



# Iowa Children's Justice

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## **Family Supports: Families for Iowa's Children (FIC) Project October, 2010**

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### October Topic: Family Connections

Family connections are essential for all children and it is especially important for children in foster care to know that people care about them at this difficult time. In October, 2010, Four Oaks Family and Children's Services (Four Oaks) in Cedar Rapids on behalf of Iowa KidsNet, and in collaboration with the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS), was awarded a 3 year federal **Family Connections** grant to implement an intensive "family finding and engagement" project, "**Families for Iowa's Children**" (FIC).

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### Families for Iowa's Children (FIC) project

The purpose of Iowa's FIC project – which began in October 2009 - is to use search technologies and family-centered practices to help children in foster care reconnect with family members and natural supports during and after their time in care. FIC Project partners include: Catholic Community Services of Western Washington, Iowa Children's Justice, the University of Iowa, and Meskwaki Family Services. The target population for the project is children, ages 0-17, who have been referred for a foster family placement. Children will be randomly assigned to the FIC project and over the 3 year period, the project will serve a total of 200 foster children.

FIC has been implemented in 26 counties in two diverse DHS service areas: the former Ames Service Area and the Cedar Rapids Service Area. Counties included in the Ames area are: Calhoun, Hamilton, Hardin, Humboldt, Jasper, Marshall, Pocahontas, Poweshiek, Story, Tama, Webster, Wright; counties in the Cedar Rapids area include: Appanoose, Benton, Davis, Jefferson, Johnson, Jones, Iowa, Keokuk, Linn, Mahaska, Monroe, Van Buren, Wapello, Washington.

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### Why family supports are important

In addition to providing options for foster care placement or permanency resources for children in the event that reunification is ruled out, relatives and natural supports can also provide support to the child in other ways both while the child is in foster care and after the child exits care. This support can include phone calls, visits, and cards; help with transportation to appointments, having someone who cares attend a school, sport or church event; having a relative or kin provide a temporary place to live. Connections with relatives and kin can also provide important support for birth parents who are working to regain custody of their child and resume their parenting roles.

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### What research tells us

A Center for Law and Social Policy study determined that children in kinship care had fewer school changes (63%) than children in non-relative foster care (80%) or those in group care (93%). Children in kinship care are more likely to report wanting their current placement to be their permanent home (kinship care-61%, non-relative foster care-27% and group care-2%) and less likely to report having tried to leave or run away (kinship care-6%, non-relative foster care-16% and group care-35%). Both teachers and caregivers tend to rate children in kinship care as having fewer behavioral problems than do their peers in other out-of-home settings.

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## What research tells us (cont'd)

A study funded by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and the Department of Health and Human Services found that children in early kinship care were more likely to achieve early stability; by 36 months, 58% of children in early kinship care were classified as stable, compared with only 32% of children in general foster care. Children in early kinship care had a lower marginal probability of behavioral problems by 36 months. The estimate of behavioral problems was 46% if all children had been assigned to general foster care only, compared with 32% if the children had been assigned to early kinship care.

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## FIC project model

FIC is a defined model based on effective practice across the country that is applied consistently to every case randomized into the project.

The FIC model includes

- Intense searching for family through personal contacts and various Internet sites, to immediately identify and engage family members and natural supports when a child is placed in foster care, developing the child's "team".
  - Potential relative placements are timely assessed and planning for permanency for the child is ongoing.
  - Daily/weekly staff supervision to maintain a sense of urgency and momentum, supporting timely decision making and addressing clinical issues as they arise.
  - Frequent Family Team Meeting's to assess and plan with the child's team, how to connect with and support the child in care and with the parent, working to regain custody of the child, during the child's time in care and ongoing.
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## How FIC works

A foster child randomly assigned to the FIC project is assigned a "search and engagement" specialist. The FIC staff works closely with the child, his or her family and the foster family, to identify important people in the child's life and identify how they can support the child. Working closely with DHS, FIC staff also locates possible friends or family, through utilizing "search" resources, that may not have been involved in the child's life recently, but who might be able to help the child and family now. The child and family are also connected to natural and community supports to provide ongoing support.

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## What judges can do

Judges can make significant contributions to connect foster children with relatives, kin and natural supports. For example:

- Welcome relatives and kin into the court process and thank them for their involvement with the foster child and his/her family.
  - Encourage the parent(s) to work with DHS to identify relative and kin resources for the child and family, including the non-custodial parent and his/her family.
  - Ask if relatives were considered for placement of the child, if the child is placed in non-relative foster care, and why a relative was not available for placement of the child.
  - Ask relative caregivers what types of financial and other supports are being provided to assure that the placement is stable and continues.
  - If an out-of-state family member is being assessed for placement, judges can inquire how the ICPC home study process is progressing.
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## What judges can do (cont'd)

### **If the child and family reside in a county served by the FIC project:**

- Ask if a specific foster child is being served by the FIC project.
  - If the foster child is being served by the FIC project, a Judge can ask about how many relative, kin and natural connections have been identified for the child and the type of involvement the various connections have with the child.
- Ask how often the child's "team" of connections meets, to plan for current and ongoing support of the foster child and his/her family.
- Ask what connections have been identified to assist the parent(s) in regaining custody of the child and to support the family when the child is returned to the parent(s).
- If the child is placed with a relative in a permanent relationship, the Judge can ask if permanency issues such as legal, financial, safety and possible future needs of the child have been addressed.

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## For more information about FIC

For more information regarding the Families for Iowa's (FIC) project, contact: Roxanne Thompson, Project Manager, 515-460-6579, [rthompson@iowakidsnet.com](mailto:rthompson@iowakidsnet.com) Cherie Torresi (Ames), 515-291-3202, [ctorresi@yss.ames.ia.us](mailto:ctorresi@yss.ames.ia.us) or Jen MacCormick (Cedar Rapids), 319-264-0259, [JMacCormick@fouroaks.org](mailto:JMacCormick@fouroaks.org)

More information about relative/kinship care can be found at the following web sites:

<http://www.cwla.org/programs/kinship/nationallinks.htm>

<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTON27748920080602>

[http://www.newamerica.net/publications/policy/relative\\_care\\_creates\\_powerful\\_bonds\\_for\\_children](http://www.newamerica.net/publications/policy/relative_care_creates_powerful_bonds_for_children)

<http://www.clasp.org/admin/site/publications/files/0347.pdf>

<http://archpedi.ama-assn.org/cgi/content/full/162/6/550#SEC2>

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## For more information about Iowa Children's Justice

For more information about Iowa Children's Justice, contact Gail Barber, Director as [gail.barber@iowacourts.gov](mailto:gail.barber@iowacourts.gov)

This e-letter may be forwarded to others you think might be interested. If you would like to add someone to our mailing list, please send their email address to [jane.kieler@iowacourts.gov](mailto:jane.kieler@iowacourts.gov)

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