had promised her sister at her deathbed that she would raise her child, but due to the maternal aunt's health she was unable to follow through. The ROAD staff facilitated a meeting including the maternal aunt, the pre-adoptive parent, The ROAD Project Director and the Youth Services Coordinator. The Youth Services Coordinator expressed to the maternal aunt that she could always be part of the child's life, and that she would always be her aunt. This pre-adoptive parent had readily facilitated the aunt's visitation in the adoptive home and the youth, 18 at the time of the meeting, also visited her aunt when she wished. The meeting was productive as issues were brought forth that the maternal aunt had been unwilling to discuss because of her misconceptions regarding adoption. She felt more comfortable in having the adoption go forward.

The ROAD was aware that the majority of the children in foster-care and available for adoption came from under-privileged backgrounds and were placed due to abuse or neglect, often as a result of parental substance abuse. These factors greatly influenced the children's problem-solving and socialization skills and their communal etiquette. We noticed that many times a placement disrupted because of the youth's difficulties finding their place in the family, negotiating family rules, or abiding by the family's expectations (for instance, cleaning up after themselves, putting their dirty clothes in the hamper, lifting the seat after using the restroom, or disposing of female hygienic products in a proper manner). These are things most folks take for granted, but they play a big impact on family relationships, especially when a new member has

joined the family and is failing to do them. Often times adoptive parents believe (and state) that "these are basic things that someone should know", and had difficulty understanding that the youth may have lacked opportunities to learn these behaviors. This created tremendous frustration for both the child and the parent: the parent believed the child was intentionally behaving badly or testing the parent, and the child thought the parent was picking on them, especially since the behavior was not addressed in the past. It was extremely important for the success of the match and placement that these topics be a part of the dialogue between The ROAD worker, the parent, and the youth. The sessions increasingly focused on these issues prior to placement, but since The ROAD did not continue to work with the families post-placement (until the end of the project), we lost an opportunity to continue to address these issues in real time.

Short Term Outcome 6: Post-placement services provided to families

All families with pre-adoptive placements have been referred to the NYCARC. Eighteen youth attended the adolescent support group, but getting the adoptive parents to attend was a greater challenge. With the goal of increasing utilization of post placement support services we continued to provide information on NYCARC services, including support group schedules, until the end of the project. Since post-placement services were not mandatory we believe that the families felt that they could function without them. We encouraged families not to wait until they experienced a crisis to engage in post-placement services, especially the support groups, and to emphasize that through participation in such groups they would learn more about what adoptive families commonly experience, and positive ways to assist their child with his/her concerns to avert crises.

Long Term Outcomes

Long Term Outcome 1: Fewer youths without a goal of a permanent adoptive family

At the conclusion of The ROAD project, 232 youth were enrolled in the program. Only 44 (19.4%) of these youth still had a goal of *Independent Living*, although the caseworkers were working closely with ROAD staff on finding adoptive families for these youth, while simultaneously working with the youth on gaining independent living skills. This represents a major shift in thinking and action on the part of caseworkers. Most of these 232 youth would have eventually aged out of the foster care system without any permanency plans in place.

These results indicate that it is possible to challenge and change the perception of many foster care caseworkers and administrators regarding the adoptability of older youth and the benefits of open adoptions. The results also suggest that older youth can indeed come to understand the benefits of having permanency plans prior to aging out of the system, and that they can learn to appreciate the benefits of adoption in general and open adoptions specifically.

Long Term Outcome 2: Placement of youths in adoptive homes

Of the 232 youth enrolled in The ROAD, 149 matches were completed and 85% of these matches (n=126) resulted in an actual placement. The target outlined in the proposal was 96 placements, so we exceeded our target by 30 youth.

For youth who were already in the home but still showed signs of anxiety towards adoption, the in-home counseling sessions were extremely beneficial. If the child was living with a foster family that was interested in adopting the child, the transition from foster care to adoption was made much smoother due to the involvement of The ROAD. The child already knew what it felt like to live with a family that has a set routine, rules which must be followed and a reassuring sense of stability, and the counseling sessions focused instead on the youth's feelings about adoption and their biological family.

