

When Change Comes: A Mixed Methods Exploration of the Perceived Effect of Permanency

Roundtables on the Decision Making Ecology of Pennsylvania Child Welfare Workers

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Doctor of Social Work

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, the people who claim me as their own, to whom I belong. To my mother, Beverly Wolf Arnold, a role model of unconditional love and faith through action. To my husband, Michael Hendrix, a true partner in this adventure we call our life and my greatest source of courage and love. To my daughters, Julia Frances and Ellen Louise, whose bold and fierce spirits honor Circe's legacy. This work would not have been possible without all of you and your support.

I would also like to dedicate this research study to all of the children and youth in Pennsylvania's foster care system. Your daily struggles living in foster care and entitlement to a permanent family were a constant source of motivation and inspiration for me.

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Approval Page

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Preface

The research described in this dissertation was conducted between October 2018 and December 2018 in an effort to inform the permanency planning technical assistance provided to child welfare professionals in Pennsylvania. The necessity of belonging to a family informed my dissertation topic and the focus of my research. As a social worker, I have dedicated the past twenty-five years of my professional life to reducing the number of youth who age out of the foster care system. I first learned about Permanency Roundtables (PRTs) in 2014 and since that time have been actively involved in their implementation throughout Pennsylvania. We have high expectations of child welfare caseworkers in whose hands the future of our most vulnerable youth rests. The caseworkers I know care deeply about their mission and describe their work expectations as akin to lassoing the moon. This study acknowledges the challenges caseworkers face and is an attempt to address their need for useful and effective professional development and support.

Abstract

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Since 1993, through the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN), Pennsylvania has devoted resources and funding to creating a permanency-driven child welfare system. This effort is supported by research consistently documenting that compared to their peers, a majority of youth who leave foster care without achieving legal and relational permanency struggle to achieve stable housing, employment, and the intimate relationships associated with adulthood. Recognizing the challenges faced by child welfare caseworkers and the significant influence their decisions have on a youth's future, SWAN was charged with implementing Permanency Roundtables (PRTs) throughout Pennsylvania. PRTs theoretically influence the permanency outcomes of older youth by affecting the case, individual, organizational, and external factors involved in the child welfare decision-making continuum. The literature suggests that caseworkers need support, training, and accountability in order to develop and maintain effective

permanency-oriented practice. This mixed methods research study explored PRTs from the perspective of caseworkers using decision making ecology (DME) as a theoretical framework. The findings of this study suggest that while there was not a statistically significant difference that could be attributed to PRT exposure, caseworkers believe PRTs positively affected the case, individual, and agency factors that influence their permanency planning practice. Implications of this study support further exploration of PRTs, continued SWAN involvement in PRT implementation, integration of permanency values into all child welfare training, and further development of a caseworker permanency planning survey.

Keywords: SWAN, Permanency Roundtable, Decision Making Ecology, Permanency, Public Child Welfare, Caseworker, Aging out of Foster Care

Signature of Investigator Tammy D. Hendrix Date 25 March 2019

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Chapter 1: Introduction, Aims, and Relevance for Social Work

Seita and Brendtro (2005) conceptualize “family privilege” as a way to describe the value of being claimed by a family and to raise concern for those lacking this important fundamental right (p. 9). Considering family to be a “mysterious,” “wondrous,” and “elusive” thing, Seita (2012) was placed into foster care after living in an abusive home for eight years (p. 34). For the next ten years, feeling “lost and discarded” he lived in a variety of foster homes and residential settings (Seita, 2012, p. 2). After leaving foster care at 18 years of age, Seita began college knowing that he had no one to call for help, no one to share triumphs with, and no one to encourage him when he wanted to quit. His message to the child welfare field cautions against the “sink-or-swim approach to independence” urging instead for vision and action that is permanency-driven, that recognizes the benefits of family privilege, and that helps children and youth in foster care develop and maintain “primary caring relationships” throughout their foster care experience (Seita, 2012, p. 38).

Following a review of the literature, Frey, Greenblatt and Brown (2005) propose a definition of permanency that starts with a relationship between the youth and at least one adult that is considered by both to be safe and life-long. Frey et al. identify the benefits of this relationship to be “the legal rights and social status of a full family membership” while offering “physical, emotional, social, cognitive, and spiritual well-being” (p. 3). Finally, these authors include access to cultural and religious experiences and norms, birth family history, and ethnic and racial heritage that is available only through ongoing contact with birth family and other significant adults in the youth’s life (Frey et al., 2005). From the perspective of youth,

permanency comprises relationships with friends and family (foster, birth, and kin) the “stability or sameness” of place (school, neighborhood, and community) and the customs, traditions, norms, and rules that govern behavior and define belonging (Stott & Gustavsson, 2010, p. 519).

The Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) is a private and public child welfare partnership created to provide permanency-oriented program and legal technical assistance (TA) to the 67 county children and youth service (CYS) agencies that make up Pennsylvania’s child welfare system. Managed by a partnership between Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries and Family Design Resources (prime contractor), funding for and oversight of SWAN is administered through the state’s Department of Human Services (DHS), Office of Children, Youth, and Families (OCYF). In 2014, to further support and improve child welfare permanency practice, the SWAN prime contractor was charged with implementation of permanency roundtables (PRTs) throughout the state. An intervention developed by Casey Family Programs, PRTs are designed to influence all levels of child welfare practice by identifying and addressing barriers to permanency at the micro, exo, meso, and macro levels of the public child welfare system (White, Corwin, Buher, & O’Brien, 2013). Designed to expedite permanency, a PRT is a structured case consultation provided by a team, comprising internal and external permanency consultants, public child welfare staff, and other experts (O’Brien, Davis, Morgan, Rogg, & Houston, 2012). The purpose of the case consultation is to identify a path to permanency and create a permanency plan that is reviewed by the team on a monthly basis until legal permanency is achieved or the youth voluntarily leaves foster care (O’Brien et al., 2012). Training on permanency values and preparation for all members of the PRT team are provided before the case consultation to support a permanency-focused effort (O’Brien et al., 2012). Training and meeting facilitation are also provided to help team members ask questions

and provide feedback in a manner that helps a public child welfare caseworker (caseworker) explore changes in attitudes, knowledge, and practice skills without feeling criticized or shamed (O'Brien et al., 2012). The logic model presented in Figure 1 outlines PRT components, activities, and outcomes.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Initial outcomes	Intermediate Outcomes	Long-term outcomes
TA Team (RTAs, PTAs, TADM's) PRT Program protocols, policies and procedures, Portal (out of home children's report) county children and youth agencies training curriculum	Assess, improve and monitor agency culture of Permanency	# of assessments completed	Identify caseworker, agency and system barriers to permanency	Increase caseworker belief in permanency	Increase permanency oriented culture
	Promote, educate and support use of PRT	# of trainings provided	Increase number of adults in youth's life	Improve caseworker skills related to permanency practice	Reduce amount of time youth spend in foster care
	Prepare PRT team members	# of county staff trained	Identify agency and system barriers to permanency	Improve caseworker knowledge related to permanency practice	Reduce number of youth who age out of care
	Create safe place for caseworkers to examine attitudes, knowledge, and practice skills	# of TA's contacts to county	Coordinate service provision	Increase knowledge of and use of resources by caseworker	
	Develop and monitor an effective permanency plan that identifies a path to permanency for youth	# of children/youth reviewed at PRT		Increase level of support provided to caseworker	
	Identify agency, community and SWAN resources needed for permanency	# of barriers identified		Increase number of permanency experts in agency	
	Provide training to caseworkers that can be applied to permanency work			Increase accountability throughout agency	
				Reduce caseworker, agency, and system barriers to permanency	

Figure 1. Permanency Roundtable Logic Model

Aims and Research Questions

This concurrent mixed methods study involving caseworkers employed at two Pennsylvania CYS agencies was conducted to evaluate what effect, if any, PRTs have on the case, individual, agency, and external factors involved in the child welfare decision-making continuum following placement into foster care. To accomplish this goal, caseworker self-assessments and perceptions of 1) their ability to achieve permanency for older youth, 2) their attitudes towards permanency for older youth, 3) their permanency planning practice skills, and 4) agency support for permanency planning were explored and compared. As recommended by Gambrill (2008) a systems perspective was used in this study to better understand the PRT intervention in the context of the environment within which it is implemented. Approaching the study from a systems perspective such as decision making ecology (DME) highlights the relationship between caseworkers and the environment within which decision-making occurs, explaining why change in one influences change in the other (Robbins, Chatterje, & Canda, 2012).

Using a deductive approach, it was hypothesized that if a public child welfare agency implements PRTs then caseworkers will perceive a change in the case, individual, organizational, and external factors that make up the DME involved in permanency planning. As recommended by Scher, Kisker, and Dynarksi (2015), the following research questions informed the sampling, comparison criteria, data analysis, and reporting of outcomes.

1. To what extent are PRTs implemented with fidelity in a CYS agency? (Quantitative)
2. Is there a difference in how caseworkers working in a CYS agency that has implemented PRTs self-assess their attitudes towards permanency, self-efficacy, and permanency planning skills for older youth compared with caseworkers who are working in a CYS agency that has not implemented PRTs? (Quantitative)
3. Is there a difference in how caseworkers working in a CYS agency that has implemented PRTs self-assess agency support for permanency planning for older youth compared with caseworkers who are working in a CYS agency that has not implemented PRTs? (Quantitative)
4. Do caseworkers who have participated in a PRT report that agency barriers to permanency planning emerge during the PRT process? (Quantitative)
5. Do caseworkers who have participated in a PRT report that system barriers to permanency planning emerge during the PRT process? (Quantitative)
6. Is there a difference in how caseworkers working in a CYS agency that has implemented PRTs perceive the DME compared with caseworkers working in a CYS agency that has not implemented PRTs? (Qualitative)
7. How do caseworkers perceive the effect PRTs have on the permanency planning DME? (Qualitative)

Statement of the Problem

In 2015, over 21,000 young adults, 18 years and older, left the child welfare system without achieving legal permanency, a phenomenon more commonly known as aging out of foster care (US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), 2017). The goal of permanency planning is a legally permanent family that meets a child's "social, emotional, and

physical needs” (Tilbury & Osmond, 2006, p. 278). For older youth, their foster care experience often comprises disrupted birth family relationships, foster placement instability, and significant time spent living in congregate care settings (Havlicek, 2011; Stott, 2013; White et al., 2013). A qualitative study exploring the effect of multiple placement moves on youth in foster care, conducted by Unrau, Seita, and Putney (2008), found themes of “profound” loss and “disconnection” (pp. 1259-1261). Perry (2006) attributes unresolved losses and unstable “social networks” to the development of emotional and behavioral problems exhibited by youth living in foster care (p. 376). Disrupting the relationships youth have with adults also isolates them, reducing the number of people in their lives who are willing to provide legal permanency in the form of reunification, adoption or permanent legal custodianship. According to Perry, youth need to be grounded in place and emotionally connected to other people within the boundaries of a healthy relationship. Wald and Martinez (2003) stress the need for all youth to be “embedded in networks-families, friends, and communities-that provide guidance, support, and help, both financial and otherwise” by the time they are 25 years old (p. 2). Massinga and Pecora (2004) agree noting the “protective factors” that a “caring relationship” with at least one adult provides to address the “multiple risks” foster children experience (p. 157). Despite these recommendations, the 2017 Child Trends report notes that, across the nation, 71% of 18 year old youth aged out of foster care.

A decade’s long history of research documenting the poor quality of life experienced by most youth who age out of foster care provides a clear mandate to identify what causes this phenomenon and how to prevent it from happening (Courtney & Heuring, 2005). Early studies called for changes in the way foster children were cared for and assisted after they left care; however, most studies were retrospective, localized, had high rates of attrition, and did not use a

comparison group (Courtney & Heuring, 2005). Gypen, Vanderfaeillie, De Maeyer, Belenger, and Van Hoken's (2017) meta-analysis of quantitative studies that used comparison groups, published between 2004 and 2015, stressed the need to support former foster youth for up to ten years after leaving care. Methodological concerns with these studies included comparison groups that did not necessarily share the same experiences and risks associated with youth living in foster care along with small sample sizes that affected the generalizability of the studies (Gypen et al., 2017). National-level studies involving larger sample sizes (Cook, 1994; Courtney & Heuring, 2005) and several longitudinal studies (Courtney et al., 2007; Courtney & Heuring, 2005; Pecora et al., 2003) found that compared to their peers, a majority of former foster youth were doing poorly in areas related to education, employment, housing stability, use of public assistance, and involvement with the criminal justice system. Supporting these research findings, the national youth in transition database (NYTD) reported over a third of Pennsylvania's foster youth who aged out of care had been homeless at least once, a quarter had become a parent, 79% were unemployed, a third had been incarcerated at least once since leaving care, and only 16% were enrolled in post-secondary education (HHS, 2016). The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (2013) conservatively estimates that in the United States the "cost of bad outcomes" associated with aging out of foster care amounts to \$8 billion dollars per year (p.10).

Reflecting the value contemporary culture in the United States places on self-sufficiency and independence, the purpose of interventions targeting transition-age foster youth have historically focused on the development of life skills (Collins, 2015). Provided by federally funded independent living (IL) programs, youth are typically offered a range of services that target educational, employment, housing, mentoring, social skills, pregnancy prevention,

parenting support, financial literacy and asset building (Collins, 2015; McDaniel, Courtney, Pergamit, & Lowenstein, 2014). While IL programs have been offered since 1985, there are no standardized methods for delivering services and few research-informed IL best practice recommendations (Collins, 2015; McDaniel et al., 2014). Donkoh, Underhill, and Montgomery's (2008) systemic review of randomized and quasi-randomized control studies found that IL participants had better outcomes than youth who did not receive IL services; however, weak methodology affected generalizability of the results. Avery (2010) cautions that IL programs not only do not prepare youth for independence, they enable youth to leave foster care without a support system that could help them when problems occur. A rigorous randomized design evaluation conducted on four IL programs in 2014 confirms Avery's conclusions, finding little evidence of effectiveness (Collins, 2015).

To respond to concerns identified about IL programs, attention has turned to strategies that reestablish relationships with birth family and to identify mentors (Collins, 2015).

While research conducted on mentoring programs has shown that these relationships positively influence resilience, not enough research has been conducted to determine their effectiveness (Collins, 2015). Pecora, Whittaker, Barth, Borja, and Vesneski (2019) describe a range of promising permanency-oriented strategies such as family teaming, concurrent planning, "intensive family preservation services," family finding, Permanency Roundtables (PRTs), and Rapid Permanency Reviews (RPRs).

Recognizing the significant influence a caseworker's decisions have on a youth's future, researchers acknowledge the complex and challenging nature of child welfare casework (Thompson, Wojciak, & Cooley, 2017; Zell, 2006). Faced with large caseloads, challenging clients, extreme stress, and vicarious trauma, caseworkers can easily become demoralized

(Tao, Ward, O'Brien, DiLorenzo, & Kelly, 2013). Given these conditions, it is with a sense of urgency that the provision of useful support to caseworkers should be considered a priority. According to Collins (2015), a knowledgeable, skilled, and supportive caseworker is critical to the effectiveness of any intervention.

Understanding the Problem

Effectively advocating for transition-age youth requires a definition and understanding of the problem (Collins, 2015). This “process of framing” considers the “social constructions” of child and family and how expectations and definitions of both groups have changed over time (Collins, 2015, p. 87). According to the seminal work of Cobb and Elder (1983), defining a problem is subjective and dependent on “interpretation and social definition” (p. 172). Collins and Clay (2009) propose both an individual and system way of thinking about the phenomenon of aging out of care and how to best address this issue. Developmental and sociological perspectives provide a theoretical foundation on which to base an understanding of the individual orientation. Developmental perspectives identify what has occurred or failed to occur during a youth’s life, how these experiences affect the youth while living in foster care, and how to support his or her exit from care (Smith, 2011). Sociological perspectives describe healthy transitions in life and identify what needs to happen to support youth in foster care (Collins, 2015). Theoretical perspectives frame an understanding of the system orientation by describing and interpreting the professional world within which caseworkers operate and interventions are implemented (Jones et al., 2013).

Developmental Perspectives

Attachment Theory. Tilbury and Osmond (2006) consider attachment theory to be the “theoretical foundation for permanency planning” (p. 268). Attributed to the seminal work of Bowlby (1969) and further developed by Ainsworth (2009), attachment theory describes how the “internal working models” of each person, created through their early experiences with a primary caretaker, influence all stages of development (Atwool, 2006, p. 318). If a caregiver responds appropriately and consistently to an infant’s distress, a secure attachment is able to form, enabling a child to view others as reliable and the self as worthy of care (Atwool, 2006). Atwool notes that the ability to identify, monitor, and control emotions in addition to establishing and maintaining relationships are affected by the quality of this first attachment experience. Smith (2011) notes that a secure attachment and safety net enable an adolescent “to move out into the world with greater autonomy” (p. 79).

Resilience Theory. Masten, Best and Garmezy (1990) define resilience as “the process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances” (p. 426). Masten (2001) attributes resilience to the “magic of ordinary, normative human resources” that enable all children to adapt to risk factors (p. 235). Researchers have identified culture, individual characteristics such as temperament, along with the quality of support from family and nonfamily members as factors influencing resilience (Atwool, 2006). Daining and DePanfilis (2007) note that as young adults transition out of foster care they lose the support of the child welfare system. Masten, Cutuli, Herbers, and Reed (2009) recommend that interventions with youth at risk for aging out of care focus on building assets by developing strategies to increase the number and quality of “resources available to youth that promote positive development” (p. 129). Greeson’s (2013) review of the “beating the odds”

studies suggests that having a positive and committed relationship with at least one adult, in addition to parents, was a critical factor for developing resiliency (p. 42). Atwool (2006) agrees considering relationships to be “key to all aspects of resilience” (p. 327).

Adolescent Development. According to Smetana, Campione-Barr and Metzger (2006) “adolescence begins in biology and ends in culture” emphasizing the influence of the social and cultural environment in determining the boundaries between adolescence and adulthood (p. 258). Freundlich et al. (2011) find adolescence to be a time of significant brain development as chemical changes in the brain provide a “window of opportunity” for youth to take risks in order to develop the knowledge and skills needed in adulthood (p. 2). Shifflet-Chila, Harold, Fitton, and Ahmedani (2016) describe typical adolescence as a “time of storm and stress” where youth struggle with developing an identity while striving for independence in the context of peer relationships and self-consciousness (p. 364). According to Meeus (2016) it is during adolescence that identity, coping strategies, and relationship skills develop.

For youth living in foster care, normal adolescent development is complicated by a history of trauma, “toxic stress,” and social disconnection (Avery, 2010; Freundlich et al., 2011, p. 25). Smith (2011) notes that most youth who age out of foster care have endured “extreme forms of adverse experiences in addition to repeated separations from biological and other caregivers” (p. 37). Studies cited by Freundlich et al. (2011) find that “complex trauma” can disrupt and slow brain development, interfere with the development of a secure attachment, and create “ongoing physical and emotional problems” (p. 26). In support, Chapple, Tyler, and Bersani (2005) attribute “long-reaching negative effects” to child neglect (p. 50). De Bellis (2001) considers child abuse and neglect to be a “negative life altering experience” that adversely affects the brain causing developmental delays and learning disabilities.

Kools' (1997) ground-breaking qualitative study found that spending a lengthy time in foster care negatively influenced a youth's identity development. Foster youth participating in her study expressed feelings of "shame, self-loathing, and low self-esteem" that led to social isolation and inability to plan for the future (Kools, 1997, p. 267).

Due to the ability of the brain to respond to experiences, Freundlich et al. (2011) report that trauma can be mediated by using a "positive youth development approach" (p. 2). Permanency planning focused on positive youth development encourages frequent opportunities for youth to connect with significant adults within their birth and foster families and the community (Freundlich et al., 2011). Greeson (2013) references several studies that find it advantageous for youth to experience social support from an adult. Avery (2010) concurs with research findings that ascribe "successful youth development...to relationships with the family of origin and other fictive kin" (p. 399).

Sociological Perspectives

Life Course Theory. According to the formative work of Elder (1998), life course theory recognizes the importance of social connections, how individual and social changes affect the personal narrative of each individual, and how individuals are changed by the people in their lives. Collins (2015) notes that the "leaving-home transition" varies among cultures and has varied over time in western culture (p. 36). A successful transition to leaving home and being an adult is dependent on educational, employment, and financial opportunities and resources that support marital and parenting decisions (Collins, 2015). Smith (2011) describes the change from foster care dependency to independence as "dramatically compressed" following high school

graduation or an eighteenth birthday, leaving little opportunity for practicing problem-solving or decision-making (p. 84). From a life course perspective, youth who age out of foster care are transitioning into adulthood too early (Collins, 2015).

Emerging Adulthood. Arnett's (2015) conceptualization of "emerging adulthood" was developed from observations that the transition period between adolescence and adulthood was increasing and characterized by instability, a search for identity, and a focus on the self (p. 2). In support, Cohen, Kasen, Chen, Hartmark, and Gordon (2003) found gradual increases over time in the acquisition of "residential, financial, romantic, and parenting" independence leading to the "consolidation of adult status" by age 30. Curry and Abrams (2015) find emerging adults of all social classes currently struggle at some level with housing and financial instability thus needing the support of adults longer than in previous generations. To support these claims, Avery (2010) reports that "40% of those who leave home for the first time between the ages of 19 and 24 return to live in their parental household at some time" (p. 400). Contributing to these findings, Steinberg (2005) describes emerging adulthood as a time of "heightened vulnerability resulting from disjunctions between the developing brain and behavioral/cognitive systems that mature along different timetables under the control of both common and independent biological processes" (p. 69). Greeson, Garcia, Kim, Thompson, and Courtney (2015) argue that it has become normal for older youth to gradually adopt adult responsibilities with support from their parents. In contrast, for transition-age youth in foster care, the state, as parent, disengages abruptly at age 19 or 21 years (Greeson et al., 2015).

Smith (2011) observes that youth who are “emotionally and socially isolated” have a more difficult time transitioning out of foster care (p. 81). Thus, while preparation for adulthood is important, success should be redefined as the establishment and nurturing of relationships that provide support and promote *interdependence* throughout the youth’s life (Curry & Abrams, 2015).