For the youth that resided in group homes or residential treatment facilities, placement into an adoptive home was more challenging. The process of placing these youths in an adoptive home was two-fold and included the identification and development of the appropriate child/family match as well as gradual and careful preparation of the youth to leave the institutional setting to live with a family in the open community. The Center for Development of Human Services (CDHS) created curriculum to involve children in foster care in learning appropriate interaction with foster/adoptive parents while they are in placement. The ROAD utilized this curriculum as part of training the project's youth participants to improve their successful adjustment in their adoptive placements.

ROAD staff also worked with youth and prospective adoptive families to create electronic scrap books and "MySpace" web pages. We felt that in order to have and maintain a successful match both the parent ***and*** child must be part of the process. In the State of New York, specifically New York City, there is a higher percentage of minority children in-care. Many of these minority children have learned stereotypes of race and sexual orientation through music or from their peers, and these stereotypes might keep them from exploring all their options. We tried to change these stereotypes by providing our children with some visual knowledge of the functioning of our families with technology that is easily accessible, for instance, through "MySpace". This avenue was successful. For example, we had a young man of Latino heritage who was somewhat ambivalent about being adopted by a White family, but after seeing their "MySpace" page his ambivalence was settled and he decided to move forward with the process. He learned that his values and those of his prospective adoptive family were much more similar than he thought. We also used Facebook as that became a more popular social media site. The families would establish an account and with prior knowledge and the assistance of the caseworker, the children would "friend" them. This facilitated more dialogue between the child and the family. The child was able to get to know the family through the Facebook postings, pictures and activities that the parent was willing to share.

Long Term Outcome 3: Improved skill sets for caseworkers

Throughout the duration of the project we saw a major improvement in receptivity to the project's services in many of the foster care agencies we worked with. This receptivity started with ACS sending a letter out to all the agencies and encouraging them to collaborate with The ROAD. The ROAD Project Director also sent a letter to the Executive Director of each New York City foster care agency, to inform them of project services and of ACS's formal involvement in the project, as well as emphasizing how cost- and outcome-effective it would be for the agencies to utilize project services. However, it was the personal relationships built between The ROAD staff and agency caseworkers and administrators, and the ongoing efforts to orient and build relationships with new staff coming into the agencies (given the high rate of turnover in this field), that were the key to successful collaborations. Multiple workshops were conducted in which a majority of the participants were professionals specializing in foster care and adoption. During these workshops, myths and concerns were challenged and addressed. We believe that we have changed the mindset of a large percentage of workers to the point that now they believe Open Adoptions are a suitable alternative for many of their older youth in case.

Long Term Outcome 4: Stronger new adoptive families through post-adoption services

As mentioned earlier, NYCARC, is the successful and well established post-adoption services program of COAC. This program has kept many adoptive families intact, and the supportive services it provides have been highly successful in preventing adoption dissolutions. Referrals to the NYCARC were an integral part of The ROAD's process, and every project family was referred to the NYCARC to sustain the adoptive placements accomplished. Not all families followed through, however. Participation in the program was not mandatory, and the preparation work conducted by ROAD staff and agency caseworkers often resulted in successful placements. When families did engage with NYCARC, it was typically after a problem had emerged. ROAD staff continued to encourage families to participate in NYCARC activities before problems emerged, but the many responsibilities families face made this difficult. Only 18 families of the 126 placed actually participated in NYCARC activities.

Long Term Outcome 5: Larger pool of potential adoptive families for youths

COAC's overall pool of prospective adoptive families has always been very large; however the number of families interested in older youth was smaller. Two hundred seventy-seven individuals/families were MAPP certified throughout the duration of the program Since 126 placements were completed, there remained 151 prospective adoptive families/individuals who were certified to become foster parents and who are interested in adoption. In addition, 642 individuals/families were oriented on the benefits of open adoptions of older adolescents, resulting in a large pool of potential adoptive parents with whom COAC will continue to engage. Our efforts have resulted in a noticeable increase in the proportion of newly approved families who are more flexible in their expectations and open to adopting an older youth.

Participation in the Caseworker Dialogue meetings was also a key factor in several applicants' decisions to consider older youth, as in these meetings they heard positive information about specific youth who they considered compatible with their own family's characteristics. ACS's involvement as an integral part in these meetings, and the mandate that the city's foster care agencies participate in them, brought foster parents already certified with other NYC foster care agencies who wanted to adopt an older child through The ROAD's services. The ROAD's Project Director's participation in ACS's community-based *Circles of Support* also contributed to increasing the pool of experienced foster and adoptive parents aware of the need for permanent families for older children.

Long Term Outcome 6: More adoptive families with an understanding of open adoption

By implementing The ROAD project into the orientation and MAPP training sessions, we increased the number of families with a clear understanding of open adoption and the needs of older youth. COAC's mission is to recruit families while introducing them to all options. Many families expressed an initial interest in younger children and were not aware that the majority of children in the foster care system were older. Many of these families expressed openness to older children after learning of the large number of older waiting children. As project policy, open adoption was a main topic of discussion in every orientation meeting and MAPP training series. Both the legal definition and the psychological issues of identity formation were addressed and a discussion generated to address prospective parents' concerns. Upon understanding the need of older youth to seek and retain some level of contact with their family of origin, and realizing the broad range of contact available, most families were willing to consider an open adoption.

Additional Outcomes

Staffing and Training of ROAD Staff. As a part of the culture of COAC, all staff members were encouraged to attend trainings that pertained to their work at COAC. Staff members were required to understand the role of each program to ensure questions or inquiries from potential clients can be answered. All ROAD/El Camino Staff attended over 30 hours of training per year, including:

- Foster/Adoptive Family Recruitment/Retention Technical Assistance.
- Sexual Abuse Dynamics and Intervention.
- Psychotropic Medications and their use in the treatment of Mental Health.
- Sexual Abuse Dynamics and Intervention Training.
- Working with Kinship Families.
- B2H (Bridges to Health) and ACS-Identification and Enrollment Meeting.
- Life Book Training.
- Social Work 101: Engagement, Work Phase & Intervention Skills.
- Adolescent Service Toolbox.
- What Youth Workers Need to Know to Help Girls Become Confident.

Children's Bureau Discretionary Grants Program
Final Evaluation Report

The New York Council On Adoptable Children
THE ROAD/EL CAMINO

Part V: Conclusions

Overall impact of the project on children and families

When The ROAD project commenced in 2005, there were critical issues impacting the New York City foster care/adoption community. Chief among these concerns were the following:

- A large number of children in the system (the NYC Child Welfare system is one of the largest in the country);
- Many children spending the better part of their young years in foster homes without being able to be reunited with their families of origin and without other permanency plans in place;
- A large number of children ages 12 and older, at risk for aging out of the system without permanency plans (in fact, many older youth were aging out of the system every year without permanency plans or stable connections in the broader community, and within a year to 18 months they were contending with the criminal justice system or unplanned pregnancies;
- Widespread biases amongst caseworkers in the foster care system regarding the adoptability of older adolescents; and
- Widespread biases amongst caseworkers, the youth themselves, and the community of prospective adoptive parents regarding the viability of open adoptions.

With its long history and immersion in the foster care and adoptive community, COAC was keenly aware of these issues. COAC sought funding for The ROAD/El Camino to address many of these issues, especially:

- To decrease the number of youth ages 12 and older in the foster care system with a goal of Independent Living and increase the number of youth with a goal of Adoption;
- To educate agency personnel and recruited families on the benefits and challenges of adopting older children;
- To educate agency personnel, recruited families, and the youth themselves on the benefits and challenges of open adoptions;
- To place 96 youth with adoptive families.

The ROAD achieved its performance target, successfully placing 126 youth with adoptive families. Additionally, The ROAD oriented 642 individuals/families on the benefits of open adoptions of older adolescents; MAPP certified 277 individuals/families; provided services to 232 older youth in the foster care system; and made 149 matches.