Social Capital Theory. According to the foundational work of Coleman (1990), social capital theory provides a way to understand the benefits of social relationships and networks. Coleman considers social capital to be the resources provided by parents and other significant adults that help a child to be successful as an adult. Social capital is dependent on the number, quality, and value of these social relationships (Freundlich et al., 2011). Radey, Schelbe, McWey, and Holtrop (2017) point to extensive research that suggests the importance of social capital in general wellness. In support, Baker (2000) has linked higher incomes, job promotions, “better mental and physical health,” longevity, “happiness, satisfaction, and a meaningful life” to higher levels of social capital (pp. 16-25). Freundlich (2009) warns that without a family and access to social capital, youth will not have the “comfort and security that belonging to a family network brings” (p. 4). Youth with family approach adulthood with role models and support for creating their own healthy family, cultural, ethnic identities, and successful work environments (Freundlich, 2009). Because youth in foster care do not have the resources to accumulate social capital, researchers find young foster care alumni attempting to obtain social capital from birth family, friends, and community with little success (Perez & Romo, 2011). Establishing and nurturing connections to “resource-rich networks” as recommended by Collins (2015) can “act as protective factors that build young people’s knowledge, skills, and confidence and aid in the successful transition to adulthood, resiliency, and recovery from trauma” (p. 45). In agreement,

Freundlich et al. (2011) urge the child welfare field to prioritize establishing and maintaining social capital as a critical element in permanency planning and preparation for adulthood.

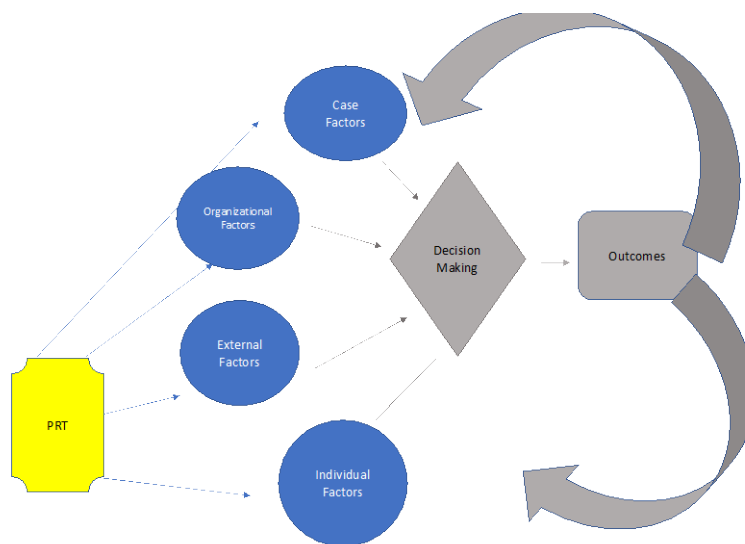
Relational-Cultural Theory. Lenz (2016) considers relational-cultural theory (RCT) to be a framework for understanding the importance of “growth-fostering relationships” in human development (p. 415). In a growth-fostering relationship “each person is inspired to shine, to change, to value his or her own well-being, at the same time he or she shares in the growth of the other person and in the well-being of the relationship” (Jordan, 2018, p. 235). Jordan (2018) considers “authenticity, mutual empathy, and mutual empowerment” to be critical elements of growth-fostering relationships (p. 7). According to Jordan, RCT challenges the Western cultural mandate to be “independent, strong, alone, and invulnerable” (p. 230). Developed from the experiences of women and “racially marginalized populations,” RCT is considered to be “relevant to all individuals, regardless of gender or cultural demographic” (Lenz, 2016, p. 415). Involvement with the child welfare system can isolate youth by excluding and devaluing them (Jordan, 2018). Samuels and Pryce (2008) caution that youth in foster care are encouraged to be independent and self-reliant in an environment that lacks social support and emotional connections. Eisenberger and Lieberman’s (2004) exploration of the relationship between the “pain of “social injury” and physical pain confirm the importance of and “lifelong need for connection” (p. 298). According to Jordan “real connection creates healing” that leads to the development of the trust, acceptance, and empathy needed to form healthy relationships with others (p. 231).

Theoretical Framework

Wulczyn and Halloran (2017) conceptualize decision-making in child welfare as consisting of a “dynamic system of feedback and response as opposed to a series of independent clinical decisions” (pp. 11-12). Munro and Hubbard (2011) define a system as “a collection of parts (or subsystems) that interact to accomplish an overall goal” (p. 728). Systems approaches highlight the relationship between people and their environments while recognizing how both are influenced as a result of this relationship (Robbins et al., 2012). In order to evaluate planned change in an organization, a systems theory approach is recommended in order to conceptualize the various “key variables” and boundaries that make up the system and to determine how the system components interact with one another (Hummelbrunner, 2011; Munro & Hubbard, 2011; Robbins et al., 2012, p. 48). As Pawson (2006) cautions, “social interventions are always complex systems thrust amidst complex systems” thus making it difficult to predict how and to what extent an intervention will alter practice (p. 35).

Helm and Roesch-Marsh (2017) recommend an ecological decision-making model as a way for child welfare professionals to examine “their own sense-making activity as part of a larger set of interacting systems” (p. 5). An ecological perspective as described by the pioneering work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) envisions the environment within which people interact and develop to be constructed of four levels, the “micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems” (p. 22). These systems range from the “pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person” to the cultural context that defines the norms and values that make up an individual’s “belief systems and lifestyle” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, pp. 22-26). Using an ecological perspective acknowledges the influence micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems have on an individual’s beliefs and behaviors

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This perspective also acknowledges the “social ecologies-the people, places, times, and contexts in which social interaction occurs” that provide insight into what causes and resolves problems (Barth,1986, p. 14). This study uses an ecological perspective, decision making ecology (DME), because it applies concepts from decision-making science to the child welfare field and in a “holistic” manner, highlights the influence individual, organizational, case, and external factors have on the decisions that are made throughout a child’s foster care experience (Dettlaff, Graham, Holzman, Baumann, & Fluke, 2015, p. 27). As shown in Figure 2, Baumann, Fluke, Dalglish, and Kern (2013) conceptualize the DME as comprising individual (microsystem), organizational (mesosystem), case (exosystem), and external factors (macrosystem) that influence how decisions are made, what decisions are made and the consequences of decisions that are made. Figure 2 also depicts the focus of this study, the influence of PRTs on the DME factors.



Adapted from Baumann et al., 2013

Figure 2. PRT and Decision Making Ecology

Case Factors

Case factors, such as child and family characteristics, affect the reason for initial and ongoing child welfare involvement, while “culture shapes the family’s response to intervention and acceptance of responsibility” (Cohen, 2003, p. 149; Dettlaff et al., 2015). Studies have documented specific youth characteristics, foster care experiences, casework practices, and organizational issues that influence whether or not youth achieve permanency before leaving care (Collins, 2015). Following a literature review, Becker, Jordan, and Larsen (2007) identify minority race, particularly African American, presence of an intellectual disability, mental illness, or substance abuse as predictors of poor permanency outcomes. Additional risk factors include entering foster care as an adolescent, spending a long time in foster care, and moving repeatedly while in foster care (Becker et al., 2007). According to Freundlich et al. (2011), youth who are 14 years and older remain in foster care twice as long as the total foster care population. Several researchers identified living in congregate care and exhibiting behavior problems as factors that negatively influence permanency (Havlicek, 2011; Simmel, 2012; Stott, 2013). Collins (2015) notes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) adolescents are disproportionately aging out of care. Of particular concern are youth with a case plan goal of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) (Tao et al., 2013). As noted by Tao et al. (2013), APPLA has become a “default case designation for older youth” for whom, in reality, permanency planning has ended (p. 218). A multistate study conducted by White et al. (2013) found that permanency was 3.8 times more likely for youth with reunification as a goal rather than APPLA and 10.2 times more likely for youth who had at least one life-long connection to an adult. Also, with each additional year of age, youth were 8% less likely to achieve permanency (White et al., 2013).

Pennsylvania's foster care statistics for 2016 highlight several at-risk populations for aging out of care (Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC), 2017c). Of the total number of youth residing in Pennsylvania's foster care system, 35% were African American and 13% were Hispanic, indicating an overrepresentation of minority children (PPC, 2017c). Over a thousand youth entered foster care at 13 years of age or older, 800 youth living in foster care were over 13 years of age, and close to 400 youth lived in congregate care (PPC, 2017c). Over 21% of youth, 16 years and older had a goal of APPLA and of those youth, 68% left foster care without a permanent resource to support them (PPC, 2017c).

Individual Factors

Individual factors include caseworker beliefs, bias, values, attitudes, expectations, personal experiences, educational background, theoretical orientation, and permanency practice knowledge and skills (Cohen, 2003; Keddell, 2017). In their ground-breaking work, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) propose a conceptual framework that links attitude to behavior, through intention. Defined as "readiness to carry out a certain behavior," intention is influenced by attitude, peer pressure, and perceived ability and control (Kim & Nan, 2017, p. 38). A caseworker's unique values, beliefs and biases strongly influence their priorities, decision-making, and actions (Cao, Bungler, Hoffman, & Robertson, 2016; Carnochan, Moore, & Austin, 2013; Freundlich & Avery, 2005; Stein & Rzepnicki, 1984).

Caseworker Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Permanency. Eagly and Chaiken (2007) define attitude as a "psychological tendency" to consider something either good or bad (p. 598). Consisting of beliefs and located "in the mind of individuals," attitudes can be expressed through judgment and behavior that is not always observable (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007, pp. 584-585; Kim & Nan, 2017). According to Olufemi (2017) attitudes are "learnt, relatively stable, but can be

modified” (p. 61). Individuals are not always cognizant of their attitudes and the influence attitudes have on their judgement and behavior (Eagly & Chaiken, 2007). Applied to child welfare, studies have explored how caseworker attitudes affect decisions regarding child protection, (Davidson-Arad & Benbenishty, 2010; Daniel, 2000; Delgado, Pinto, Carvalho, 2017; Munro, 1996) the participation of children and youth in decision-making, (Shemmings, 2000) and successful youth transition out of foster care (Gates, Hughes, & Kim, 2015). Other studies have explored caseworker attitudes towards kinship foster care (Peters, 2005) and noncustodial fathers (Arroyo & Peek, 2015). According to Davidson-Arad & Benbenishty (2010), under conditions of uncertainty such as in child welfare, decisions are influenced by a worker’s attitudes. Beckstead (2003) found that in situations that are complex, caseworkers pay attention to those factors that are consistent with their attitudes.

Renne and Mallon (2005) argue that successful permanency planning starts with the belief that “every young person is entitled to a permanent family” (p. 497). In support, a case study conducted by Avery (2000) found that if a youth was believed to be “too emotionally troubled, too old, too damaged by the system...unadoptable” recruitment efforts were reduced, negatively affecting permanency outcomes for that youth (pp. 414-415). Louisell (2009) concurs highlighting the misperceptions caseworkers have about the availability of adoptive resources for older youth, the desires of older youth to be adopted, and the success of older youth adoptions. Warning that attitudes and beliefs are not always based on “empirical knowledge or...practice wisdom,” Davidson-Arad and Benbenishty (2010) call for training and supervision that increases

caseworker awareness of their attitudes and beliefs (p. 7). In his seminal work, Munro (1996) urges caseworkers to be aware of and to question their attitudes and beliefs in order to counter the tendency individuals have to pay attention to information that supports already held beliefs.

Self-Efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to an individual's beliefs about his or her ability to complete a task or reach a goal (Bandura, 1995). People with low self-efficacy are easily discouraged if they are not successful, while those with high self-efficacy find ways to overcome challenges (Bandura, 2006). Applied to child welfare, self-efficacy influences the motivation, decisions, and actions of caseworkers (Bandura, 1995). Cherry, Dalton, and Dugan (2014) note that caseworkers "need a strong belief in their ability to affect changes in the client's situation in the face of opposition and long odds" (p. 320). Cherry et al. found self-efficacy to be influenced by employment history, education, tenure, and staff development experiences. Bandura (2006) argues that in order to develop self-efficacy related to permanency planning, caseworkers need to be exposed to permanency planning efforts that are effective, receive positive feedback regarding their own permanency planning practice, and then successfully help children and youth achieve permanency.

Permanency Planning Practice Skills. Permanency planning is defined by the foundational work of Maluccio and Fein (1983) as goals *and* actions that establish and maintain life-long, healthy connections between youth in foster care and committed adults. Tilbury and Osmond (2006) consider "relationships, identity, and a sense of belonging" to be the desired outcomes of effective permanency planning (p. 267). Freundlich et al. (2011) urge the child welfare field to make the establishment and nurturing of relationships a priority in casework activities, all interventions adopted, and services provided. To reduce the risk of aging out of care, caseworkers are encouraged to begin permanency planning the first day of placement,

conduct individualized case assessment and planning, engage birth family in identifying problems and possible solutions, ensure frequent and meaningful visitation with birth family, and effectively collaborate with other service systems (Barth, Greeson, Zlotnik, & Chintapalli, 2009; Renne & Mallon, 2005; Tilbury & Osmond, 2006). Caseworkers should also identify and engage kinship resources, repeatedly use recruitment strategies, refer for services that nurture youth well-being and permanent relationships with adults, and take action that encourages and nurtures positive attachments with birth family and other significant adults (Barth et al., 2009; Renne & Mallon, 2005; Tilbury & Osmond, 2006). Renne and Mallon (2005) recommend adopting a “youth permanency framework” based on the belief that every youth has a right to a permanent family, that involves youth in all decision-making, that establishes and nurtures healthy relationships with birthparents, siblings, extended family, and other significant adults, that utilizes concurrent planning, that is sensitive to the youth’s gender, culture, race, religious preference, and sexual orientation, that is strength-based, and that provides services in a respectful, honest, and responsive manner. Involving youth in the decision-making process by asking them to identify and participate in a permanency planning team that meets until the youth achieves permanency is recommended by several researchers (Avery, 2000; Holland, Faulkner, & Perez-del-Aquila, 2005; Renne & Mallon, 2005).

A child welfare practice framework, described by McCarthy (2012) identifies family engagement, teaming, assessment, planning, and intervention as components critical for effective family-centered child welfare practice. These components are also identified in Pennsylvania’s child welfare practice model as best practice (Pennsylvania DHS, 2014). True family engagement treats family like “key stakeholders and advisors,” and

involves them in all aspects of service planning, delivery, and evaluation (McCarthy, 2012, p. 5). Teaming recognizes the value of “community effort” in providing the needed resources to address the complex issues faced by caseworkers (McCarthy, 2012, p. 8). McCarthy stresses the need for team meetings to be empowering for staff at all levels of the agency. Assessment, completed in “partnership” with children, youth, and families, is conceptualized as an ongoing process of “gathering, analyzing, and using information” to create an understanding of the problem and to build a foundation for planned action (McCarthy, 2012, p. 8). The goal of service planning is to develop, with the family, an attainable path to safety, well-being, and permanency for the children and youth involved (McCarthy, 2012). Intervention is considered by McCarthy to include the “actual delivery” of services, resources, and support needed for the family to successfully complete their goals (p. 8).

Organizational Factors

White et al. (2013) call attention to the influence organizational culture, climate and staff turnover have on effective permanency planning. Flower, McDonald, and Sumski (2005) found a negative correlation between the number of caseworkers a youth was assigned and the youth’s achievement of permanency. A 2009 Children’s Right study found that a lack of accountability and resources negatively affect the prospects of achieving permanency for youth who have been in care for two or more years.

Based on organizational support theory, employees perceive an agency as supportive if they believe that resources are fairly distributed, agency policies and procedures are just, supervisors value their contributions and are invested in their best interests, and they are treated with respect and have the opportunity to participate in decisions that affect them (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Thus, unrealistic work expectations, unclear or changing

job expectations, inadequate training, and a lack of rewards or opportunities for advancement can lead to a perception of negative agency support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). A systematic review of the literature related to agency support conducted by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) found that “having the opportunity to have one’s opinion heard and being treated with dignity and respect” had the strongest association with a supportive environment (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002, p. 708). Rhoades and Eisenberger also found that a positive perception of agency support led to “increased job satisfaction, positive mood, and reduced strains” which improved staff turnover and job performance (p. 711). Allan, Harlaar, Hollinshead, Drury, and Merkel-Holguin (2017) reported lower rates of foster care placement with caseworkers who had a manageable caseload and support from agency leadership and management staff. Yoo (2002) however, did not find a statistically significant relationship between poor work performance and negative attitudes about “compensation, work conditions, and leadership.” She theorized that supportive coworkers and supervisors served as “protective factors” enabling caseworkers to help their clients achieve better outcomes (Yoo, 2002, p. 57).

Julien-Chinn and Lietz (2016) reference literature supporting the influence supervision has on decisions made by caseworkers. A meta-analysis conducted by Mor Barak, Travis, Pyun, and Xie (2009) found a significant relationship between positive client outcomes and “effective supervision” within social service agencies (p. 3). While there is support for the influence supervision has on job satisfaction, studies report mixed findings related to the effect supervision has on client outcomes in child welfare (Carpenter, Webb, & Bostock, 2013; O’Donoghue & Ming-sum, 2015). Several researchers consider the supervisor’s role in child welfare to be essential in helping caseworkers transfer learning to their interactions with children and families (Frey et al., 2012; Nijman & Gelissen, 2011). Landsman and D’Aunno (2012) reference

literature that supports the need in child welfare for a supervisory framework grounded in staff skill development, the achievement of outcomes, the use of evidenced-informed strategies, and attention to culturally competent practice. They also recommend the use of reflection and strength-based approaches during supervision (Landsman & D’Aunno, 2012). O’Donoghue and Ming-sum (2015) conclude that client outcomes are improved when supervision is focused on client issues. A quantitative study exploring the influence supervision has on permanency outcomes conducted by Julien-Chinn and Lietz found evidence that increasing permanency-oriented content in supervision increased workers’ confidence in achieving timely permanence for the children and youth on their caseload. Despite these recommendations, Ruch (2007) describes the dominant child welfare supervisory model as “one based on surveillance rather than support, with an emphasis on monitoring, management, and narrowly conceived performance indicators” (p. 372). High staff turnover and inadequate staffing also force supervisors in child welfare to work directly with children and families, decreasing the amount of time they have to nurture and support frontline caseworkers (Landsman & D’Aunno, 2012).

External Factors

External factors include the community in which a CYS agency exists, the “hierarchical array of human services,” and the numerous and at times competing laws and regulations generated from federal, state, and local entities (Cohen, 2003, p. 147; Dettlaff et al., 2012). Collins (2015) describes the current child welfare system in America as a “collection of programs and policies established incrementally through the years” (p. 70). Since the 1980s federal legislation has attempted to address concerns related to aging out of foster care and to influence permanency planning efforts by requiring placement in the least restrictive environment, the establishment of permanency goals for all children placed

into foster care, and the creation of individualized case plans that are reviewed by a court every six months (PPC, 2008). The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) formally ended long-term foster care as a case plan goal or permanency option (Freundlich, Avery, Munson, & Gerstenzang, 2006). ASFA established permanency-focused time frames, supported the temporary nature of foster care, and encouraged permanency planning beginning the first day of placement (PPC, 2008). The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 emphasized the importance of legal permanency by offering states incentives to increase the number of older youth who were adopted, providing subsidies to legal guardians, increasing support for placement of foster children with relatives, allowing for resumption of care, mandating youth participate in the development of an individualized transition plan at least 90 days prior to leaving foster care, and extending subsidies for youth to age 21 years (Collins, 2015; Pérez, 2017). This act also stressed the importance of maintaining connections with and knowledge about one's biological family (Pérez, 2017).

Pennsylvania state statutes related to permanency planning require searching, identifying and engaging relatives and kin of foster children beginning at placement and throughout their time in foster care (PPC, 2008). To expedite permanency, the use of engagement strategies such as family group decision-making, family group conferencing, diligent search, and family finding along with the use of concurrent goals and planning are also encouraged (PPC, 2008).

Amendments to Pennsylvania's Adoption Act recognize the value of ongoing contact with birth family by allowing for the creation of an enforceable post adoption contact agreement between

an adopted child and birth relatives (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2010). In addition, this act requires the establishment of a statewide registry for all records and documents associated with finalized adoptions (Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2010).

Relevance for Social Work

The primary goal of social work is to “help meet the basic needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty” (National Association of Social Workers (NASW), 2017, p. 1). As a result, social work has a long history of involvement with child welfare systems and a stated commitment to identify and further good practice in this field (Collins, 2015). Preventing youth from aging out of foster care requires intervention at the macro, mezzo, and micro levels of child welfare practice, making this topic particularly relevant to social work education, research, and leadership (Collins, 2015). Justification for this assertion lies within the profession’s core values of “service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence” (NASW, 2017, p. 1).

Collins’ (2015) believes that the needs of youth at risk for aging out of care have been largely ignored as a result of child welfare bureaucracies with inadequate funding and rigid rules, an emphasis on family preservation and prevention, and “social ambivalence” directed towards adolescents (p. 4). Renne and Mallon (2005) describe child welfare policies and practice that are crisis-oriented and directed towards ensuring permanency for younger children to be prioritized over the needs of older youth. Collins points to negative media coverage and “lukewarm public support” as contributors to this lack of attention (p. 4). The principles related to social justice demand advocacy, informed research, and effective

intervention for this “stigmatized” and “marginalized” population (Collins, 2015, pp. 4-5). Given what is known about the futures of youth who are disconnected and untethered, upholding the principle of service requires social workers to act to create a permanency-driven child welfare system (Collins, 2015; Courtney & Heuring, 2005; Gypen et al., 2017). Due to the potential for transition-age youth to be re-traumatized by a system and services that are provided to help them, new interventions and evaluations of effectiveness must be viewed through the lens of trauma-informed, relationship-based, and positive youth development approaches (Avery, 2010; Collins, 2015; Freundlich et al., 2011). Schools of social work need to prepare students to work and lead within CYS agencies given the practice skills needed and change in focus required for a permanency-driven child welfare system.

Justification for Study

This study adds to the child welfare field by addressing research gaps identified in the literature, by providing needed information to Pennsylvania policy makers and the SWAN prime contractor, by adding to the research already conducted on PRTs, and by empowering caseworkers involved in the PRT project. Identifying and choosing interventions designed to reduce the number of youth who age out of foster care is complicated by Courtney’s (2000) concerns that the “child welfare field has little conclusive to say about the comparative benefits of any of its interventions or the quality of decision-making engaged in by those operating the child welfare system” (p. 745). Fisher, Spangler, and Huebner (2015) agree finding that agency administrators, in “desperation” agree to implement interventions that they do not completely understand because they do not have “solid evidence about what works” (p. 92). In response, Chaffin (2006) proposes “research-practice partnerships” to better

understand and modify interventions within real world settings (p. 92). Tao et al. (2013) recommend an evaluation of the agency's culture of permanency to assess workers' attitudes and beliefs about permanency, of leadership's support of permanency practice, and of the training and organizational support needs of caseworkers.

Gaps in research identified by Packard, McCrae, Phillips, and Scannapieco (2015) include little understanding of change from the perspective of front-line workers and limited exploration of change tactics. Packard (2013) calls for research that utilizes a mixed methods approach to evaluate the effect of change by involving participants in the change effort rather than the more common methods of gathering data from "only a few managers or allegedly successful cases" (p. 86).