In addition, since most of the youth served by The ROAD were the oldest of their known siblings, they can then potentially become a source of support for their younger siblings also in care.

In the process of achieving these milestones, The ROAD has demonstrated that older youth can be adopted, and that open adoptions are a viable alternative to ensure that youth exit the foster care system with stable family and community connections.

Overall impact of the project on the individual agencies and organizations involved

The ROAD/El Camino collaborated with 55 agencies throughout the Metropolitan New York City Area; 36 of these were foster care agencies and two of them government partners (the New York City Administration for Children and Families, and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services). Through the forging of close personal relations built on mutual respect, information exchanges, instilling hope, and sharing successes, The ROAD was able to challenge and change the way agency staff looked at and worked with their youth 12 and over who were at risk of aging out of the system without permanency plans. Agency caseworkers were able to examine their biases about the adoptability of older youth, open their minds to the benefits of open adoptions, and rekindle hope in the hearts of a group of older youth that were feeling unwanted. In addition, by sharing with agency staff the strategies used by The ROAD, like mining cases to find any resource that had not been previously explored by agency staff and developing a deeper knowledge and the vocabulary to speak clearly about open adoptions, the project has contributed to broadening the options available to foster care agency caseworkers (and to the youth in their care).

Impact on the community

The ROAD has also been able to impact the broader community:

- By recruiting in different communities about adopting older kids, the word has spread to communities that this is a viable option.

- Challenging the notion that males do not deserve a loving family by using examples of successful adoptions of older adolescent males.

- Using street fairs in different communities to spread the word about the viability of adopting waiting foster care youth.

In conclusion, The ROAD has succeeded beyond expectations and has positively impacted older youth and families in the foster care system, the agencies delivering services to these youth and their families, and the broader community.

Part VI: Implications of Results and Recommendations

Several important recommendations emerge from this project.

Recommendations to Administrators of Future, Similar projects

- Secure the cooperation and support of government partners and foster care agencies that have case planning responsibility for the youth. They are important partners to obtain timely and complete information on the youth, to disseminate information about the program; and to refer their youth to the program.

- Hire staff that is passionate about this work and that has previous experience with older youth. This staff would understand the issues these youth face in foster care. Some of our staff were younger and had some common interests with the youth which made it easier to develop a bond to introduce some of the heavier topics.

- Have an advisory board made up of former and current participants along with agency staff and families to see if the services are helpful and to provide feedback as to what needs to be improved.

- Utilize post-placement services to assist in the placement to finalization phase.

- Have focus groups with the youth starting at the 6 month point and continue to have them either quarterly or every 6 months to see how the services are impacting the clients.

Recommendations to Project Funders

- Continue to fund these types of programs.

- Increase funding for post-placement and post-adoption services.