The majority of research conducted on decision-making in child welfare has investigated how safety assessments and placement decisions are made during investigations of abuse and neglect (Crea, 2010; Dolan & De Bortoli, 2015). Dettlaff et al. (2015) and Shlonsky (2015) encourage extending research of the DME to "all points of the [child welfare] decision-making continuum" (p. 22). Skivenes and Tonheim (2016) urge researchers to include the "voices of child welfare workers" to better understand their perceptions of the barriers to "thorough decision-making in everyday child welfare work" (p. 107).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Implementation Science

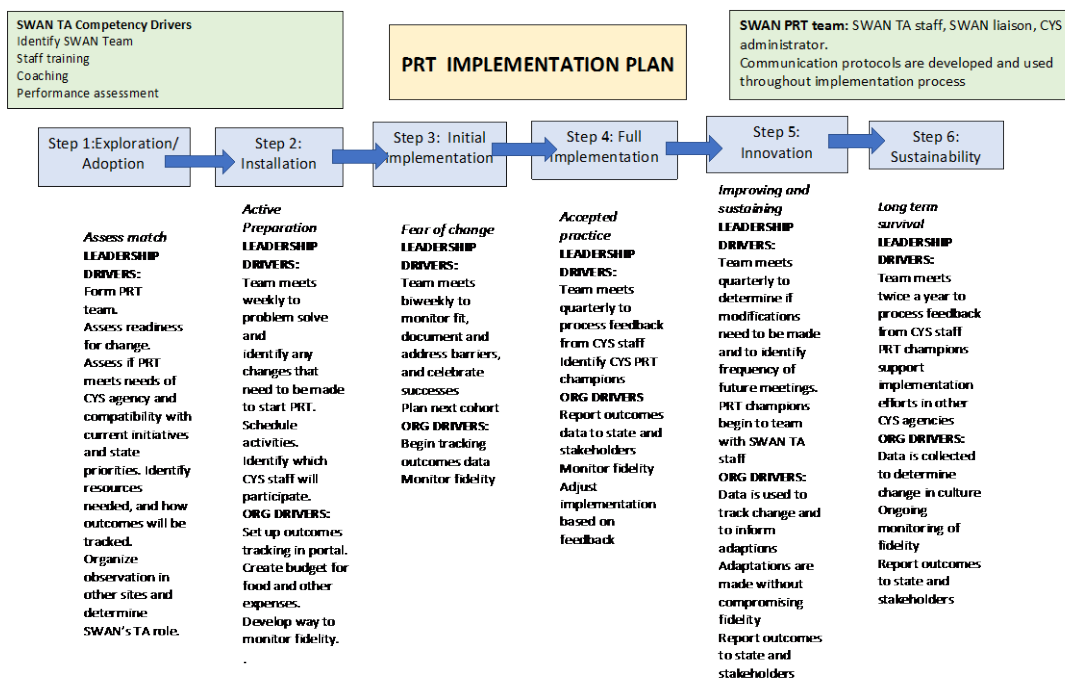
While the sole purpose of this study was not to evaluate implementation of PRTs, Durlak and DuPre (2008) recommend that researchers consider the role implementation plays when exploring an intervention. Implementation science uses theoretical models to explore

the reasons efforts to implement evidenced-based interventions succeed or fail (Nilsen, 2015). Although Armstrong et al. (2014) consider change to be necessary in an organization, they have found that the majority of interventions targeting change are not implemented well. Mildon and Shlonsky (2011) and Fixsen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, and Wallace (2005) stress that effective implementation is an ongoing process that is purposeful and active, rather than passive and time-limited. Following a review of five meta-analyses involving almost 500 studies, Durlak and DuPre (2008) conclude that the quality of an implementation effort has a “profound” effect on client outcomes, noting statistics that range in effect from two to 12 times higher. Albers, Mildon, Lyon, and Shlonsky (2017) caution that the effect of an intervention cannot be explored unless fidelity of implementation is assessed. Given that the highest rate of fidelity found by Dulak and DuPre was 80%, some intervention adaptation seems to be necessary for sustainability.

Supported by the research of Crea and Crampton (2012) and Williams and Glisson (2014), Lambert, Richards, and Merrill (2016) found organizational climate and culture along with resources to be the most important factors in all stages of implementation. According to Aarons and Palinkas (2007) the bureaucratic organization of child welfare agencies, the significant and challenging needs of children and families, and the diversity of service providers complicate implementation of interventions such as the PRTs. Although Leathers, Melka-Kaffer, Spielfogel, and Atkins (2016) did not find a correlation between caseworker attitudes and successful implementation efforts, Lambert et al. consider the “buy-in and active support” of leadership necessary to begin the change effort, of management staff to create change, and of on-line staff to sustain change (pp. 147-148).

Although Kaye, DePanfilis, Bright, and Fisher (2012) and Lambert et al. (2016) note the limited use of implementation science in child welfare, the literature reviewed found a positive correlation between organizational change and staff perception that the intervention was “valuable and worthwhile” (Armstrong et al., 2014, p.107). Using an ecological framework, Durlak and DuPre (2008) consider characteristics of the intervention, the organization providing the intervention, and the larger system within which the organization operates as important factors in successful implementation of an intervention. Reviews of evidenced-based interventions in child welfare highlight the need for ongoing and sustained support from change agents when implementing new practice frameworks (Aarons & Palinkas, 2007; Leathers et al., 2016). As an “intermediary organization” or “change agent,” the SWAN prime contractor provides the technical assistance needed to diffuse, disseminate and implement PRTs throughout the state (Franks & Bory, 2015, pp. 53-54; Rogers, 2003, p. 400). Leathers et al. (2016) found that caseworkers who received support in using evidence-based practice interventions following training were more likely to consider using the intervention. Factors that affect implementation of the PRT intervention include the novelty of PRTs, the manner in which the SWAN prime contractor educates and promotes the use of PRTs within the SWAN network, and the time it takes for county CYS agency administrators to decide to implement PRTs (Rogers, 2003). According to Rogers (2003), how quickly PRTs are adopted is influenced by how beneficial PRTs are thought to be, how well PRTs fit the “values, past experiences, and needs” of CYS agencies, how complex PRTs are perceived to be, and the ability adopters have to experiment with PRTs (p. 15).

Effective implementation is critical in order for an intervention such as PRTs to “create change in the knowledge, behavior, and attitudes” of caseworkers (Fixsen et al., 2015, p. 30). Implementation of PRTs, using the National Intervention Network (NIRN) framework, is a six-step process that begins with exploration and ends in sustainability (Fixsen et al., 2005). As recommended by Fixsen et al. (2005) the SWAN prime contractor and county CYS agency staff form a team to implement the PRT intervention. Considered necessary for change in child welfare practice, leadership, competency, and organizational implementation “drivers” described in Figure 3 promote agency leadership and support, fidelity of implementation, and the maintenance of an organizational climate conducive for change (Blasé, Kiser, & Van Dyke, 2013; Fixsen et al., 2015, p. 2; Kaye et al., 2012).



Blasé, Kiser, & Van Dyke (2013). *Stages of implementation analysis: Where are we?*

Retrieved from National Implementation Research Network. Active Implementation Hub. <http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/resources/changes-to-exploring-context>

Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman, & Wallace (2005). *Implementation research: a synthesis of the*

literature. Retrieved from National Implementation Research Network. Active Implementation Hub. <http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu>

Figure 3. Permanency Roundtable Implementation Plan

Decision-Making Science

Child welfare casework is described in the literature as a “series of decision points” made with “a high level of discretion” that significantly influence the lives of children and youth in foster care (Dettlaff et al., 2015; Drury, 2014, p. 401; Gambrill, 2008). Beginning with an assessment to determine the birth family’s ability to safely care for the child, decision-making then shifts to ensuring child safety, well-being, and permanency for the length of time the child is in foster care (Crea, 2010). Using standardized assessment tools and consultation with peers and supervisors, caseworkers often have to quickly make complex decisions without having access to all of the information they need (Crea, 2010; Gambrill, 2008). Keddell (2017) considers the “best interests” of the child to be the identified “fundamental principle” that informs how decisions should be made in child welfare practice (p. 327). While universally accepted, Keddell considers this principle to be vague and open to interpretation, thus “creating problems for both decision makers and those subject to their decisions” (p. 239). Hackett and Taylor (2014) describe decision-making in child welfare as a process that is “complex and fluid” involving a continuum between analytical and intuitive ways of thinking (p. 2183). Hammond (2007) describes analytical thinking to be a deliberate and “slow process” that is clearly defined and defensible (p.165). In contrast, intuitive thinking is described by Kowalski (2006) as an “effortless,” less structured process that relies more on emotion and instinct (Abstract, para. 1). Where child welfare decision-making falls on this continuum is based on the amount of information that needs to be processed, the timeframe within which the decision needs to be made, and the skill and experience of the caseworker (Hackett & Taylor, 2014). Studies conducted on decision-making in social work support the integration of intuitive and analytical thinking styles (Dolan & De Bortoli, 2015; Helm & Roesch-Marsh, 2017).

Researchers have documented concerns about the quality and consistency of decisions made by child welfare professionals in the field (Dettlaff et al., 2015; Gambrill, 2008). Cohen (2003) notes that rather than applying standard casework policies, decisions often are influenced by a lack of resources, “accepted agency practice,” time pressures, and the values and bias of the caseworker (p. 145). Seminal research conducted by Lindsey (1992), found that given the same set of facts, only 25% of caseworkers reached consensus regarding whether or not to place a child into foster care. These findings were supported by a study comparing caseworker decisions conducted by Rossi, Schuerman, and Budde (1999). Decision-making errors, the involuntary nature of most public child welfare practice, uncertainty, and loss were found to negatively affect permanency outcomes for youth living in foster care (Gunning, 2017; Skivenes & Tonheim, 2016). Research findings point to an overconfidence in initial assessments, a reliance on “unreliable evidence,” an underutilization of research, a reluctance to make or revise initial opinions, an inability to identify all of the options, and a failure to consider long-range consequences of a decision as errors in the critical thinking process of caseworkers (Munro, 2008; Skivenes & Tonheim, 2016, p. 108). Smith and Donovan (2003) consider Lipsky’s (1980) foundational theory of street-level bureaucracy as a way to explain why caseworker attitudes and practice with clients do not always reflect best practice expectations. Lipsky believes that a lack of time, resources, and “conflicting and ambiguous goals” encourages caseworkers to invest more time and energy with clients most likely to succeed, to work towards achieving personal goals that differ from those established by the agency, and to ration services (p. 40). Ellett and Leighninger (2007) attribute the “de-professionalization” of child welfare staff to the increase in staff turnover and the lowering of professional standards for caseworkers (p. 3). These factors

negatively affect how well clients are served and thus the outcomes achieved by children and youth in foster care (Ellett & Leighninger, 2007). According to the seminal work of Young, Corcran-Rumppe, and Groze (1992), decision-making delays prior to termination of parental rights and a lack of appropriate services increase the amount of time youth spend in foster care.

Helm & Roesch-March (2017) consider “professional judgment” or “professional sense making” to be a complex activity that is influenced by the caseworker’s understanding of practice theory and research, their personal and professional values, and the agency’s lines of authority (pp. 1-3). In order to make sound decisions, child welfare workers need to decide where to “focus their attention” and become aware of what is influencing their decision-making process (Gambrill, 2008, p. 179). Gambrill (2008) finds successful problem-solvers “think more about their thinking” by critically analyzing data, and attending to information that does not support their assumptions (p. 177). Helm and Roesch-March believe that the ability to make a sound decision is developed through repeated interactions with supervisors, coworkers, clients, and other professionals who help the caseworker reflect and process professional experiences. Exploring how to improve decision-making in child welfare, Hackett and Taylor (2014) recommend supervision that focuses on how decisions are reached and not just on what decisions are made. Recognizing the numerous decisions made by caseworkers on a daily basis, Munro (2008) cautions against focusing “solely on the major decision points” (p.199). She recommends helping child welfare workers develop skills related to quickly and accurately assessing a situation (Munro, 2008, p. 200).

Organizational Context

An organization is defined by Rogers (2003) as a “stable system of individuals who work together to achieve common goals through a hierarchy of ranks and a division of labor” (p. 404). Yoo, Brooks, and Patti (2007) recommend considering organizational variables when evaluating the implementation and effect of an intervention on client outcomes. Organizational factors include the agency’s mission, structure, policies, and procedures along with performance expectations (Cohen, 2003; Dettlaff et al., 2012). The structure of an organization details how people are organized, who they supervise or report to, what decisions they can make, how job responsibilities are defined, how job performance is monitored, and the extent of collaboration between groups within the organization (Montanari, n.d.). The bureaucratic structure of public child welfare agencies generally limits the decision-making authority of caseworkers (Yoo et al., 2007). Aarons, Hurlburt, and Horwitz (2011) concur noting that case documentation requirements, an emphasis on agency procedures, and licensing requirements do not nurture creative problem-solving or willingness to try innovative strategies, influencing implementation of new interventions. The successful adoption of a new practice in order to improve permanency outcomes is affected by agency climate and culture (Leathers, et al., 2016).

Organizational Culture. According to the foundational work of Verbeke, Volgering, and Hessels (1998) organizational culture “reflects the way things are done” (p. 23). Acknowledging a history of inadequate funding and staffing, Ellett, Ellis, Westbrook, and Dews (2007) consider the work of child welfare to be the “most complex in social work” taking up to two years for a new caseworker to achieve self-efficacy. According to Williams and Glisson (2014) child welfare “cultural norms” influence the manner in which caseworkers view, engage, and respond to children and families (p. 758). These “cultural norms” also influence the type of relationships

they develop with their clients (Williams & Glisson, 2014, p. 758). Tao et al. (2013) summarize findings that support the positive influence a quality child welfare workforce and a favorable work environment had on permanency outcomes for youth. Following a systematic review of eight articles, Goering (2018) concluded that children and families had better outcomes in organizations that focused on engagement and provided opportunities for professional development. PRTs attempt to change the culture of permanency within a CYS agency by increasing the success caseworkers have establishing legal permanency for the youth on their caseloads. Caseworker by caseworker, PRTs challenge the norms that have become practice as usual in CYS agencies by exploring the myths surrounding permanency, identifying barriers to permanency, and increasing support provided to the caseworkers in their attempts to overcome these barriers. In turn, these efforts are thought to change attitudes and beliefs held by caseworkers, thereby establishing and nurturing in caseworkers hope and a vision of the future that is permanency-oriented. A national study conducted by Williams and Glisson (2014) found that “organizational culture acts as an antecedent to climate and has indirect effects on youth outcomes” (p. 765).

Organizational Climate. Climate is described as the way workers perceive the environment of the organization and its influence on their well-being (Glisson, Green, & Williams, 2012; Verbeke et al., 1998). Following an extensive literature review, Kuenzi and Schminke (2009) describe the influence organizational climate has on staff attitudes and behavior. In agreement, Glisson and Hemmelgarn (1998) note the influence organizational climate has on the effectiveness of public child welfare agencies. A positive organizational climate is described by Collins (2015) as one that values professionalism, supports staff development through effective supervision and training opportunities, and encourages career

advancement. Kuenzi and Schminke consider a positive organizational culture to be one that is “fair, supportive, ethical, [and] participative” (p. 691). In contrast, public child welfare is conducted in a climate that is “under resourced, crisis oriented...[and] highly scrutinized” (Leathers et al., 2016, p. 380). Williams and Glisson (2014) link organizational climate to child welfare outcomes due to the influence job satisfaction and agency commitment have on caseworker self-efficacy. Thompson et al. (2017) describe the negative effect high caseloads, low wages, excessive paperwork, limited training, and budgetary restrictions have on caseworkers. Caseworkers involved in focus groups conducted by Tao et al. (2013) were described as “bleak and frustrated” highlighting the intensive needs of the foster youth on their caseloads, the agency and systems barriers they encountered, and the responsibility they felt for the well-being of the youth they served (p. 228). The findings of a longitudinal study conducted by Leathers et al. (2016) attribute the focus on “documentation, meeting court requirements, and only addressing their clients “most pressing needs” as factors that negatively affect permanency planning (p. 376). Acknowledging the stressful nature of child welfare casework, Glisson et al., (2012) recommend increasing caseworker involvement in decision-making, and encouraging cooperation and collaboration as ways to improve staff morale.

In contrast, Ellet et al.’s (2007) large qualitative study found that caseworkers who chose to remain in the field were personally and professionally committed to the larger mission of the profession and to the agency within which they practiced. These workers functioned best with consistent and engaged leadership, strong and supportive supervisors, and coworkers who supported one another (Ellet et al., 2007). A qualitative study, conducted by Thompson et al. (2017) concluded that caseworkers valued a collaborative and supportive environment. PRTs theoretically nurture a permanency-driven CYS agency climate through the identification of a

path to permanency for each youth presented, by evenly distributing tasks amongst team members in order to support the caseworker, and by identifying barriers to permanency that are outside the control of the caseworker. Monthly follow-up meetings ensure accountability and ongoing attention to the permanency plan. The PRT team maintains consistency and attention to permanency despite high turnover of caseworkers and supervisors.

Organizational Learning. A learning organization views workplace learning from a systemic perspective, considering the professional development needs of employees and what is needed for the agency to adapt and survive in a changing environment (Beddoe, 2009). Avby, Nilsen, and Ellström (2017) observed that caseworkers in their study valued knowledge gained from professional and personal experiences rather than knowledge based on research findings. They also found that those caseworkers who considered research, used it to confirm rather than examine beliefs that justified the decisions they made (Avby et al., 2017).

Learning within a CYS agency is an ongoing process that is essential for competent casework practice (Brittain & Potter, 2009). Complicating the learning process, Brittain and Potter (2009) note that child welfare work is conducted while an evidence base for best practice is developing. High staff turnover, common in child welfare, makes it difficult for caseworkers to “develop the ongoing experience-based knowledge that links judgments to outcomes” (Dolan & De Bortoli, 2014, p. 2146). Beddoe (2009) considers identifying and sharing best practice wisdom along with creating a safe environment within which to review and learn from practice errors as critical components of true learning. Due to the ambiguous and unpredictable nature of social work, Beddoe also recommends professional development based on values and focused on critical thinking. Landsman and D’Aunno (2012) consider supervision to be critical in “developing the organization’s knowledge base, and interpreting and transferring knowledge

within and outside the organization” (p. 6). Deglau et al. (2015) found “...only 10% to 13% of what is learned in training may actually transfer to practice” (p. 156). Brittain and Potter remind educators to use teaching strategies that encourage dialogue and interaction with others and to deliver content that is useful and practical. Findings from a qualitative study completed by Deglau et al. (2015) suggest that training across multiple levels of staff encourages the development of “informal social networks” in order to facilitate a “collective transfer of knowledge” that leads to practice change throughout the agency (p. 170).

Training on permanency values and the PRT process are provided to all PRT team members in an effort to create the safe learning environment described by Beddoe (2009). PRTs promote professional development by creating an environment within which child welfare staff can explore their own judgment and sense-making in relation to permanency planning without shame. External consultants and experts expose child welfare staff to creative and potentially unorthodox options. Supporting successful permanency efforts made by caseworkers potentially increases the number of permanency experts within the agency. In addition, professional development that occurs throughout the PRT process should be generalized to other cases.

Organizational Change. PRTs are designed to influence and change caseworker attitudes, beliefs, and actions in an effort to improve permanency outcomes for foster youth served by CYS agencies. Packard et al. (2015) acknowledge the difficulty researchers have identifying and documenting successful change efforts in organizations given the complexity of defining and tracking “indicators across multiple organizational levels, positions, and activities” (p. 444). Following a literature review, Bess (2009) recommends considering individual and organizational level change along with the type and degree of change that occurs within each level. Staff receptiveness, ability, and capacity for change are thought to be necessary

“precursors” for successful change efforts (Packard et al., 2015, p. 447). How change is initiated, the reasons for the change, the characteristics of the organization, the environment within which the organization exists, the goals of the change process and what needs to be changed are noted by Packard et al. (2015) to be factors that influence the success of the change effort. Cao et al. (2016) believe that high quality communication and inclusion of front line workers is critical for successful implementation of change in public child welfare organizations. Communication should be timely, accurate, and useful in helping staff feel more in control of the change (Cao et al., 2016). Cao et al. further recommend that leadership communicate change information and direct supervisors communicate how the change will affect employees’ jobs and responsibilities.

Permanency Roundtable

PRTs theoretically influence permanency outcomes by affecting the case, individual, organizational, and external factors that influence the child welfare decision-making continuum. The literature suggests that caseworkers need support, training, and accountability in order to develop and maintain effective permanency-oriented practice (Tao et al., 2013; Thompson et al., 2017). Specifically, Shlonsky (2015) recommends providing opportunities, such as a case consultation, to support the development of critical-thinking skills in caseworkers. The PRT uses a team-based approach, as recommended by Helm and Roesch-Marsh (2017) and Hackett and Taylor (2014), in order to take advantage of the value of a “diverse range of perspectives” and to promote casework skill development (p. 6). Considering the challenges faced by child welfare caseworkers, researchers such as DePanfilis and Girvin (2005) recognize the benefits of using teams to address “faulty reasoning” and support decision-making (p. 355). In addition to providing support, “teams and groups within organizations also have a ‘collective memory’

which serves to foster transfer of learning that individuals are then able to use to make future decisions” (Helm & Roesch-Marsh, 2017, p. 6). Group decision-making can nurture a permanency-driven agency culture by addressing the attitudes and perceptions of caseworkers, and by identifying and addressing agency and system barriers (Dettlaff et al., 2015, p. 14). Helm and Roesch-Marsh note that group decision-making does not prevent all errors in judgment and is dependent on a competent facilitator to manage the process. When addressing a problem as “complex, unpredictable, open-ended [and] intractable” as preventing youth from aging out of foster care, Conklin (2009) recommends moving away from a linear problem solving process (p. 712). PRTs theoretically accomplish this recommendation by engaging stakeholders in a process that creates a “shared understanding” of why the youth presented is not achieving permanency, by encouraging “coherent action” through the development of a permanency plan, and finally by nurturing commitment to action (Conklin, 2009, p. 18).

Research evaluating the effectiveness of PRTs has had mixed results. In 2009, a quantitative study conducted on a PRT project in Georgia found that by 24 months, 50% of the Georgia cohort ($n = 496$) had achieved legal permanency (Rogg, Davis & O’Brien, 2011). After comparing permanency statistics for 9,000 children in care in Georgia during 2008 and 2009, the researchers found that the rate of achieving permanency was significantly higher in 2009, attributing these positive findings, in part to the PRT process (Rogg et al., 2011). This study did not include a control group and information about the youth and perceived barriers were provided by caseworkers, reflecting their perspective and interpretation (Davis, et al., 2013).

A multistate mixed methods study, conducted in 2010, found at 12 months, 8.5% of the cohort ($n = 726$) had achieved legal permanency (White et al., 2013). A multivariate analysis was conducted to determine the effect of protective and risk factors on achieving legal

permanency, barriers to permanency, placement instability, case managers' attitudes towards permanency, and fidelity to the PRT model. No significant predictors of permanency outcomes were found regarding case manager attitude or fidelity to the PRT model (White et al., 2013).

The discrepancy between the Georgia and multi-state PRT outcomes is thought to be attributed to differences between the two cohorts related to age, placement history, criminal and substance use histories, and barriers to achieving permanency (White et al., 2013). The authors of the multi-state study point to low survey responses, low statistical power, and no matched comparison group as factors that limited the study's ability to determine whether PRTs influenced permanency outcomes for the youth in this cohort (White et al., 2013). White et al. (2016) caution against comparing PRT data across different states due to differences in "state laws and policies; agency structure and funding; agency leadership, focus, and communication; staff stability; staff training and support; and differences in the 'regular' practice model" (White et al., 2016, p. 581).

A process, outcome, and cost study conducted in Colorado between 2013 and 2015 as part of a Title IV-E waiver project evaluation, examined the impact of family engagement, PRTs, and kinship support on permanency outcomes (Forehand, Schisler, & Villwock, 2016). Child welfare staff interviewed by Forehand et al. (2016) reported an appreciation for "the model's focus on permanency, sense of optimism, and relentlessness, spirit of trying new things, and challenging the status quo" (p. 124). Caseworkers reported a change in thinking and practice as a result of their participation in PRTs (Forehand et al., 2016). Data from the youth who were presented at PRTs ($n = 239$) and youth in the comparison group ($n = 139$) were analyzed using a historical matched case comparison design (Forehand et al., 2016). While not statistically significant, the authors found that youth who received PRTs achieved permanency at a higher

rate than the comparison group (Forehand et al., 2016). The study also found that youth receiving PRTs established significantly more connections with adults than the comparison group (Forehand et al., 2016). Following a review of fidelity, Forehand et al., found that youth whose PRT team met regularly were two times more likely to achieve permanency and youth whose team comprised the facilitator, internal and external consultants, caseworker, supervisor, and administrative staff were 69% more likely to achieve permanency (Forehand et al., 2016).

Summary

The literature reviewed informed the purpose and design of this research study in several ways. Given the complex nature of public child welfare casework, the importance of ongoing organizational learning provided justification for an intervention designed to improve permanency planning practice. The dynamics of organizational change structured expectations related to the effectiveness of the PRT intervention. Implementation science provided guidelines to explore the influence of PRTs within the context of the culture and climate of a CYS agency. Decision-making science and the DME formed the foundation upon which the research questions were created, data gathered, and findings analyzed. Understanding concepts related to organizational change and learning and a review of prior research on PRTs suggested a research design comprising a comparison group and focusing on the caseworker instead of youth permanency outcomes. It is within this body of knowledge that the researcher explored the differences between the caseworkers in two CYS agencies to determine what effect if any PRTs had on their permanency planning DME.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Study Design

A concurrent mixed methods approach was used in order to take advantage of what Menon and Cowger (2010) describe as a holistic way to conduct research consistent with social work values. This method also takes advantage of the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Menon & Cowger, 2010). Using a mixed methods approach to explore an intervention such as PRTs is also supported by Gitlin and Czaja (2016). Multiple sources of data, including semi-structured interviews, a caseworker permanency planning survey, and a PRT implementation fidelity survey were used to increase the validity of the study (Bronstein & Kovacs, 2013; Gitlin & Czaja, 2016).

Quantitative. The quantitative portion of the study was designed to explore the fidelity of PRT implementation, to determine the effect of PRTs on caseworker self-report of individual factors and agency support, and to determine if agency and systems barriers were identified during PRTs. Individual factors explored included caseworker self-assessments of 1) their ability to achieve permanency for older youth, 2) their attitudes towards permanency for older youth, 3) their permanency planning skills, and 4) agency support for permanency planning. While a randomized controlled trial is considered the “gold standard for assessing causality,” a quasi-experimental research design, posttest-only comparison group, was used due to the practical, ethical, and logistical challenges involved in conducting intervention research in “real-world settings” (Handley, Lyles, McCulloch, & Cattamanchi, 2018, p. 6). These challenges included time constraints and an inability on the part of the researcher to control which Pennsylvania CYS agency chose to implement PRTs. Given the challenges involved in establishing causality, Thyer (2010) considers this type of study design to be a common way to begin

to study the effects of a social work intervention. To address concerns that caseworkers exposed to PRTs would influence caseworkers not exposed to PRTs a separate CYS agency was chosen as the comparison group (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). To minimize bias caused by unobserved variables, and to strengthen internal validity, the two CYS agencies studied were as similar as possible (Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

Qualitative. The purpose of the qualitative portion of this study was to better understand the PRT intervention by giving voice to caseworkers. Focus groups were held to determine if there were any differences between how caseworkers from both CYS agencies perceived case, individual, agency, and external factors of the DME. As described by the foundational work of Moustakas (1994), a phenomenological approach was chosen in order to identify and describe the “common meaning” caseworkers have regarding what influences their permanency planning efforts and of the PRT intervention (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 75). As recommended by Rubin and Babbie (2017), the design of this portion of the study is based on a qualitative pilot study conducted by the researcher in 2017.

Participants and Recruitment

Study participants were recruited from a convenience sample of caseworkers at two Pennsylvania CYS agencies (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The study population was defined as caseworkers employed at a CYS agency that implemented PRTs (PRT CYS agency) and caseworkers employed at a CYS agency that did not implement PRTs (non-PRT CYS agency).

PRT CYS agency study participants were recruited from a Pennsylvania CYS agency that has conducted PRTs since 2016. Scher et al. (2015) recommend choosing a comparison group that is as similar to the treatment group as possible. To identify a comparison group, a review of demographic information from the 2010 US census and child welfare statistics from Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC) (2017) was conducted. As detailed in Tables 1 and 2, no CYS agencies were perfectly matched.

Table 1. Pennsylvania CYS Agencies Demographics Comparison

	PRT County Rural Mix	Non-PRT County Urban Mix	County A Rural Mix	County B Rural	County C Rural Mix
PRT Implementation	2016	no	no	no	no
Population Median	137,762	125,917	131,504	81,170	185,974
Household Income (in 2016 dollars)	\$42,917	\$44,033	\$40,511	\$43,361	\$63,345
Percent Persons in Poverty	15.6%	14.8%	17.5%	14.8%	8.45%
% White alone	90%	93.2%	92.75	97.2%	94.5%
% Black or African American	4.3%	2.45	4.75	0.65	1.4%
% Hispanic or Latino	2.0%	1.6%	1.2%	1.3%	1.8%

Table 2. Pennsylvania CYS Agencies Child Welfare Statistics Comparison

	PRT County Rural Mix	Non-PRT County Urban Mix	County A Rural Mix	County B Rural	County C Rural Mix
Unduplicated number of children served in foster care	218	206	346	136	194
% youth (13 years and older) in foster care	30.7%	29.6%	25.75	27.9%	26.8%
% of teens living in congregate care	47.4%	73.5%	36.5%	42.9%	26.1%
Rate per 1,000 Children age 0-20 in foster care placement	6.3	6.2	10.7	7.1	3.9
% non-Hispanic white in foster care	61.9%	80.1%	77.5%	89.7%	80.9%
%Non-Hispanic black or African-American in foster care	16.1%	6.8%	19.7%	1.5%	2.1%
% Hispanic or Latino in foster care	4.6%	6.8%	1.2%	2.9%	1.5%
Youth 16-20 with goal of APPLA as % of age group served	19.4%	16.7%	23.1%	9.5%	13.0%
% of APPLA goal exit to non-permanent arrangements	40.0%	100%	83.3%	100%	100%
% of all foster care goal exits to non-permanent arrangements	10.5%	6.5%	6.4%	5.7%	7.1%
% of children who were in foster care for 12 to 23 months and had three or more placement settings	11.3%	28.4%	21.6%	43.8%	38.0%
% of children who re-entered care in fewer than 12 months following reunification	8.6%	14.1%	26.35	23.7%	28.8%

Differences between the PRT CY5 agency and the non-PRT CY5 agency include percentage of urbanization, percentage of county population that is African-American, the racial makeup of each county's foster care population, percentage of teens living in congregate care, percentage of youth with a goal of APPLA who exited care to non-permanent living arrangements, foster care placement stability, and foster care re-entry rates (PPC, 2017a; PPC, 2017b; PPC, 2017c; US Census, 2010).

The non-PRT CY5 agency chosen as the comparison group had not implemented PRTs and, based on the information reviewed, was similar to the PRT CY5 agency in a number of important ways. Demographics such as population size, poverty levels, median household income, number of unduplicated foster children served, and percentage of children under age 18 living in low-income families were similar (PPC, 2017b; PPC, 2017c; US Census, 2017). Child welfare statistics that were similar included the rate per 1,000 children, ages 0-20 years, in foster care, the percentage of youth, ages 16-20 years, with a goal of APPLA, and percentage of children and youth who reunified in a timely manner (PPC, 2017c).

Quantitative. Survey participants were recruited from a total sample size of 75 caseworkers, 35 employed at the PRT CY5 agency and 40 employed at the non-PRT CY5 agency. After obtaining email addresses for all caseworkers employed at both CY5 agencies, the invitation to take the survey was sent to the caseworkers directly from the researcher through Cvents, a software program utilized by the SWAN prime contractor. To encourage participation the survey invitation described the purpose of the study, the estimated amount of time needed to complete the survey, and the possibility of winning one of six, \$50.00 Amazon gift cards (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2014). A link to the survey was embedded in the email to facilitate completion. In addition, information was provided regarding why the study

participant was chosen to complete the survey, the potential benefits of the study for other caseworkers, and the opportunity to influence the future direction of permanency-oriented technical assistance provided to Pennsylvania's child welfare system (Dillman et al., 2014). Recognized as best practice, the survey was designed to be completed anonymously, participation was monitored frequently, and four reminder emails were sent to those study participants who had not responded before the response window closed (Dillman et al., 2014). Of the 75 caseworkers invited to participate, 37% ($n = 28$) completed the caseworker permanency practice survey. Forty-three percent ($n = 15$) of the invited caseworkers from the PRT CYA agency completed the survey; while 32% ($n = 13$) of the invited caseworkers from the non-PRT CYA agency completed the survey.

Qualitative. Focus group participants were recruited from the same 75 caseworkers asked to complete the survey, 35 employed at the PRT CYA agency and 40 employed at the non-PRT CYA agency. While Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) recommend a small sample size in order to “extract thick, rich data,” they also note that the sample size needs to be large enough to “achieve data saturation” (p. 242). Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest 3 to 15 study participants to be an optimal sample size for phenomenological studies. An email inviting caseworkers to a focus group was sent to each agency's administrator, identifying the purpose of the study, the time commitment, and the potential benefits of participation. Each agency administrator then distributed the solicitation email to all caseworkers employed at the CYA agency. Recruitment incentives, refreshments and raffled gift bags, were used to encourage participation. Of the total number of caseworkers invited, 24% ($n = 18$), participated in the focus groups, 61% ($n = 11$) from the non-PRT CYA agency and 39% ($n = 7$) from the PRT CYA agency.

Data Collection Procedures

Quantitative. The quantitative data were gathered through an electronic web-based, self-administered Cvent survey titled the Caseworker Permanency Planning Survey (see Appendix A). A web-based format was chosen in order to inexpensively and quickly gather information from caseworkers to inform the research questions posed by this study (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). This format was also chosen in order to reduce the effort required to access and complete the survey and to facilitate storing and analyzing the data (Baatard, 2012). Cvent software was chosen because the SWAN prime contractor uses this company when creating and distributing surveys within the SWAN network. The Caseworker Permanency Planning Survey measured caseworker self-assessment of: 1) attitudes towards permanency for older youth, 2) permanency planning skills, 3) self-efficacy related to permanency planning, and 4) agency support for permanency planning. The survey was created by revising the Attitudes Towards Permanency scales developed and used by White et al. (2013), experts in the field of child welfare and permanency planning. Permission to use and revise the survey was obtained in order to reflect the unique service system and culture of Pennsylvania's child welfare system. For example, questions were added to determine if caseworkers utilized the Older Child Matching Initiative and referred child specific recruitment services, resources unique to Pennsylvania. The survey questions were then organized around the individual and agency factors of the DME. To reduce study participant fatigue, the survey was divided into sections and one section was displayed at a time (Baatard, 2012). Each question was reviewed to prevent duplication and to ensure that the survey was not too lengthy. The survey was tested by four caseworkers with PRT experience who were employed by a CYS agency that was not involved in the study. Feedback was requested to determine how long it took to complete the survey, if the meaning of the questions

were clear and straightforward, if the scales provided an appropriate way to respond, and if the questions were written in a way that did not lead the user towards a choice (Rogers, n.d.).

Survey revisions were made based on information gathered from each focus group, a review of the literature, and testing feedback. Each survey question gathered information using a five-point Likert scale to produce a ratio score of measurement. Demographic data collected included age, gender, highest educational degree completed, number of years employed at the CYS agency, number of years working in child welfare, position held at the agency, and number of youth presented at a PRT. Caseworker assessment of attitudes and beliefs about permanency for older youth were measured with 11 questions scored from 1 to 5. Caseworker assessment of permanency planning skills were measured with 10 questions scored from 1 to 5. Caseworker assessment of self-efficacy related to permanency planning was measured with 13 questions scored from 0% of the time to 100% of the time. Caseworker perception of agency support was measured with 12 questions scored from 1 to 5.

A fidelity survey, originally developed by White et al. (2013), was used to measure fidelity of PRT implementation (see Appendix A). Permission to use and revise the survey was obtained in order to simplify the survey and accurately assess the implementation of PRTs in Pennsylvania. Logic was built into the survey so that only those survey participants who had attended at least one PRT were able to access the fidelity questions. Survey participants identified how many youth they had presented or observed at a PRT and if they had attended the values and skills training before attending a PRT. The remaining 26 questions scored from 0% of the time to 100% of the time measured the fidelity of PRT implementation by SWAN prime contract staff. Finally, two questions measured if agency and system barriers were identified during the PRT and one question measured caseworker satisfaction with PRTs. As recommended

by Pereplechikova and Kazdin, (2005) a high level of fidelity was indicated by a score of 80% to 100%, a moderate level of fidelity was indicated with a score between 79% and 50%, and a low level of fidelity was indicated by a score below 50%.

Qualitative. The qualitative data was gathered from two focus group held at each CYS agency involved in the study. Focus groups were chosen in order to “capitalize on group dynamics,” to encourage interaction between the study participants, and to create a safe environment for the study participants to provide feedback about their attitudes, beliefs, and practice skills (Freeman, 2006, p. 491). While facilitating the focus group meetings, attention was paid to creating a comfortable environment for the participants, encouraging all participants to talk, and utilizing prompts and open ended questions to fully explore each question (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Freeman, 2006).

The non-PRT CYS agency focus group was 83 minutes long and the PRT CYS agency focus group was 120 minutes long. Extra time was added to the PRT CYS agency focus group in order to capture feedback on PRTs. An interview guide was created and used with each CYS agency focus group (see Appendix B). For both CYS agencies, the same questions were created in order to explore focus group participants’ perceptions of case, individual, agency, and external factors involved in permanency planning. For PRT CYS agency focus group participants, additional questions were created to explore their perceptions of if and how PRTs affected case, individual, agency, and external factors. While an interview guide was used, flexibility and willingness to explore concepts that seemed important to the participants was allowed for. During the focus group meetings, notes were taken while data was recorded on a Sony digital dictation machine.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data Analysis. A summary of the qualitative data analysis is presented in Table 3. The independent variable was the PRT intervention and the dependent variables were the scores on the caseworker permanency practice survey measuring caseworker self-assessments of agency support for permanency planning, identification of external and organizational barriers to permanency, self-efficacy, permanency planning skills, and beliefs and attitudes towards permanency for older youth. The intervening variable was fidelity of PRT implementation. Moderating variables that could have affected the strength of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables were not measured in this study. Data from the permanency planning and fidelity surveys were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 22 for Microsoft. Due to the small sample size, dissimilar group size, non-normal distribution of the data, non-parametric analysis was conducted (Laerd, 2015). Prior to analysis, population pyramids were created in order to visually determine the shape of the distribution between the independent variables (Laerd, 2015). A Mann-Whitney U test using the legacy procedure was conducted to determine if there were differences in survey scores between caseworkers who had participated in a PRT at the PRT CYS agency and caseworkers at the non-PRT CYS agency (Laerd, 2015). As recommended by Gitlin and Czaja (2017) PRT implementation fidelity was measured to determine if the PRT CYS agency staff received the intervention as intended. Average scores were computed to determine percentage of fidelity related to individual implementation components and to determine the overall percentage of implementation fidelity. Identification of agency and system barriers as a result of the PRT were measured by computing the mean percentage of survey responses.

Table 3. Quantitative Data Analysis

Research Question	Sample Size	Variables	Statistical Analysis
To what extent are PRTs implemented with fidelity in a CYS agency?	$n = 7$	Attendance at training PRT team member PRT Process PRT focus	Mean percentages for individual components and total implementation
Is there a difference in how caseworkers working in a CYS agency that has implemented PRTs self-assess their attitudes towards permanency, self-efficacy, and permanency planning skills for older youth compared with caseworkers who are working in a CYS agency that has not implemented PRTs?	PRT CYS agency: $n = 7$ Non-PRT CYS agency: $n = 13$	Attitudes towards permanency Self-efficacy Permanency planning skills	Mann-Whitney U
Is there a difference in how caseworkers working in a CYS agency that has implemented PRTs self-assess agency support for permanency planning for older youth compared with caseworkers who are working in a CYS agency that has not implemented PRTs?	PRT CYS agency: $n = 15$ Non-PRT CYS agency: $n = 13$	Agency support for permanency planning	Mann-Whitney U
Do Caseworkers who have participated in a PRT report that system and agency barriers to permanency planning emerge during the PRT process?	$n = 7$	Identification of system barriers Identification of agency barriers	Mean percentage

Qualitative Data Analysis. Padgett (2017) considers transcription to be “an essential form of data filtering” (p.145). To prepare the focus group data for analysis, both recordings were uploaded to a professional transcription service, Rev Transcription. The recordings were then transcribed word for word. Following transcription, both interviews were reviewed and edited to ensure accuracy. Following this review, the transcriptions were uploaded into NVivo Mac 12, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software program described by Leech and Onweugbuzie (2007) and Peters and Wester (2007), for coding and analysis.

Initial analysis at the word level was conducted to determine the frequency of words used in the interview (Peters & Wester, 2007). To determine word frequency, all questions and comments made by the researcher were removed from each transcript, leaving only the study participants words. Using NVivo, the word search was limited to the 1,000 most frequent words with a letter length of four or more. To identify themes, data were initially organized into codes to match the DME theoretical framework and PRT feedback (Peters & Wester, 2007). An inductive, open coding approach described by Padgett (2017) was then used to organize the data and to prevent the researcher’s own preconceptions from influencing how the data were interpreted. To begin coding, the transcript was reread in its entirety and then codes that were short, simple, specific, and that reflect action were assigned (Charmaz, 2008). These codes were then assigned to themes.

As recommended by Peters and Wester (2007) data analysis began with a “partly open conceptual frame” in recognition that “research is a learning process” (p.637). Memos were written and linked to the codes to encourage reflection and to specify “ideas, perceptions, and decisions” that affected the data analysis (Peters & Wester, 2007, p. 638). Analysis at the code

level was completed to identify themes (Peters & Wester, 2006). NVivo was then used to facilitate analysis at the concept level, linking codes to the data and comparing codes between the two focus groups through the creation of concept maps (Peters & Wester, 2007).

Ethical Considerations

Permission to recruit study participants was obtained from Pennsylvania DHS, OCYF, the PRT CYS agency administrator, the non-PRT CYS agency administrator, and Millersville University's Institutional Review Board, IRB protocol no. 43850788. Due to the unpredictable nature of phenomenological research and subsequent difficulty preparing study participants completely, informed consent was an ongoing process and subjects were able to withdraw from the study at any time (McDonnell, Jones, & Read, 2000) (see Appendix C). To maintain confidentiality, study participants were assigned an identification number (Creswell and Poth, 2018). While no names were shared, group demographics were summarized and quotes attributed to unit and tenure at the CYS agency. Study participants were informed that due to the small sample size, it might be possible to identify who was interviewed for the study and what they reported about their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Limits to confidentiality included child abuse reporting mandates along with indications that a participant was a threat to themselves or others. No identifying information related to children or families served at the involved CYS agencies was shared. Besides the researcher, two Millersville faculty had access to the survey data collected. All data collected during the study was stored in a password protected folder on a password protected computer.

Chapter Four: Results

Demographics

Survey Participants. Demographic statistics for survey group participants are displayed in Table 4. Ninety-three percent of PRT CYS agency survey respondents (12 women, 3 men) were white and had an average age of 36.42 years ($SD = 11.41$, age range: 23-54 years). Eighty percent of these study participants had attained a bachelor's degree, with the majority majoring in criminal justice. Sixty percent of PRT CYS agency survey respondents identified as placement workers, with a mean agency tenure of 67.33 months ($SD = 72.38$, range: 9-240 months) and a mean child welfare tenure of 91.33 months ($SD = 27.47$, range: 9-300 months). One hundred percent of non-PRT CYS agency survey respondents (12 women, 1 man) were white and had an average age of 35.54 years ($SD = 10.92$, age range: 23-62 years). All non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers had attained a bachelor's degree, with the majority majoring in psychology. Fifty-four percent of PRT CYS agency survey respondents identified as placement workers, with a mean agency tenure of 33.92 months ($SD = 19.98$, range: 11-81 months) and a mean child welfare tenure of 39.54 months ($SD = 27.47$, range: 11-120 months).

Focus Group Participants. Demographic statistics for focus group participants are displayed in Table 5. One hundred percent of PRT CYS agency focus group participants (6 women, 1 man) were white. Seventy-one percent of this group were over 41 years of age and had attained a bachelor's degree. Fifty-seven percent of the PRT CYS agency focus group participants identified as placement workers with 44% reporting over 15 years of agency tenure and 57% reporting over 15 years of tenure in child welfare. Ninety-one percent of non-PRT CYS agency focus group participants (10 women, 1 man) were white. Forty-six percent were over 41 years of age and 91% had attained a bachelor's degree. Seventy-three percent of the non-PRT

CYS agency focus group participants identified as placement workers with 9% reporting over 15 years of agency tenure and 10% reporting over 15 years of tenure in child welfare.