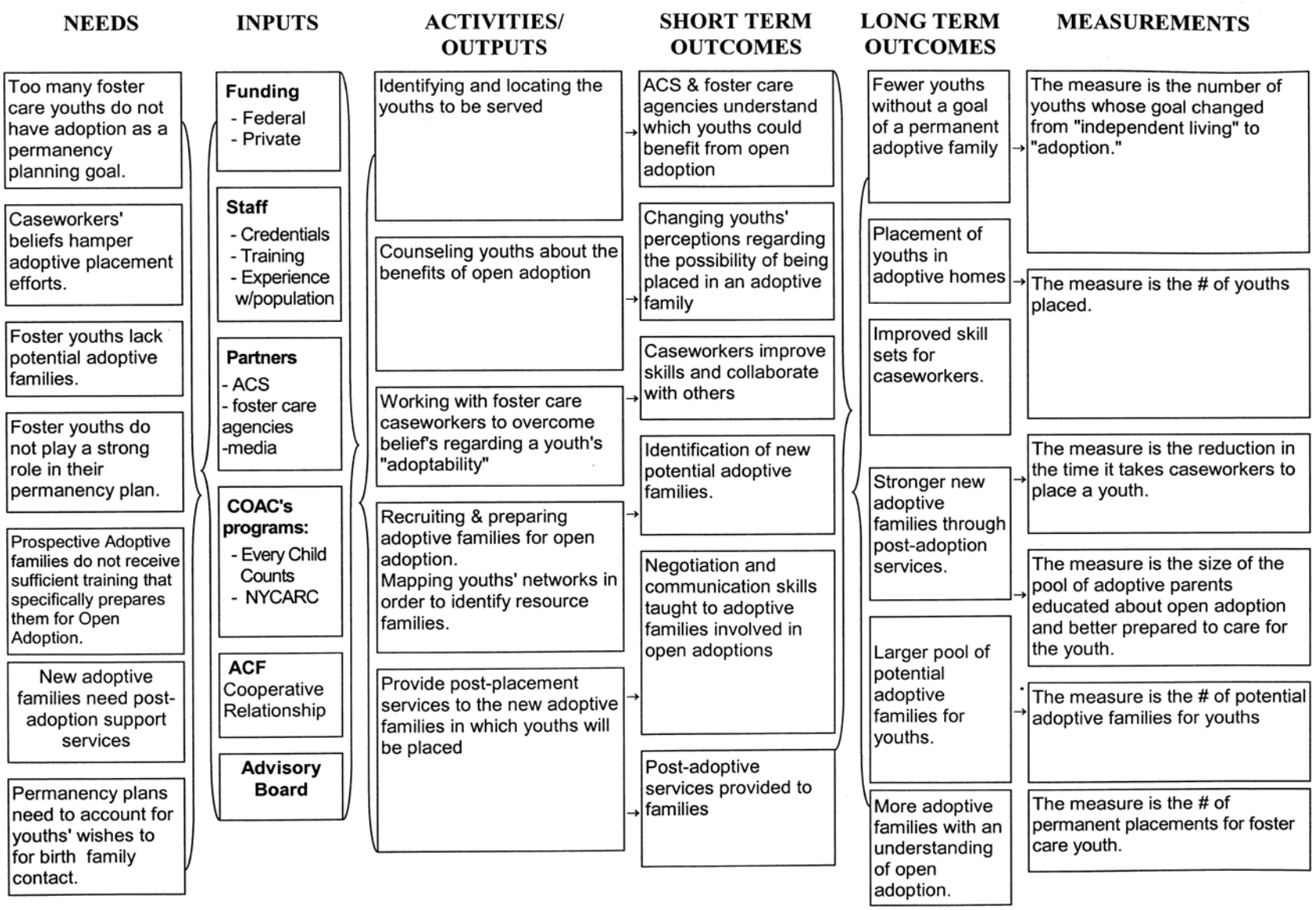
- Provide more guidance on the evaluation component to enable programs to more closely examine the impact of the program, gather costing data, and make recommendations as to services that exist and ones that are needed.

Recommendations to the general field

- Expand the knowledge and visibility of adoptions and open adoptions as a viable alternative for older youth in care.

- Use social media websites such as Myspace and Facebook to expedite and increase the number of matches. Youth use these methods of communication with peers and it is another way to connect with the young people waiting to be adopted.

Appendix A: Logic Model: The ROAD/El Camino



Appendix B--Job Descriptions for The ROAD/El Camino

There were a number of staff that worked on different aspect of The ROAD

The Executive Director is in charge of the overall direction of the agency. Program Development, Fundraising, Fiscal Management and overall supervision are among some of the duties of this position. At COAC, the Executive Director provided supervision to the Program Director. The Executive Director spent 15% of his time on The ROAD project.