Table 4. Survey Participant Demographics

Characteristics	PRT CYS Agency (n = 15)		Non-PRT CYS Agency (n = 13)	
	f	%	f	%
Race				
White	14	93%	13	100%
Black/African American	1	7%	0	0%
Gender				
Female	12	80%	12	85%
Male	3	20%	1	14%
Age:				
Mean (SD)		36.42 years (11.41)		35.54 years (10.92)
Range		23-54 years		23-62 years
Degree				
Bachelor's Degree	12	80%	13	100%
Master's Degree	3	20%	0	0%
Major				
Criminal Justice	5	34%	3	23%
Non Social Services	3	20%	2	15%
Psychology	2	13%	4	29%
Social Work	2	13%	2	15%
Sociology	2	13%	0	0%
Human Services	1	7%	2	15%
Unit				
Ongoing/Placement	9	60%	7	54%
Intake	5	33%	4	31%
Family Finding/Engagement	1	7%	2	15%
Tenure at Agency				
Mean (SD)		67.33 months (72.38)		33.92 months (19.98)
Range		9-240 months		11- 81 months
Tenure in Public Child Welfare				
Mean (SD)		91.33 months (27.47)		39.54 months (27.47)
Range		9-300 months		11-120 months
PRT Participation:				
Yes	7	47%		
No	8	54%	13	100%

Table 5. Focus Group Participant Demographics

Characteristics	PRT CYS Agency (n = 7)		Non-PRT CYS Agency(n = 11)	
	f	%	f	%
Race				
White	7	100%	10	91%
Hispanic	0	0%	1	9%
Gender				
Female	6	86%	10	91%
Male	1	14%	1	9%
Age				
Under 41 years	2	29%	6	54%
41-50 years	5	71%	5	46%
Degree				
Bachelor's Degree	5	71%	10	91%
Master's Degree	2	29%	1	9%
Major				
Non-Social Services	2	29%	0	0%
Social Work	1	14%	0	0%
Criminal Justice	1	14%	1	9%
Rehabilitation	1	14%	0	0%
Education	1	14%	2	18%
Did not identify	1	14%	2	18%
Psychology	0	0%	5	46%
Sociology	0	0%	1	9%
Unit				
Ongoing/Placement	4	57%	8	73%
Intake	2	28%	1	9%
Family	1	14%	2	18%
Finding/Engagement				
Position				
Caseworker	5	71%	10	91%
Supervisor	2	29%	1	9%
Tenure at Agency				
0-5 years	2	28%	7	64%
6-15 years	2	28%	3	27%
Over 15 years	3	44%	1	9%
Tenure in Public Child Welfare				
0-5 years	2	28%	6	54%
6-15 years	1	15%	4	36%
Over 15 years	4	57%	1	10%
PRT Participant:				
Yes	5	71%	0	0%
No	2	28%		

Summary of Quantitative Findings

Identification of Agency and System Barriers. Caseworker Permanency Planning survey respondents ($n = 7$) reported, on average, that agency barriers emerged during 68% of PRTs attended and system barriers emerged during 75% of PRTs attended (see Table 6).

Table 6. Identification of System and Agency Barriers

Outcome	<i>n</i>	Percent of time
Identified system barriers	7	75%
Identified agency barriers	7	68%

Descriptive Statistics: Descriptive statistics comparing mean survey scores are displayed in Table 7. This information suggests that PRT CY5 agency caseworkers had almost the same attitude and belief scores ($n = 7$, $M = 4.06$, $SD = .466$) as non-PRT CY5 agency caseworkers ($n = 13$, $M = 4.00$, $SD = .396$). PRT CY5 agency caseworkers had almost the same permanency planning skills scores ($n = 4$, $M = 4.50$, $SD = .300$) than non-PRT CY5 agency caseworkers ($n = 9$, $M = 4.14$, $SD = .619$). PRT CY5 agency caseworkers had very similar self-efficacy scores ($n = 5$, $M = 4.15$, $SD = .407$) as non-PRT CY5 agency caseworkers ($n = 8$, $M = 4.03$, $SD = .574$). PRT CY5 agency caseworker agency support scores ($n = 10$, $M = 3.65$, $SD = .699$) were similar to non-PRT CY5 agency caseworker scores ($n = 9$, $M = 3.76$, $SD = .349$).

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics

		Attitudes Towards Permanency	Permanency Planning Skills	Self-Efficacy	Agency Support
PRT CYSAgency	<i>n</i>	7	4	5	10
	M (SD)	4.06 (.466)	4.50 (.300)	4.15 (.407)	3.66 (.699)
	<i>Mdn</i>	4.18	4.50	4.31	3.75
	Variance	.218	.090	.166	.490
	Range	3.55-4.45	4.20-4.80	3.69-4.46	2.42-4.50
Non-PRT CYSAgency	<i>n</i>	13	9	10	9
	M (SD)	4.00 (.396)	4.14 (.618)	4.03 (.5740)	3.76 (.349)
	<i>Mdn</i>	4.09	4.10	3.92	3.83
	Variance	.157	.383	.392	.122
	Range	3.45-4.45	3.40-4.90	3.46-4.85	3.33-4.25

Mann-Whitney U Test Results: Statistics from the Mann-Whitney U tests comparing PRT CYSAgency and non-PRT CYSAgency agency survey scores are displayed in Table 8. There were no missing values for the ATP score ($n = 20$). Distribution of the attitude and belief scores for both groups of caseworkers was not similar as assessed visually through population pyramids (Laerd, 2015). Mean rank attitude and belief scores for PRT CYSAgency caseworkers (mean rank = 9.14) and non-PRT CYSAgency caseworkers (mean rank = 11.23) were not statistically significantly different ($U = 36.00$, $z = -7.60$, $p = .447$). There were 7 missing values for the permanency planning skills score ($n = 13$). Distribution of the permanency planning scores for both groups of caseworkers was not similar as assessed visually through population pyramids (Laerd, 2015). Mean rank permanency planning scores for PRT CYSAgency caseworkers (mean rank = 9.25) and non-PRT CYSAgency caseworkers (mean rank = 6.00) were not statistically significantly different ($U = 9.00$, $z = -1.394$, $p = .16$). There were 7 missing values for the self-efficacy score ($n = 13$). Distribution of the self-efficacy scores for both groups of caseworkers was not similar as assessed visually through population pyramids (Laerd, 2015). Mean rank self-

efficacy scores for PRT CYS agency caseworkers (mean rank = 7.30) and non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers (mean rank = 6.81) were not statistically significantly different ($U = 18.50$, $z = -.221$, $p = .82$). There were 9 missing values for the agency support score ($n = 19$). Distribution of the agency support scores for both groups of caseworkers was not similar as assessed visually through population pyramids (Laerd, 2015). Mean rank agency support scores for PRT CYS agency caseworkers (mean rank = 9.90) and non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers (mean rank = 10.11) were not statistically significantly different ($U = 44.00$, $z = -.082$, $p = .94$).

Table 8. Mann-Whitney U Statistics

	County	n	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Attitudes Towards Permanency	PRT CYS Agency	7	9.14	64.00
	Non-PRT CYS Agency	13	11.23	146.00
Permanency Planning Skills	PRT CYS Agency	4	9.25	37.00
	Non-PRY CYS Agency	9	6.00	54.00
Self-Efficacy	PRT CYS Agency	5	7.30	36.50
	Non-PRY CYS Agency	8	6.81	54.50
Agency Support	PRT CYS Agency	10	9.90	99.00
	Non-PRY CYS Agency	9	10.11	91.00

PRT Implementation Fidelity. Seven PRT CYS agency caseworkers completed the PRT implementation fidelity survey with no missing values. PRTs were implemented at 70% integrity, a moderate level of fidelity (see Table 9). To better understand this score, fidelity was separated into training, PRT team member participation, process, and PRT focus. The lowest measures of fidelity included completion of training before participation in a PRT scored at 57% and attendance of key PRT members scored at 54%. This low team attendance score reflects inconsistent participation in PRTs by the agency administrator, along with legal, policy, and educational consultants. Implementation of the PRT process was scored at 82% and the PRT's focus on permanency was scored at 87%, both indicating a high percentage of fidelity.

Table 9. Permanency Roundtable Implementation Fidelity

Implementation Components	<i>n</i> = 7	% Fidelity
Training		
Participated in permanency values training before PRT		57%
Participated in PRT skills training before PRT		57%
Total		57%
PRT team member participation		
Permanency Consultant		96%
Master Practitioner		78%
Legal Consultant		14%
Policy Consultant		25%
Educational Consultant		43%
Supervisor		78%
CYS Agency Administrator		28%
Scribe		89%
Facilitator		88%
Total		54%
Process		
Overview of purpose, process, and ground rules		89%
Caseworker provided with 20 minutes to present case		64%
Time provided for clarifying questions		78%
Youth's permanency status rated		68%
Time for brainstorming		86%
Creation of permanency action plan		96%
Tasks on plan divided p between PRT team		96%
Debrief held		43%
Schedule monthly follow-up		100%
Monthly follow-up occurred		96%
Total		82%
PRT focus		
Identifying and engaging permanency resources		93%
Creating permanent connections for youth		89%
Identifying and securing appropriate services and supports		86%
Did not create an independent living plan		79%
Total		87%
Total percentage of implementation fidelity		70%

Summary of Qualitative Findings

The most frequently used words in the PRT CY5 agency focus group were think, permanent, and workers (see Figure 4). The most frequently used words in the non-PRT CY5 agency focus group were think, family, and people (see Figure 5). The most frequently used words were similar between the two focus groups, confirming the focus and reflecting the topic of the study and the focus group discussion. To link the focus group data to the DME, codes were organized around four main themes: case, individual, agency, and external factors. Codes assigned to the information shared about the perceived effect PRTs had on permanency planning were also organized around these main themes.

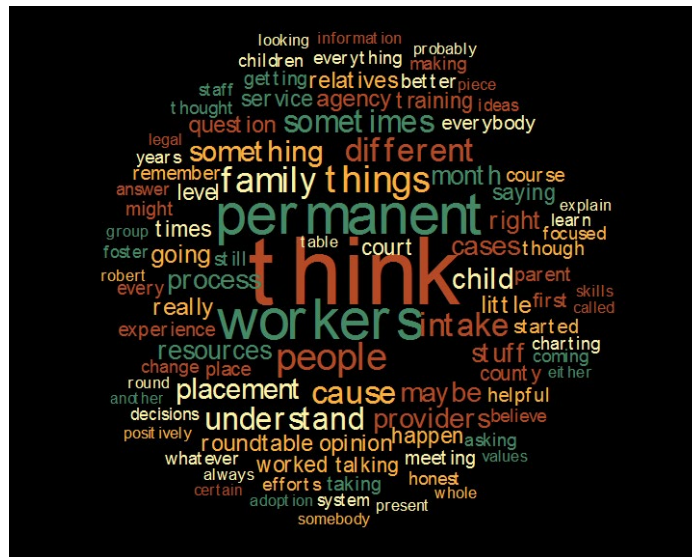


Figure 4. Word Cloud PRT CY5 Agency

Case Factors		
Birth Family Factors	Youth Factors	Resource Family Factors

Figure 7. Non-PRT CYS Agency Case Factors Hierarchy Chart

Case Factors Themes

Between the three case factor codes, birth family factors dominated the discussion at both CYS agency focus groups. Three common themes were identified, generational patterns of abuse and dysfunction, negative effect on youth of impermanence on youth, and inability to parent youth. Themes unique to non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers included lack of birth parent engagement and birth parent poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. A theme unique to PRT CYS agency caseworkers involved kinship family concerns. These themes are identified in case factor concept maps displayed in Figures 8 and 9.

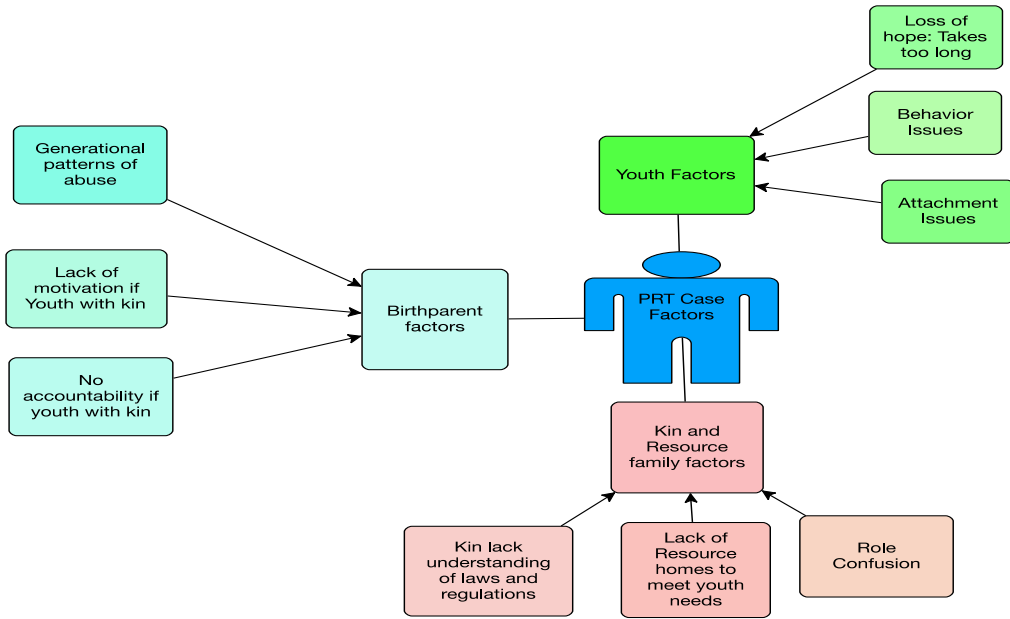


Figure 8. PRT CYA Agency Case Factors Concept Map

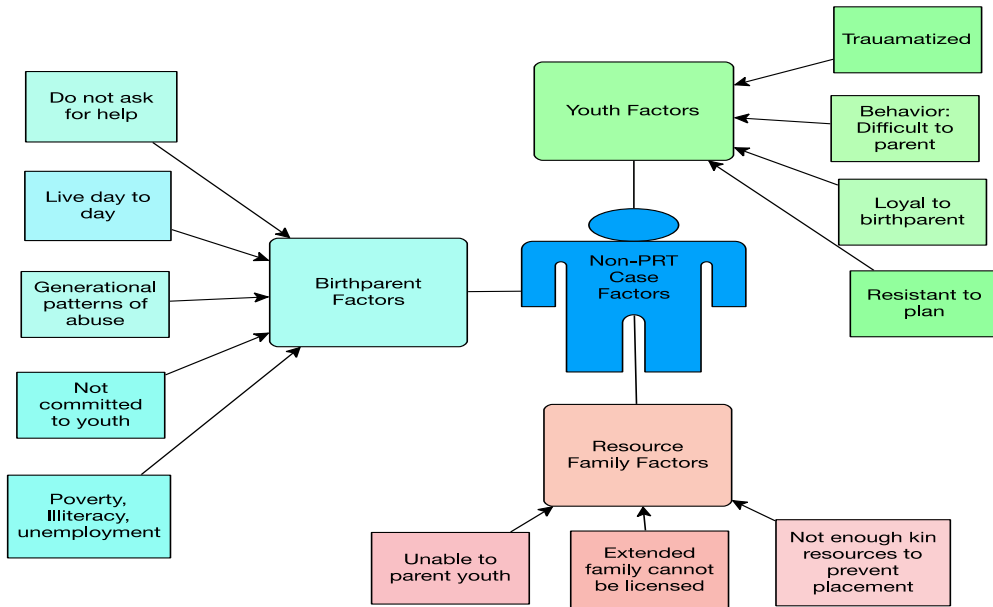


Figure 9. Non-PRT CYA Agency Case Factors Concept Map

Generational Patterns of Abuse and Dysfunction. Caseworkers from both CYS agencies described generational patterns of abuse and dysfunction that interfered with reunification and efforts to maintain the youth with birth family or kin. As described by a placement caseworker with over three years of experience:

We want to send kids with their family and stay with their family and know their family, but were finding also that sometimes that's just not the best choice... We're substituting a parent with a drug and alcohol issue, for an uncle with a domestic violence issue.

Negative Effect of Impermanence on Youth. Caseworkers from both CYS agencies described the struggle they experienced trying to help youth with emotional and behavioral problems achieve permanency. Demonstrating insight into the negative effect on youth of impermanence, a PRT CYS agency caseworker described how a loss of hope in finding a permanent family and attachment issues negatively affected placement stability for youth: "You said this was gonna happen, and why isn't it happening...it's affecting their behaviors, they're having multiple placements because of the behaviors, so it's not good." Non-PRT agency caseworkers specifically pointed to the trauma experienced by the youth, loyalty issues, and resistance to the permanency plan as barriers. A placement caseworker with less than three years of experience shared: "We struggle with a lot of the teens that, they already have a mom and dad so why do they want a new family?"

Inability to Parent Youth. Caseworkers in both CYS agencies also identified how difficult it could be for kin and resource families to parent youth who exhibited behavior problems. A placement caseworker with over three years of experience noted:

...but then when they get into the depths of it and the child does have a lot of emotional issues or trauma, they get overwhelmed by it. And then were stepping in again to try to find other family...Its like a revolving door. Theyre not, maybe theyre just not educated Enough or they dont know enough about you know whats going on with that particular child. But it ends up being just, okay were tired of this, we cant do it and then were back at square one again.

Birth Parent Poverty, Illiteracy, and Unemployment. Non-PRT CY5 caseworkers expressed frustration that their county did not have the services needed to address the poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment experienced by birthparents that prevented reunification. A placement caseworker with over three years of experience pointed out that: "A lot of our clients struggle with reading. I can think of very, very few jobs that you can support a family on, where you dont have to be proficient in reading."

Lack of Birth Parent Engagement. Non-PRT CY5 agency caseworkers identified birthparent characteristics such as a reluctance to ask for help, a lack of commitment to the youth, and a day-to-day existence as significant barriers to reunification. A caseworker with over 11 years of experience stated: "I would like to see committed, dedicated, biological parents who want to do the right thing for their kids so that we dont have to."

Kinship Family Concerns. PRT CY5 agency caseworkers identified role confusion experienced by kin along with a lack of understanding of laws and regulations as case factors that delay permanency. A PRT CY5 agency supervisor with over 15 years of experience shared: "Sometimes, they have an issue, sometimes, maybe, understanding their role in this situation. One case we had, where it was, Im the childrens grandmother first, not their foster mother..." These caseworkers also noted a reduction in accountability and motivation to reunify among

birthparents, if their child was placed with a relative under general protective services. As reported by this same supervisor: "Theyre not going to be going up for adoption in their minds, because its with my sister, or something like that, who is not a foster parent, so theyre just there. So, I think that they relax a little bit."

Agency Factors

Agency factors are defined as caseworker perceptions of agency characteristics and issues that either support or negatively influence permanency outcomes for youth in foster care. Agency factors that support permanency outcomes were further coded into strategies, supervision, coworkers, workforce development, resources, and a focus on permanency. Agency factors that were identified as barriers to permanency were further coded into workload management, staffing, and a focus on safety. Figures 10 and 11 display agency factor codes for each CYS agency.

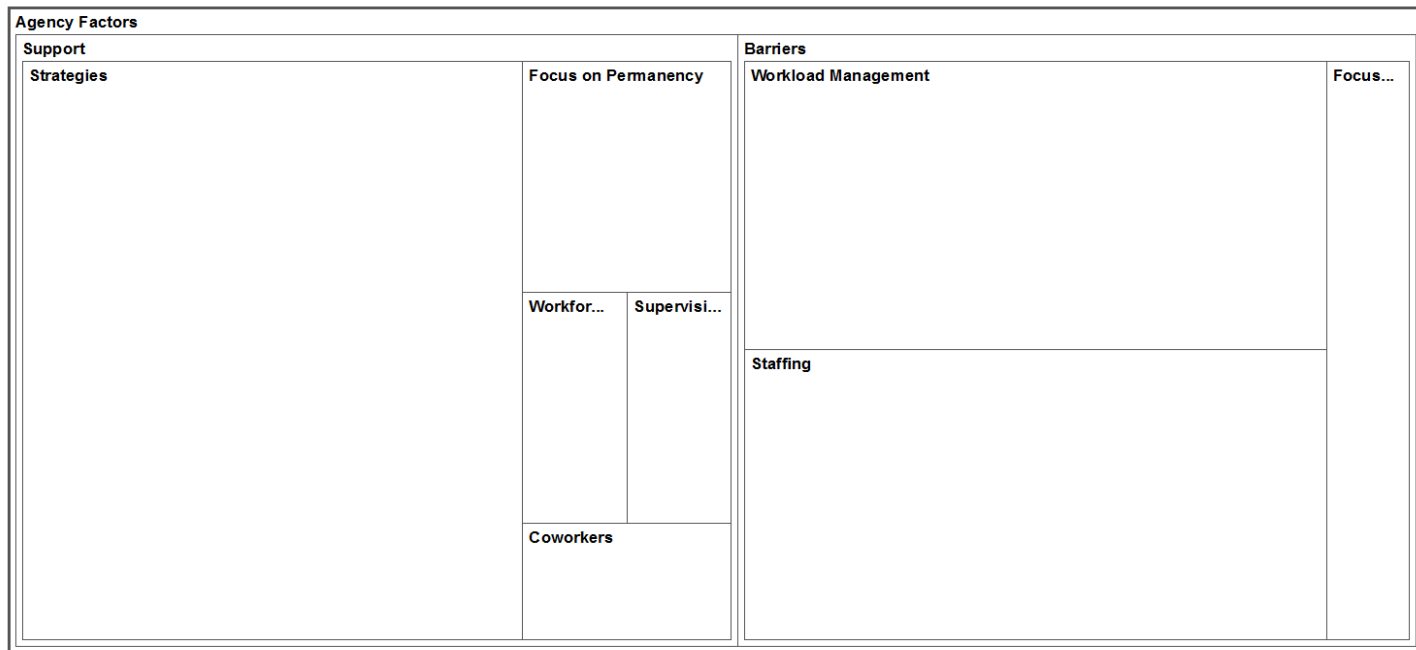


Figure 10. PRT CYS Agency Factors Hierarchy Chart

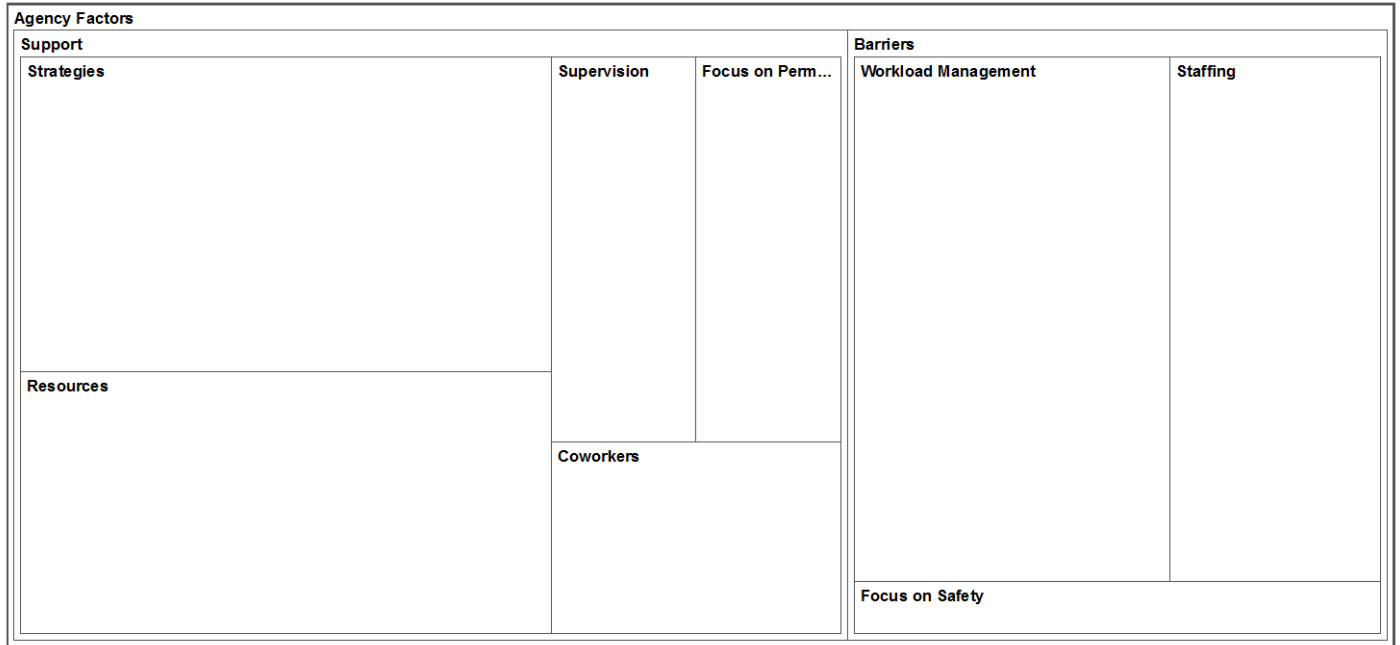


Figure 11. Non-PRT CYS Agency Factors Hierarchy Chart

Agency Factors Themes

Four common agency factor themes were identified by caseworkers at both CYS agencies, two related to factors that support permanency and two related to factors that are considered barriers to permanency. Themes related to factors that support permanency included a permanency-driven agency culture and the support of co-workers and supervisors. Themes related to factors that barriers to permanency included staffing shortages and perceived conflict between ensuring safety and permanency. A unique theme to PRT CYS caseworkers involved the importance of training and role models within the agency to support permanency planning efforts. These themes are identified in agency factor concept maps displayed in Figures 12 and 13.

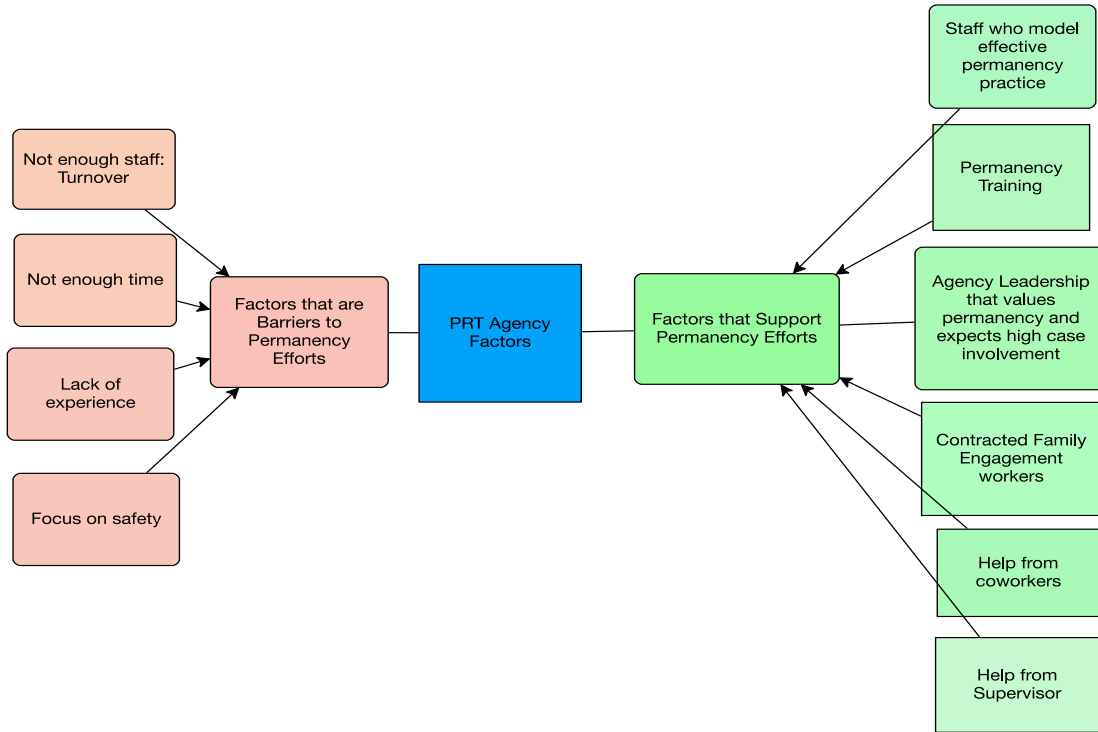


Figure 12. PRT CY S Agency Factors Concept Map

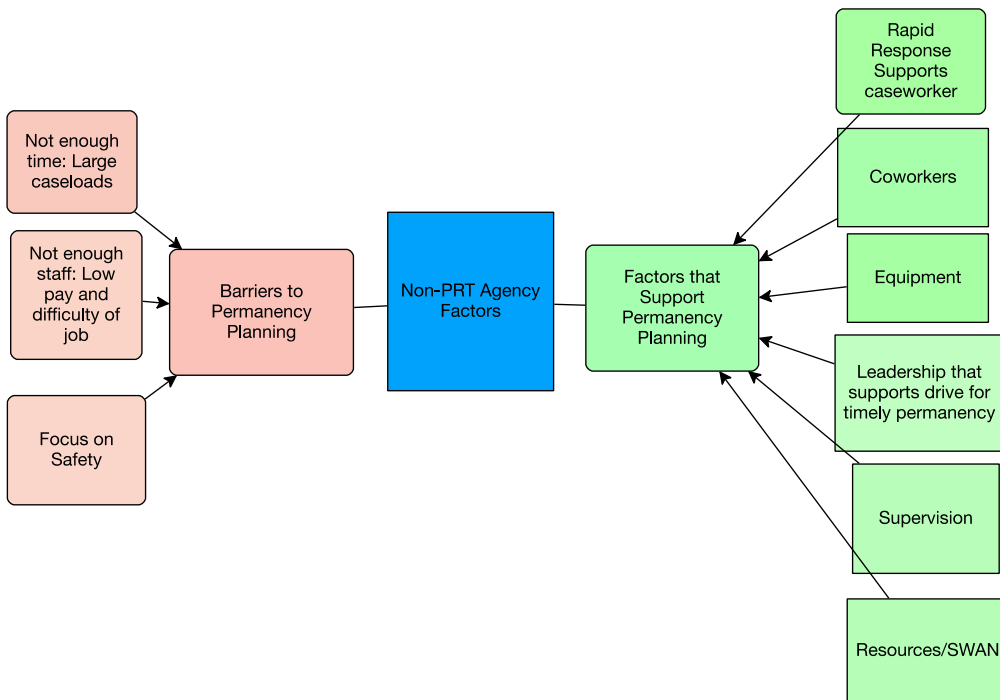


Figure 13. Non-PRT CY S Agency Factors Concept Map

Permanency-Driven Agency Culture. Focus group participants at both CYS agencies described the culture in their agency as permanency-driven. PRT CYS agency caseworkers described an atmosphere of high expectations related to permanency, while non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers described a “drive for timely permanency” and the support of the entire agency to help them successfully achieve permanency for older youth. As a result, there were many similarities regarding how caseworkers at both CYS agencies perceived supportive agency factors. Caseworkers at both CYS agencies attributed this culture to leadership that valued permanency. A supervisor in intake and ongoing services with over 15 years of experience noted: "Weve had from the top down, demonstration of the attitude, that thats a value that you should have." To demonstrate this value and support permanency efforts, administrators from both CYS agencies devoted resources, including staff, to family finding and engagement efforts.

Support of Co-Workers and Supervisors. Caseworkers from both CYS agencies stressed the importance of co-workers and supervisors who encourage and support effective permanency practice. An intake worker with over 6 years of experience noted: "I think thats really important because you can...go to your coworkers and get some of that information instead of having to deal with it on your own. Your supervisors as well, I mean theyre there to help us also.”

Permanency Training and Role Models. Although non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers recognized the value of coworkers and supervisors, PRT CYS agency caseworkers specifically identified the importance of permanency planning training and having role models to provide them with examples of *how* to successfully help youth achieve permanency.

Staffing Shortages. Caseworkers from both CYS agencies attributed barriers to permanency to staffing issues, particularly high staff turnover. Study participants believed that increased caseloads and demands such as paperwork, reduced the amount of time that could be spent with youth and families. A placement caseworker with more than 15 years of experience noted: "Our caseloads are higher, so even though you still are looking for that permanency, you dont have the time to really put into it, like you did before."

Ensuring Safety and Permanency. Despite the recognition that permanency was valued within their agencies, caseworkers at both CYS agencies described the conflict they experienced meeting agency policies to ensure safety while trying to help youth achieve permanency. Particularly during the intake process, concerns about safety took precedence over permanency. An intake worker with over 11 years of experience noted: "...permanency is not really something that you can think about or have time to think about, you have to get in there, get out. Where it's just, nobody really thinks about the permanency." This same caseworker admitted: "We arent thinking permanency, were not. We are thinking safety, get into that house, what is the issue at hand, are these children safe, do we need to refer out. What do we need to do to insure the safety so that we can close out."

Individual Factors

Individual factors are defined as caseworker perceptions of their own experiences, knowledge, beliefs, and actions that influence the permanency outcomes of youth in foster care. Individual factors were further coded into attitudes towards permanency, self-efficacy, self-care, permanency training, and permanency planning skills. Attitudes towards permanency are defined as a caseworker's perceived feelings or opinions about permanency for older youth on their caseloads. Self-efficacy is defined as a caseworker's beliefs about his or her ability to help

youth achieve permanency. Self-care is defined as perceptions by case workers of the stress and trauma they experience as part of their work. Permanency training is defined as a caseworker’s exposure to permanency values and concepts before and during employment at a public child welfare agency. Permanency planning skills are defined as skills caseworkers perceive they need in order to help youth on their caseloads achieve permanency. Permanency planning skills were further coded into assessment skills, engagement skills, planning skills, intervention skills, and teaming. Assessment skills are defined as a caseworkers perceptions of skills needed to obtain information in order to identify needs and strengths. Engagement skills are defined as a caseworkers perceptions of skills needed to effectively establish a relationship with children, youth, and adults. Planning skills are defined as a caseworker’s perceptions of skills needed to engage in a process to find youth permanency. Intervention skills are defined as a caseworkers perceptions of action and strategies that are needed to reduce risk and promote permanency. Teaming skills are defined as a caseworkers perceptions of permanency planning efforts that promote shared responsibility and decision-making. Figures 14 and 15 display individual factor codes for each CYS agency.

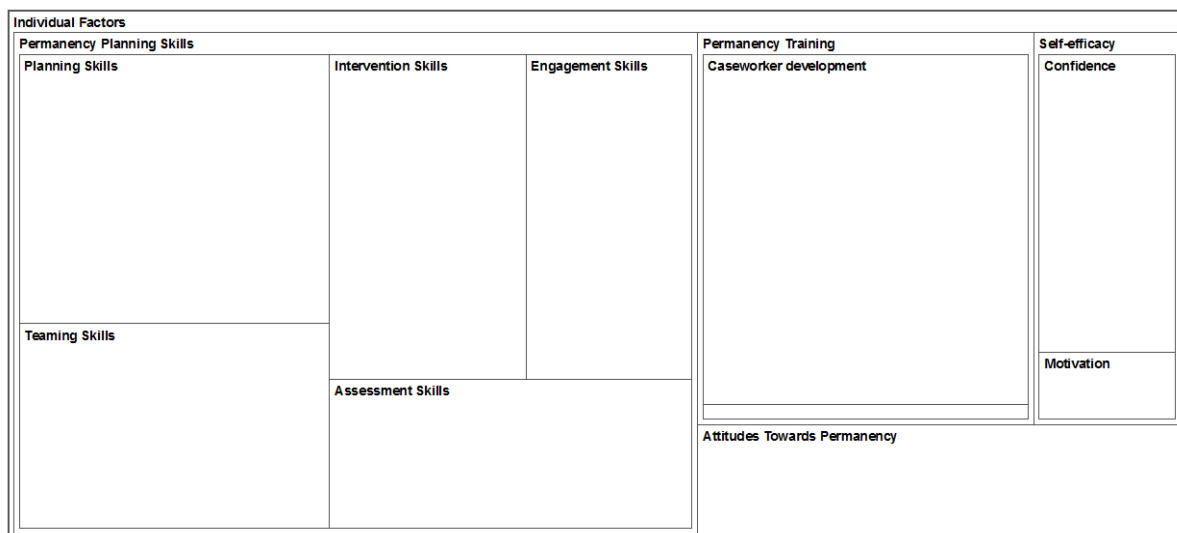


Figure 14. PRT CYS Agency Individual Factors Hierarchy Chart

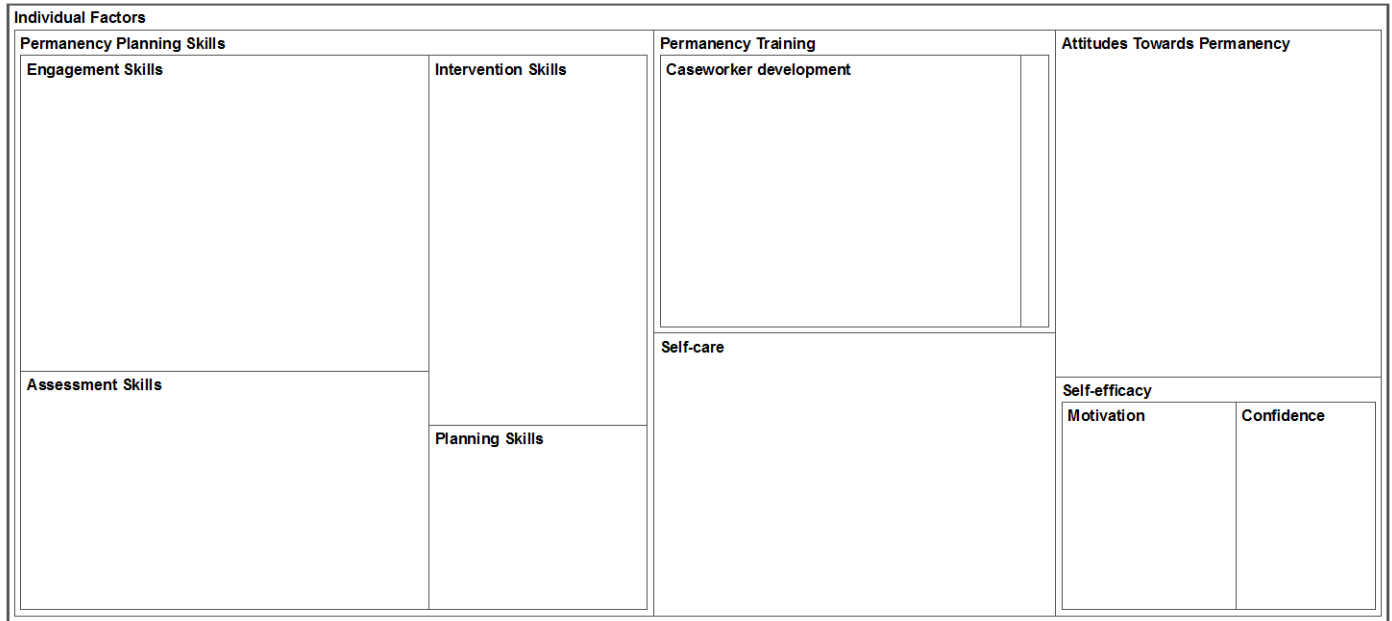


Figure 15. Non-PRT CYA Agency Individual Factors Hierarchy Chart

Individual Factors Themes

Common individual factor themes identified included knowledge, confidence, hope, self-awareness, relationship-building, family and youth engagement, strategies and resources, and sharing power. A theme unique to PRT CYA caseworkers included the benefits of teaming. Themes unique to non-PRT CYA agency caseworkers included forgiveness and self-care. These themes are identified in agency factor concept maps displayed in Figures 16 and 17.

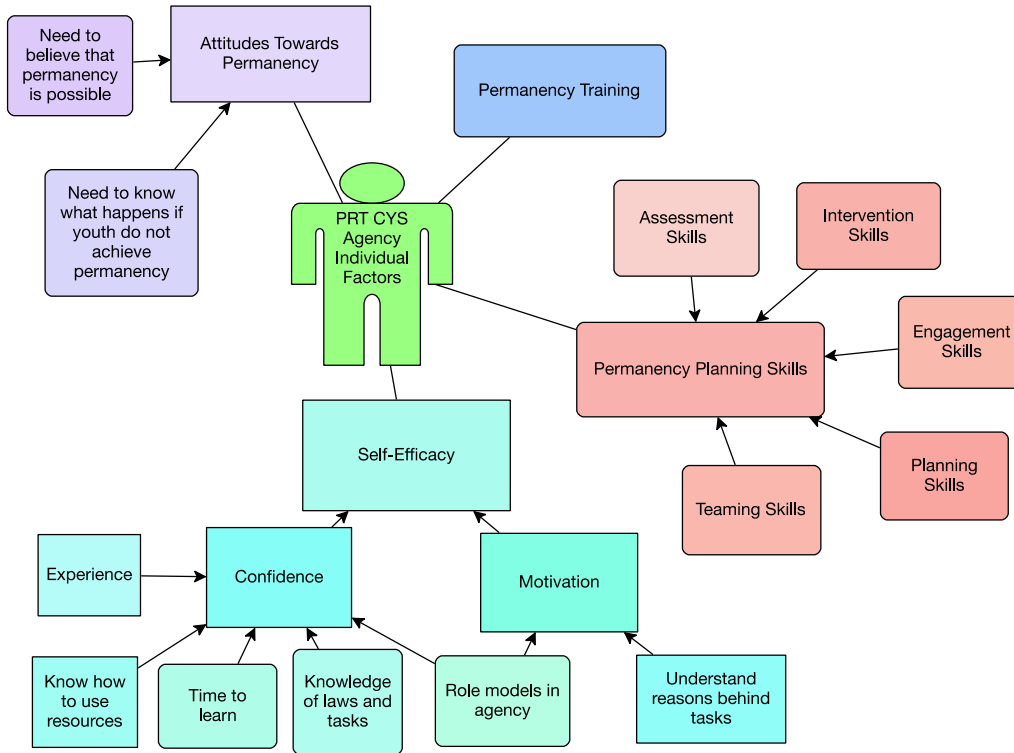


Figure 16. PRT CYS Agency Individual Factors Concept Map

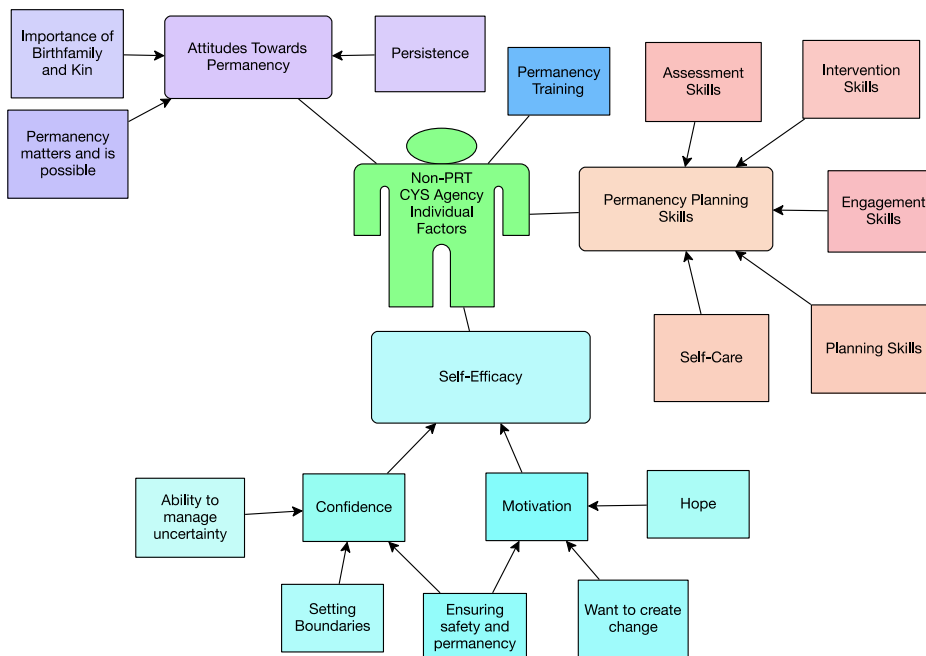


Figure 17. Non-PRT CYS Agency Individual Factors Concept Map

Knowledge. Caseworkers at both CYS agencies reported that college course work completed at the bachelor's and master's level did not include permanency values, concepts, or skills. All of the caseworkers in this study described their preservice training, completed shortly after being hired, as consisting of the paperwork, placement process, and legal aspects of permanency. An ongoing worker with over six years of experience shared: "I think that they had one topic, and I don't remember the title... and I don't think they used the word permanency, it was placement and adoption, and placement, something or other." PRT CYS agency caseworkers stressed the importance of not just believing in permanency but also understanding what happens to youth if permanency is not achieved. Contrary to the recommendations of PRT CYS agency caseworkers, no information was provided during preservice training regarding the outcomes and consequences of leaving care without permanency. Of concern, these caseworkers did not understand many of the terms presented and did not know how to apply what was being presented. An ongoing caseworker with less than three years of experience shared: "Especially, because when you're taking Charting the Course, often times, you're brand new into it, and they're using this terminology that you don't even know, and you're trying to cram it all in, in a short period of time..."

Confidence. Caseworkers at both CYS agencies expressed a lack of confidence regarding their ability to help youth achieve permanency and ensure safety. An ongoing worker with over three years of experience shared: "I know, a lot of times, I don't feel confident that I'm doing everything I can for permanency." Non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers expressed a lack of confidence in their knowledge of resources, and ability to manage uncertainty. A family finding worker with over three years of experience stated: "...you just don't know where you're headed...and that's the part of it that has people like a little bit more tense and more stressed

because you just dont know at points and we have to be prepared for anything but youre really not a lot of times." The complexity of their work was acknowledged by a supervisor with over 15 years of experience: "All these things are coming together, the court, you, your interviewing ability, your knowledge of child welfare, your knowledge of how to deal with crisis situations, your interviewing skills, all those things come together, and if one of those things is deficient, its gonna bring the other ones down." PRT CY5 agency caseworkers identified experience, time to learn, and agency role models as critical for developing confidence.