Program Director --Adoption Programs was the direct supervisor for The ROAD Project Director. The duties include administration, supervision, reporting, monitoring, evaluation, had overall project direction and oversight, collaborated with agencies and media, and served as the main liaison between the Project and ACS, the main collaborating partner of the Project. Being bilingual in Spanish and English was extremely helpful since COAC recruited families who spoke both languages. The Program Director spent 15 % of her time on The ROAD activities

Project Director The ROAD/El Camino Project Director was responsible for the day-to-day management of the program. The Project Director's duties included: collaborating with the Youth Services Coordinator on establishing relationships with foster care agencies caseworkers serving youths targeted by the Project; supervising The ROAD/El Camino's Youth Services Coordinator and Youth Services Assistant; responsible for reporting data and working closely with the Project Evaluator. He also was responsible for case management for 10% of the youths in The ROAD/El Camino project. This ensured that the Director was attuned to the daily challenges of the Project and promoted creative problem-solving with the Coordinator regarding case management issues. The Project Director coordinated with directors of the other COAC programs (VBFRP and NYCARC) to ensure wrap-around services. The Project Director spent 100% of his time on The ROAD activities

The following was used to advertise for the position:

Knowledge: Will need knowledge of attachment/separation/loss issues related to the foster care /adoption youth populations; knowledge of family/cultural issues in African-American and Latino population. Bilingual /bicultural. Experience: Masters level degree (MSW, MA/MS) with 5 years direct work experience, two of these supervisory – in, or related to the foster/adoption system. A candidate with life adoptive parent/adopted person/former foster child - that is, someone with life experience -- with the right credentials would be a plus.
Past Experience: in implementing a program of this size, scope and complexity: Two years experience in implementing a program that requires extensive collaboration at the director level. Experience with the population and the workings of the system, are essential, combined with a pro-active, confident attitude.

Youth Services Coordinator (YSC) The YSC worked closely with youths, their caseworkers, and their networks, including birth families. He provided one on one counseling to youths in order to educate them about the benefits of open adoption. He met with each youth at least once per month and more frequently at the beginning of the relationship. Worked closely with the youth's caseworker in order to measure progress and solve problems He mapped the youths' networks and examined case records to identify persons who could serve as a permanent resource for the youth. He connected with the youth's birth parents and/or other

family members, kin, extended family or other significant adults. The YSC contacted independent living programs to offer to speak with youth and their caseworkers. He provided examples of successful adoptions for older youths and explained how family connections can be maintained even after one is adopted. . The YSC collaborated with COAC's successful VBFRP program in the following ways: 1) to recruit, prepare, and support prospective adoptive parents interested in adopting waiting youths in foster care. 2) co-conducted orientations with VBFRP staff (in both English and Spanish) for prospective adoptive parents, focusing on the need for homes for youths and the need for families willing to keep open birth family connections; 3) provided special training of prospective adoptive parents regarding the benefits and challenges associated with open adoption; 4) taught adoptive parents about negotiation and communication skills vis-à-vis birth parents. 5) prepared families through the MAPP (Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting) Program and have home studies completed. The Youth Services Coordinator spent 100% of his time on The ROAD activities.

The following was used for the advertisement of the position.

Knowledge - the YSC will require the same knowledge as the Project Director, but the knowledge may come from a combination work /personal experience. ***Bilingual /bicultural a plus.*** Experience: BA/BS level; he/she must have: 2 years casework experience in foster care-adoption, related casework with foster youth OR direct experience - a former foster child, an adopted person or adoptive parent with the necessary educational credentials. Experience in outreach and forming liaisons with cooperating agencies is vital. Past Experience: in implementing a program of this size, scope and complexity: He/she must have 2 years of experience in working in collaborations as well as a dynamic personality.

Program Assistant, The Program Assistant was responsible for all clerical duties related to the Project. This included data management, following up with project participants, and assisting the Project Director and Youth Service Coordinator in other duties as assigned. The Program Assistant was bicultural and bilingual in English and Spanish. She also met with the youth in the program and performed similar duties as the YSC which was listed above. The Program Assistant spent 100% of her time on The ROAD activities.

Independent Evaluator: The evaluator designed the evaluation tools, monitored data collection, monitored client satisfaction and the program's effectiveness in meeting its stated goals. Time Commitment: 40 days per year.