Hope. Caseworkers at both CY5 agencies shared the importance of having hope, even though youth, birth family, and resource family characteristics made achieving permanency difficult. Hope was thought to be a particularly important element of motivation. A supervisor with over 15 year of experienced shared: "Im a believer, that theres a home for every kid." An adoption worker with over 11 years of experience stated: "You have to be able to listen to that and be able to present a level of calm in that this is something that can be handled and can be dealt with. You know, that there is hope. You have to be able to still present that instead of like losing it along with them, like oh my god I cant believe that really happened."

Self-awareness. Caseworkers at both CY5 agencies identified awareness of bias, willingness to consider anothers opinion, ability to manage conflict, and staying calm as necessary permanency planning skills. Non-PRT CY5 agency caseworkers noted the importance of cultural competency, not being judgmental, having insight into behavior, and getting the perspective of the birth families. A family finding worker with over three years of experience stated: "Sometimes it isnt a safety issue, therefore we dont have to create a lack of permanence

over somebody who lives a way that we dont agree with." An adoption worker with over 11 years of experience agreed: "You have to have empathy for where somebody is at in the situation that theyre in, and you have to have the emotional stability to not get completely wacked out when somebody is identifying a problem they have..."

Relationship-Building. Caseworkers from both CYS agencies believe relationship-building skills such as listening, crisis-management, and de-escalation to be critical permanency planning skills. An ongoing worker with over 15 years of experience shared:

I think listening skills, if you put it that way, because especially when you have the older kids. They know what they want, and even though, sometimes, they say they want something that they know is not reasonable, at least its in a discussion piece that you can use, then, to talk to them, and build that relationship with them, about realistic expectations about what can happen, and it just builds that trust...

Family and Youth Engagement. Although non-PRT CYS agency provided more details about how to engage youth and family, all study participants described the importance of engagement skills and appreciated the support received from family engagement workers in their agency. PRT CYS agency caseworkers considered engagement and investment in youth along with quickly locating and engaging birth family to be essential to helping youth achieve permanency. An intake worker with over 11 years of experience stated: "I dont think that you can be here and this is just a job. You have to have some investment in these kids and want to invest your time in these kids." Non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers referred to the importance of developing rapport, empowering clients, not taking things personally, exhibiting empathy, and

building trust as skills needed for successful engagement. An ongoing worker with over three years of experience agreed: "I think its important to you know establish a good relationship with your client. Your client should feel comfortable. You know, talking to you about things."

Sharing Power. Caseworkers at both CYS agencies noted the importance of and challenges with involving birth family in planning. An ongoing caseworker with over three years of experience noted from the birth family's perspective: "Youre making this decision, youre developing a plan, you come up with this plan and... well see if we agree with it. You know well toss it back and forth but you come up with the plan." To support the benefits of involving birth family in planning, a non-PRT CYS agency caseworker said "...almost every one of those plans that these families have come up with are at the very least parallel to our recommendations so better go get some drug and alcohol treatment, go take some parenting classes..."

The need to share power while setting boundaries was acknowledged by non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers. An intake worker with over six years of experience noted:

...a lot of these clients of ours, because of their mental health and their issues, theyre gonna puff out their chest and theyre gonna scream and yell because thats worked for them up until this point in time, especially a lot of our teenagers. No ones set a boundary yet so a lot of the things I find out with new case workers, you need to be setting some boundaries of, yeah theres a power sharin g dynamic in this, but you might have to make the call and you might have to make that decision and set that boundary.

A Non-PRT CYS agency caseworker cautioned: "...you need to be willing to give and give a lot of yourself...[however] there are times you need to take some of that power back and take some of that control back."

Strategies and Resources. Caseworkers at both CYS agencies mentioned the use of concurrent planning, full disclosure, resources such as SWAN, and beginning family finding early as strategies that expedited permanency. PRT CYS agency caseworkers discussed ensuring the quality of services provided and being thorough. Non-PRT CYS caseworkers mentioned starting where the family is at, persistence, and organizational skills. An ongoing worker with over three years of experience shared:

Being new Im kind of learning this now about deadlines and such. So, I have a client who is in placement and this client doesnt have any family, so if I dont send out that referral for foster care shes sitting there. So, like every day that I put it off and forget to do it, is like an extra day that my client is just sitting there." .

Benefit of Teaming. Only PRT CYS agency caseworkers identified teaming as a necessary skill when helping youth achieve permanency. These caseworkers described the benefits of partnering with a family engagement worker, the value of case review, and the support they received from private service providers. The benefits of teaming were identified by a supervisor with over 15 years of experience: "...the teaming approach that comes with looking at a childs case, from all aspects, not just a case work aspect, not just a therapeutic aspect, from each competency, that everyone who comes to the table has, is helpful." Although in support of teaming, PRT CYS agency caseworkers identified challenges to ensure ongoing participation of the planning team. An ongoing worker with over six years of experience shared:

To constantly be notified in writing that this is expected. If you cant attend the meeting please try to be on the phone. If you cant be on the phone please have somebody, the case worker or myself...[send an] update as to the report or your involvement with the child or family. Because it helps.

Forgiveness. While caseworkers at both CYS agencies believe that permanency is important, non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers provided unique insight into the emotional challenges they face as an adoption caseworker with over 11 years of experience shared:

You have to be willing to forgive the parent and let them move on and we can get in the way of that because there are sometimes some things that just, there hasn't been enough time...to get to that point of forgiveness. And some, I'm gonna be honest with you, some of these incidences against these children, 18-24 months is not enough time for me to forgive and I struggle with that, to give that second chance for the children to go back because it just seems so unforgivable sometimes. And then now I look back at those cases and I'm like, I'm there. I'm there at that point now, I can probably offer more third and fourth chances in that case but we've already moved on and you know, there's no way to go back.

Self-care. Only non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers described how undervalued and misunderstood they felt. They described their work as stressful and dangerous. Stressing the need to decompress after work, these caseworkers described themselves as wounded and the work as a heavy burden. Although they did not want to take their work home, these caseworkers admitted that their experiences in public child welfare affected their personal lives. An ongoing caseworker with over three years of experience shared: "It all hurts us, it all affects our own lives. Of course, it's going to, were not statues."

External Factors

External factors are defined as caseworker perceptions of conditions, trends, and forces outside the control of the CYS agency that influence permanency outcomes for youth in foster care. External factors were further coded into community, regulatory environment, and resource

environment. Community is defined as a caseworker’s perceptions of issues regarding the community the CYS agency exists within that influence permanency outcomes for youth. Regulatory environment is defined as a caseworker’s perceptions of the laws and regulations developed by federal, state, and local governments that influence permanency outcomes for youth in foster care. Resource environment is defined as a caseworker’s perceptions of issues related to public and private community resources that influence permanency outcomes for youth in foster care. The resource environment was further coded into parent resources, child resources, permanency resources, and interagency collaboration. External factors codes are presented in figures 18 and 19.

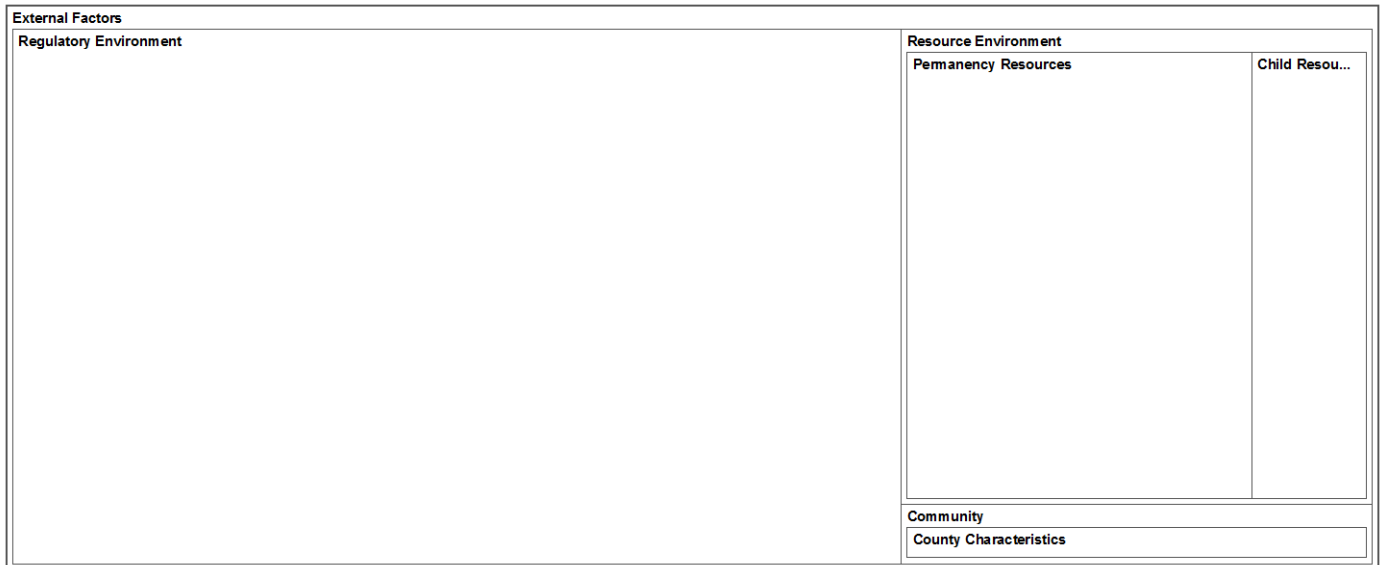


Figure 18. PRT CYS Agency External Factors Hierarchy Chart

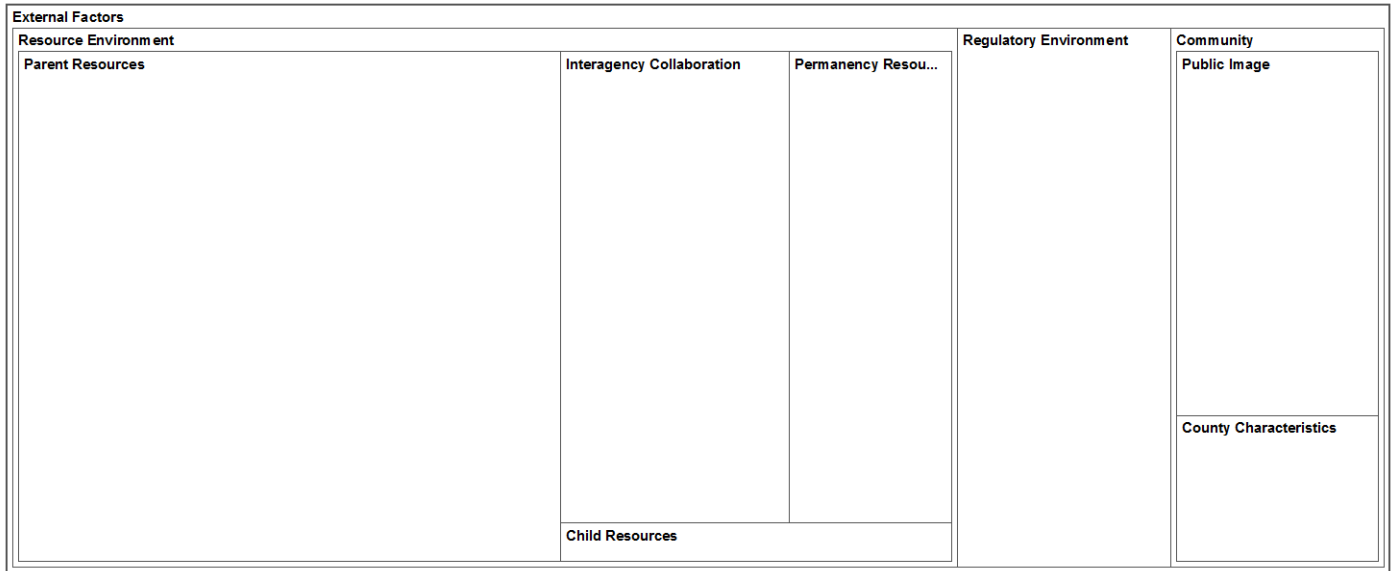


Figure 19. Non-PRT CY5 Agency External Factors Hierarchy Chart

External Factors Themes

Common system factor themes identified included rural child welfare and the influence of the court system. Themes unique to non-PRT CY5 agency caseworkers included interagency collaboration and feeling unappreciated. These themes are identified in agency factor concept maps displayed in Figures 20 and 21.

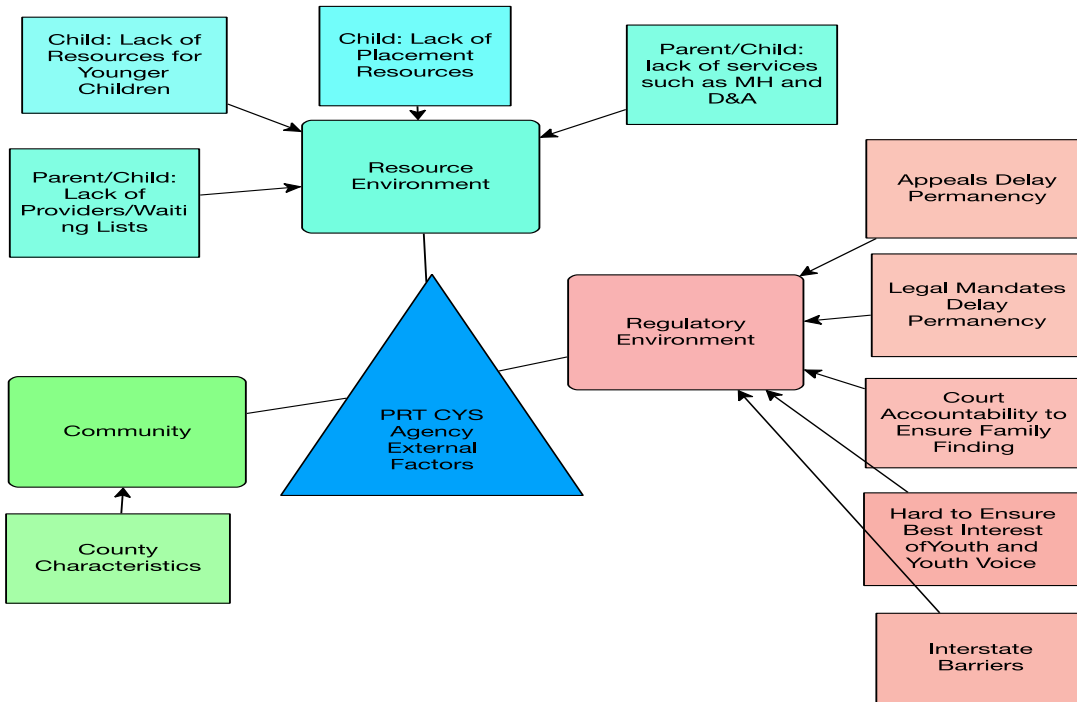


Figure 20. PRT CY5 Agency External Factors Concept Map

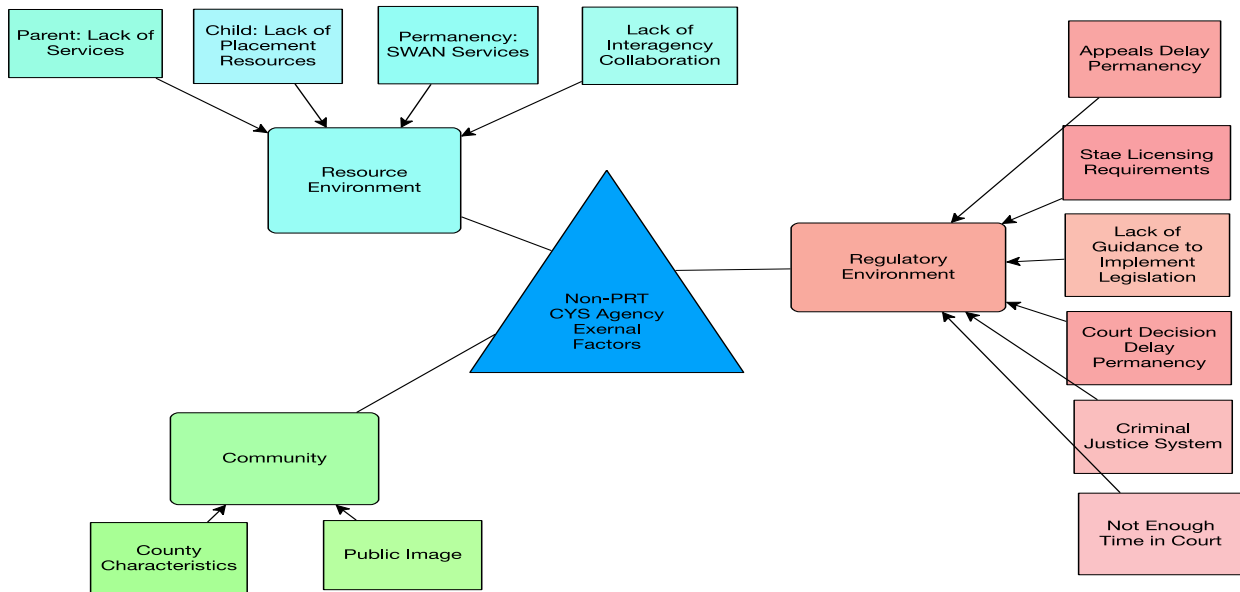


Figure 21. Non-PRT CY5 Agency External Factors Concept Map

Rural Child Welfare. Caseworkers from both CYS agencies described the negative effect on permanency outcomes of practicing within a rural county. They described challenges meeting the needs of their clients due to a lack of resources and service providers. A placement supervisor with over 15 years of experience shared: “We're a four class county. When you're talking about kids that we have in care, our resources are maxed out...” Difficulty accessing services due to transportation issues was considered a barrier by non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers. Non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers emphasized the need for resources that prevent youth and their families from CYS involvement. An intake worker with over six years of experience explained: “I'm more of a frontline person, I want to get in front of it. I want there to be resources for parents to not get to that point. Lots of what we see is a complete utter symptom of poverty and no hope. If you ain't got nothing, you ain't got nothing to lose.”

PRT CYS agency caseworkers talked more about the lack of mental health and drug and alcohol services available to parents and youth once they were involved in the child welfare system. They also complained about the waiting lists they were forced to use because there were so few providers. A placement supervisor with over 15 years of experience noted: “I think, when we do use them, they are used well, but we don't have an unlimited amount of resources to be able to pull from.”

Influence of Court System. The negative effect of legal appeals was described by caseworkers at both CYS agencies as factors that delay permanency. An intake and placement supervisor explained: “So, one whole year has been under appeal, where this kid has not found permanency.” PRT CYS agency caseworkers described the regulatory environment as

both a barrier and a support to effective permanency planning. Court efforts to ensure that family finding efforts were made, reinforced the importance of establishing and maintaining kinship connections. On the other hand, a family engagement worker with over 15 years of experience shared:

One thing that's frustrating for me in permanency planning is... your gut tells you, but the law and the system tells you, that you gotta work the course, you gotta provide the efforts, you gotta demonstrate...to get to a place that you knew where it's gonna happen. Anyway, we're constricted within the law, and what's legally mandated on us, as an agency and workers.

These caseworkers also identified how difficult it was to honor the wishes of the youth while ensuring that their best interests were considered. A family engagement worker stated: “Some of our Guardian Ad Litem, it's like they get two seconds before a court hearing, for a kid's voice, versus best interest stuff.” Finally, PRT CYC agency caseworkers pointed to the challenges involved if youth move to another state and the resulting delays in permanency. Non-PRT CYC agency caseworkers attributed permanency delays to the slow nature of the criminal justice system. A family finding worker with over three years of experience shared:

...it was very, very difficult because mom is still facing criminal charges...and it's been a year and a half now. So now we're at past that 15 month mark and we're like what's good for this child at this point? Do we keep it on hold? You know do we keep it on hold that we don't reunite? Or we start reunification? And then we start it and then we find out well, legally we can just pull out. I mean it's, you go back and forth and back and forth.

Non-PRT CYC agency caseworkers also shared their frustration with the limited amount of time they had in court as described by a placement worker with under three years of experience:

That is so hard, because like you go into the courts and stuff like that. And you try and tell everything that has happened over the last six months to a judge or something like that in a matter of a half hour, maybe an hour and you know, they're handing down a decision and you're sitting back and you're sitting there thinking, oh my god no, that's not the way it should be.

Interagency Collaboration. Non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers identified challenges with interagency collaboration that delayed permanency. A placement worker with over three years of experience shared:

I have a family base team that every time they go into court, the judge has to order them to speak because of their confidentiality and stuff like that. You know they can't report on how they are doing in the home and stuff like that and it's like well we have you in the home for a reason. We need to know this information, you know this child is in the process of being returned to this home.

Feeling Unappreciated. Non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers shared how unappreciated and misunderstood they felt by their community. A placement worker with over three years of experience noted: “Yeah I feel like our job is very underrated. The people that have not worked in this field do not understand whatsoever.”

Perception of PRT

Feedback from caseworkers about PRTs was generally positive and provided insight into how they perceived PRTs affecting case, agency, and individual factors. Caseworkers involved in the study did not provide any feedback regarding their perception of how PRTs affect external factors. PRT perception codes are presented in figure 22.