ACS: Provided data on target population, identified foster care agencies caring for the youth, introduced The ROAD/El Camino staff to senior leadership of these agencies. Referred prospective adoptive parents. Time Commitment: Quarterly Process and Evaluation-focused meetings of all participants; Monthly case and process-focused meetings.

Foster Care Agencies: provided access to the youth; assisted ROAD staff in counseling youth about open adoption; handled placement and adoption finalization procedures. Time Commitment: Biweekly Case focused meetings with ROAD Staff, Quarterly Process and Evaluation-focused meetings of all participants

COAC's Virginia Butler Family Recruitment Program: Role: recruited, trained and utilized adoptive parents for the youth. Responsibilities included parent recruitment, orientation, MAPP training, State

Central Register clearance, homestudies, collaborated with project staff in matching and placing youth. Time Commitment: as needed to find and prepare adoptive parents for the youth in the program.

COAC's NYC Adoption Resource Center (NYCARC): Conducted post-placement support groups, in home and in office crisis intervention as well as via a "Warmline", referrals, Teen Support Groups and Recreational Activities for youth who have been placed and their adoptive families. Monthly support groups for youths and families, Counseling to youths and their adoptive families on a case-by-case basis. Time Commitments: bi-monthly support groups and recreational events, year-round services as needed.

Appendix C-Orientation Survey

NY Council On Adoptable Children (COAC)

Pre-Orientation Survey

Please answer yes or no to the following questions by circling the corresponding word.

1. Do you know what an open adoption is? YES NO
2. Are you interested in adopting an "older" (12+) child? YES NO
3. Does the child's nationality play a role in your adoption decision? YES NO
4. Is age a major factor in your adoption decision? YES NO
5. Do you know what "children with special needs" means? YES NO
6. Do you believe all children in foster care have some form of special need? YES NO
7. Would you consider adopting a child with special needs? YES NO

NY Council On Adoptable Children (COAC)

Post-Orientation Survey

Please answer YES or NO to the following questions by circling the number that corresponds to your answer, using the following scale:

1. Less than before
2. Same as before/No change
3. Better than before
4. Much better than before

1. My understanding of open adoption is...	1	2	3	4
2. My interest in adoption an older (12+) child is...	1	2	3	4
3. My focus on the child's nationality as a factor in adopting is...	1	2	3	4
4. My focus on the child's age as a factor in adopting is...	1	2	3	4
5. My knowledge and understanding of "children with special needs" is...	1	2	3	4
6. My belief that all children in foster care have special needs is...	1	2	3	4
7. My desire to adopt a child with special needs is...	1	2	3	4

Appendix D- Worker Youth Trust Scale

COAC-The ROAD Worker-Youth Trust Scale

	1 Almost Never Or Never True	2 Not Very Often True	3 Some-times True	4 Often True	5 Almost Always Or Always True
1. My worker respects my feelings.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I feel my worker does a good job as my worker	1	2	3	4	5
3. I wish I had a different worker.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I like to get my worker's point of view on things I'm concerned about.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I feel it's no use letting my feelings show around my worker.	1	2	3	4	5
6. My worker can tell when I am upset about something.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Talking over my problems with my worker makes me feel ashamed or foolish.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My worker expects too much from me.	1	2	3	4	5
9. When we discuss things, my worker cares about my point of view.	1	2	3	4	5
10. My worker trusts my judgment.	1	2	3	4	5
11. My worker helps me to understand myself better.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I tell my worker about my problems and troubles.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I don't get much attention from my worker.	1	2	3	4	5

Continues on Next Page

Worker-Youth Trust Scale (Continued)

	1 Almost Never Or Never True	2 Not Very Often True	3 Some-times True	4 Often True	5 Almost Always Or Always True
14. My worker helps me to talk about my difficulties.	1	2	3	4	5
15. My worker understands me.	1	2	3	4	5
16. When I'm angry about something my worker tries to be understanding.	1	2	3	4	5
17. I trust my worker.	1	2	3	4	5
18. If my worker knows something is bothering me he/she asks me about it.	1	2	3	4	5