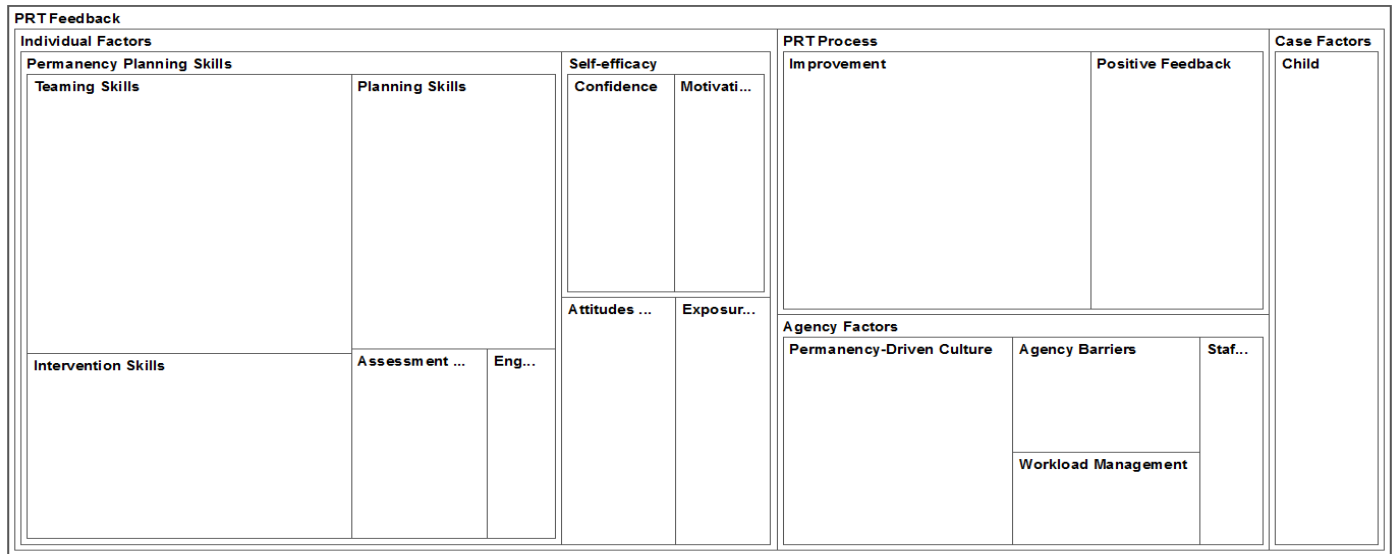


Figure 22. PRT Feedback Hierarchy Chart

Case Factors PRT Themes

PRT CY5 agency staff chose youth to present at PRTs based on criteria such as length of time in foster care, age, and risk of aging out of care. Caseworkers described the youth presented at their PRTs as isolated teens who could not reunify with birth family, who experienced placement instability and who believed no one wanted them. A caseworker with over 15 years of experience shared: "I have a teenager that has nobody...you know she believes that nobody wants her, that shell never find a family."

While case factors included youth, birth parent and kin and resource family factors, feedback provided on PRTs involved only youth factors. Case factors PRT themes identified included access to new ideas and resources and an increase in youth engagement (see Figure 23).

Access to New Ideas and Resources. Caseworkers reported that PRTs provided them with new ideas and resources that could be used to increase youth wellbeing and the number of positive connections with adults, thus decreasing the time to permanency. A placement caseworker with over 15 years of experienced shared: "I find them helpful...even

if I dont agree with all the ideas and stuff, I find you know that the ideas arent for me theyre for the kids so they have some benefit for the child and I just feel like everybody was invested and participated."

Increase Youth Engagement. Youth engagement was thought to be facilitated through the PRT process by ensuring that attention was paid to well-being and the wishes of the youth. A family engagement worker with over 15 years of experience shared: "It continues to show that... we're still trying to make efforts on those difficult teens and the work being done and the momentum. Things keep moving."

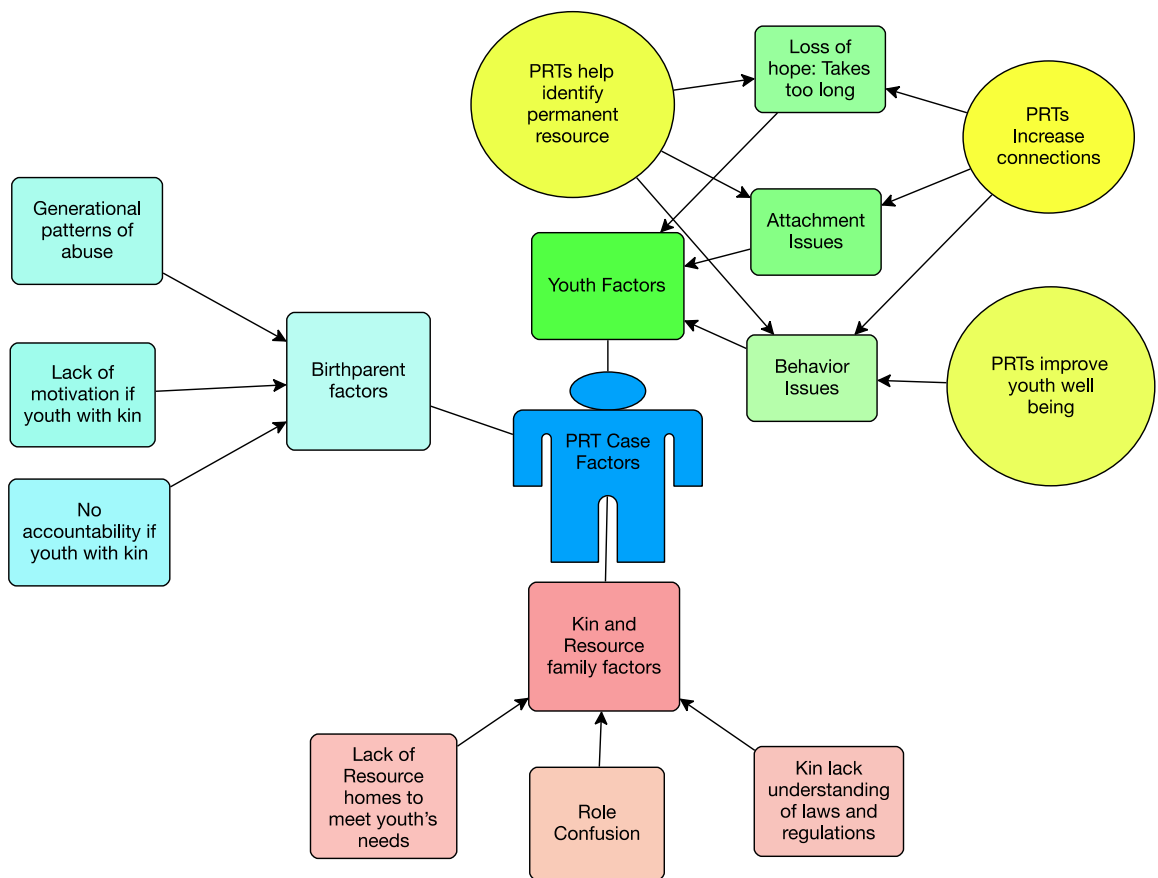


Figure 23. Case Factors and PRT Concept Map

Agency Factor PRT Themes

Feedback was provided regarding the effect PRTs were thought to have on agency barriers to permanency. Agency factor PRT themes included address staff turnover, reduce agency barriers, and address focus on safety (see Figure 24),

Address Staff Turnover. Study participants believed PRTs to be an effective way to address work force issues that led to many of the agency barriers to permanency they experienced. PRTs were described as a way to manage staff turnover by providing a consistent team amidst changes in CYS agency staff. According to caseworkers, PRTs provided a way to train new staff and orient them to the youth's history and service providers. An ongoing caseworker with less than three years of experience admitted: "I would say at my very first PRT, the case was more presented to me and I would say I got more of a sense of maybe the gravity of the situation."

Reduce Agency Barriers. Although focus group participants could not remember what agency barriers had been identified, they stressed the importance of the agency administrator's presence at PRTs as a way to address agency barriers. A family engagement worker with over 15 years of experience described what happens when the administrator was not present at a PRT: "We lose somebody with that authority saying why or questioning...a little deeper and I can do my best to challenge folks around the table but it is not at the same degree... it changes the direction... a case can go."

Address Focus on Safety. Caseworkers in this study attribute the PRTs with helping them maintain a focus on permanency. A supervisor with over 15 years of experience has observed "...a values shift...showing that thats important." A family engagement worker with over 15 years of experience shared: "I guess, it takes me back, understanding what the definition

of, not only permanency, but the legal permanency component, that values training...it is a shift in a way of thinking.” Study participants believe that PRTs change how caseworkers think by providing them with successful permanency planning experiences. These successes provide an antidote to biases and judgments that may delay or interfere with helping youth achieve permanency. A family engagement worker with over 15 years of experience shared: “...for a newer case worker I think it's like, a sponge of learning hearing other people talk.”

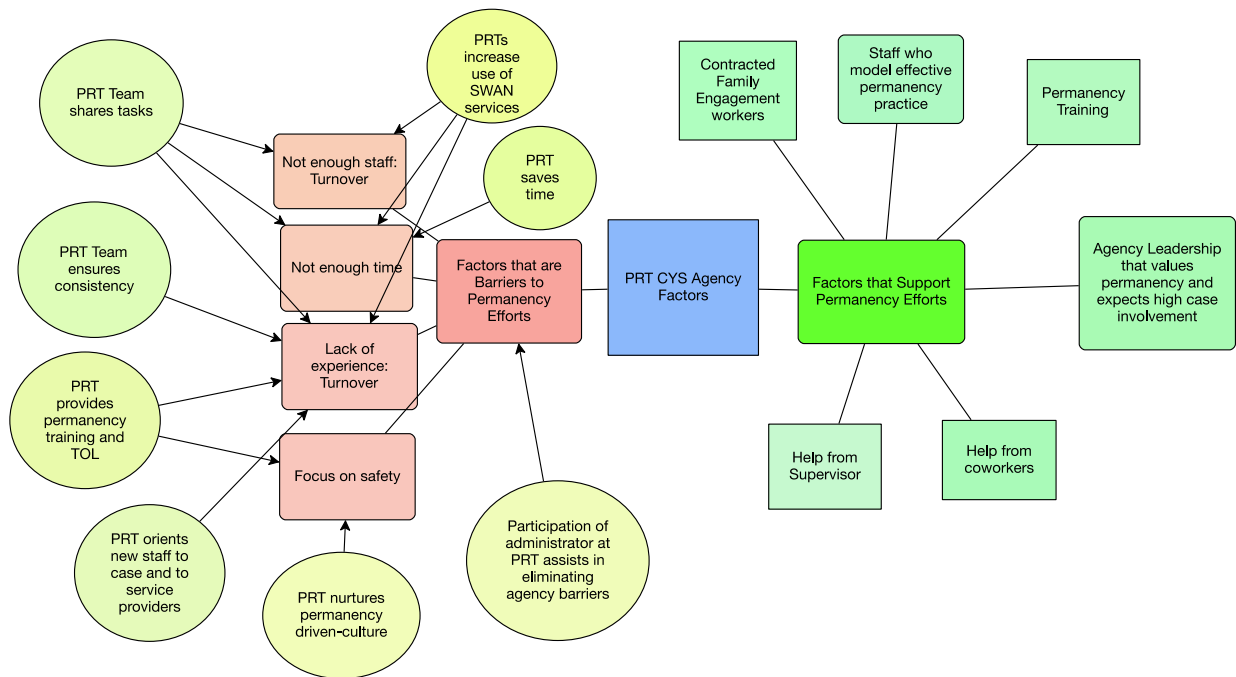


Figure 24. Agency Factors and PRT Concept Map

Individual Factors PRT Themes

Themes identified regarding the influence the PRT is thought to have on individual factors include increased caseworker support, improved planning, improved collaboration, increased confidence, and increased hope (see Figures 25 and 26).

Increased Caseworker Support. It was thought that the teaming process ensured the caseworker received assistance in completing tasks that helped move the youth closer to achieving permanency. Assigning tasks to PRT team members was mentioned several times as particularly supportive. As a placement worker with over 15 years of experience noted: "...that's one thing I like about them is like I'm not doing everything. It's being delegated to this person, that person and I'm like yes." PRT CYIS agency caseworkers reported that the PRT increased knowledge of and use of SWAN services. This increase in use of SWAN was described as a way to support caseworkers by reducing their heavy workload. A caseworker described time saved as a result of the PRT "...to come together as a team and the way that this can work, can free up several hours in the case, in the work, in the action steps, that results from being in that meeting."

Improved Planning. Planning was supported by protecting time, creating a sense of urgency, increasing out of the box thinking, breaking down goals, and increasing accountability. As noted by an intake supervisor with over 15 years of experience; "You don't want to show up and not have something to say...it's kind of like perhaps forcing people to like hold them accountable and do things you know...They don't want to show up and not have done it." A caseworker with over 15 years of experience shared:

Especially if you have a difficult case because it gives you other ways of thinking. Especially because if you've exhausted everything you have with your ideas to find permanency other people might have other options and ideas that would assist with that. So it kind of gives you more opinions and ideas to move forward.

Improved Collaboration. By providing a forum within which conflict is addressed and communication and collaboration is fostered, PRTs were thought to promote more effective collaboration. An ongoing caseworker with over 15 years of experience shared: “I get an update on things that I may not have known that's going on with my kid because we're utilizing the affiliates so much.”

Increased Confidence. Study participants believe that PRTs increase caseworker confidence levels by increasing knowledge of the case, breaking down isolation, increasing knowledge about other systems, and increasing understanding about what decisions need to be made. As a family engagement caseworker with over 15 years of experience shared: “...just the feeling of knowing that [the worker is] not alone in all the chaos and whats going on and happening and decisions needing to be made.” Caseworkers reported that when making difficult decision such as separating siblings or terminating parental rights, the PRTs provided support and a justification for the decision. A family engagement caseworker with over 15 years of experience observed that knowledge gained in a PRT was transferred to another case: “...not only gaining that knowledge but then taking that knowledge and whatever they learned and using it for one of their other cases, that's happened.”

Increased Hope. PRTs were thought to effect motivation by creating a vision of success, providing support, increasing hope, and increasing energy through exposure to new ideas and fresh perspectives. A placement caseworker with over 15 years of experience admitted: “Yeah I was looking for other avenues and help because we just were feeling defeated.”

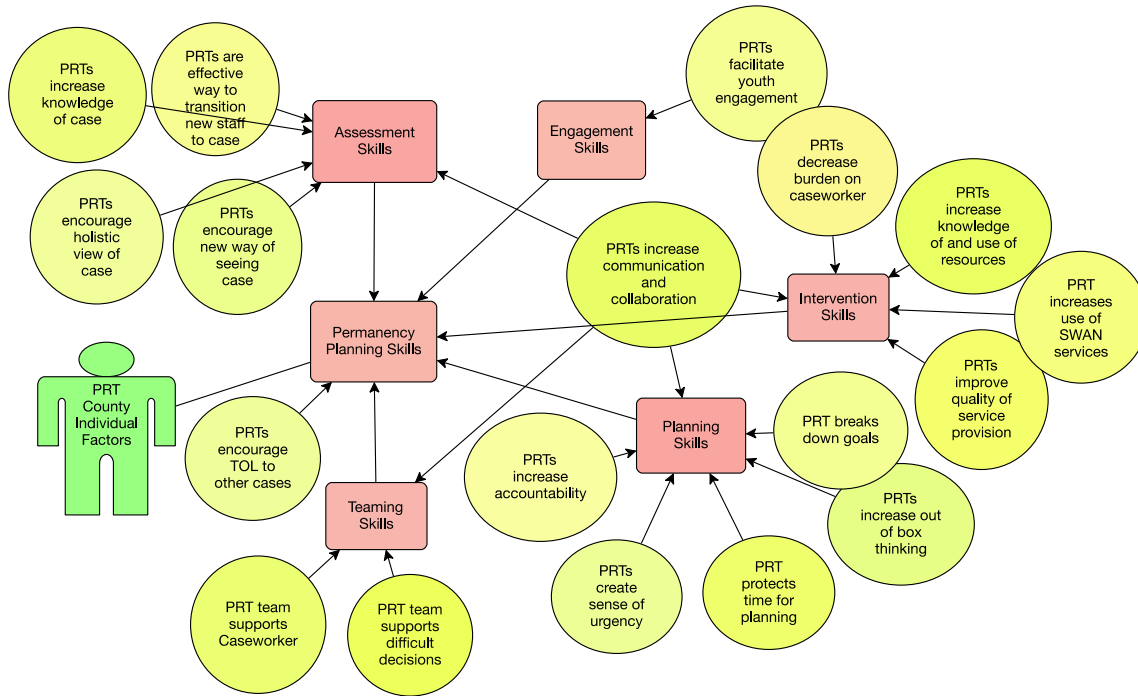


Figure 25. Permanency Planning Skills and PRT Concept Map

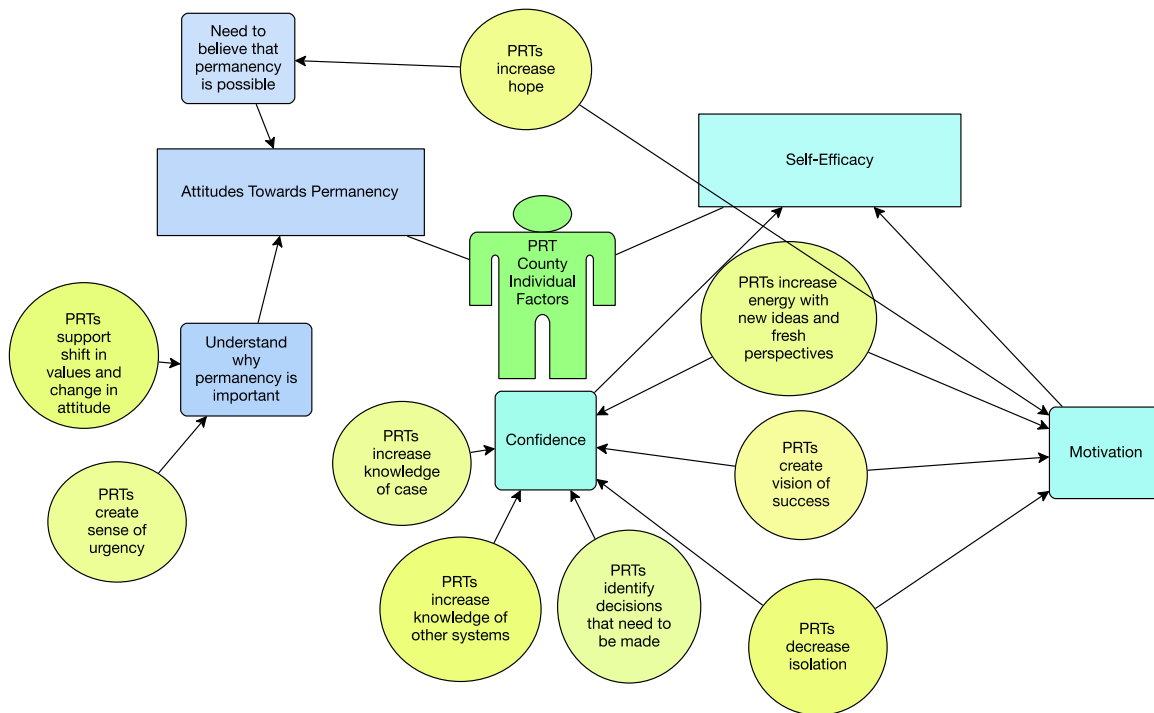


Figure 26. Attitudes Towards Permanency, Self-Efficacy, and PRT Concept Map

Recommendations for Improvement

Although most of the feedback about PRTs was positive, study participants reported that they were still struggling to help some youth achieve permanency despite PRT involvement. A family engagement worker shared: “we're still turning our wheels and nothing's happening. And we don't, we're kind of out of answers, resources, ideas like we're just crossing our fingers hoping that the one plan that we have in place falls through eventually.” To improve PRTs, focus group participants suggested revising the permanency values training so that all caseworkers, especially those in intake, better understood how their actions positively or negatively influenced youth permanency outcomes. It was also recommended that intake workers be invited to participate in PRTs to help engage these workers and provide the team with a valuable resource. Identifying a day and time that was convenient for all team members and maintaining commitment and enthusiasm during the follow-up phase were noted as challenges in the process. Support provided by SWAN’s technical assistance staff was seen as a way to address these concerns.

Chapter Five: Discussion

While caseworkers involved in this study were not very diverse, they were similar in several ways to child welfare caseworkers throughout the nation. As with the participants in this study, a majority of the 5,052 caseworkers involved in the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-being (NSCAW II) were white women between the ages of 25 and 44 years who had completed at least a bachelor’s degree (Dolan, Smith, Casanueva, & Ringeisen, 2011). NSCAW II caseworkers reported an average agency tenure of five years, similar to the

four-years agency tenure reported by study participants who completed the caseworker permanency planning survey (Dolan et al., 2011). In contrast, the majority of caseworkers who participated in the PRT CYS agency focus group reported over 15 years of agency tenure and the majority of caseworkers who participated in the non-PRT CYS agency focus group reported over six years of agency tenure.

Case factor findings from this study were supported by previous studies. Difficulty locating and engaging birth and resource families that could meet the needs of older youth was identified by caseworkers from both CYS agencies supporting the findings of White et al. (2013). The negative effect of impermanence on youth is well-supported in the literature (Courtney et al., 2007; Courtney & Heuring, 2005; Pecora et al., 2003). Caseworkers from both CYS agencies attributed youth emotional and behavior problems rather than specific characteristics such as age and gender identified by other researchers (Davis et al., 2013; Freundlich et al., 2011; O'Brien et al., 2012) to the challenges they experienced helping youth achieve permanency. These findings are similar to those described in a study conducted by White et al. (2015). Supporting the findings of Tao et al (2013) caseworkers from the non-PRT CYS agency also identified birth family factors such as poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment they believed delayed permanency. The systematic review of kinship care studies conducted by Winokur, Holtan, and Batchelder (2018) confirmed the kinship experiences of PRT CYS agency caseworkers.

Agency factor findings from this study were supported by other researchers. Caseworkers involved in this study identified high staff turnover and agency policies that seemed to favor safety over permanency as factors that negatively affected youth permanency outcomes

in their agency, confirming the findings of other studies (Forehand et al, 2016; Flower et al., 2005; Pecora et al., 2019; Tao et al., 2015; White et al., 2013). On a positive note, study participants considered the support they received from agency administration, their supervisors and co-workers as critical elements needed to foster positive permanency outcomes, supporting the conclusions drawn by others (Davis et al., 2013; Pecora et al., 2019; Tao et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2017; Rogg et al., 2011). Caseworker belief in the importance of a permanency-driven culture on client outcomes has some support in the work of Williams and Glisson (2013).

Acknowledging the positive influence education and training have on permanency planning, study participants reported they did not remember learning about permanency concepts or the value of permanency in any of the college courses they completed. This lack of attention to permanency continued through their preservice training provided by the Child Welfare Resource Center (CWRC). During that time period, study participants described how challenging it was to both understand and then apply what they were learning to their interactions with children, youth, and families. Supported by the research of Avery (2000) and Carnochan et al. (2012), caseworkers involved in this study recommended ongoing training as a way to improve their permanency planning skills. In agreement with Bandura (2012), PRT CYS agency caseworkers recognized the importance of understanding what happens to youth if they exit care without achieving legal permanency and the importance of having time to learn and role models to learn from in order to develop self-efficacy. Although Pecora et al. (2019) document the importance of social work training in child welfare, only 22% of the NSCAW II participants,

14% of the caseworkers who completed the permanency planning survey, 0% of the non-PRT CYS agency focus group participants, and 14% of the PRT CYS agency focus group participants had a social work degree (Dolan et al., 2011).

Caseworkers from both CYS agencies described and self-assessed their permanency planning practices in a way that suggests an ability to help youth establish and maintain positive relationships with adults as recommended by Seita and Brendtro (2005) and the findings of other studies (Avery, 2010; Barth et al., 2009; Freundlich et al., 2011; Tilbury & Osmond, 2006; Maluccio and Fein, 1983; Renne and Mallon, 2005). Specifically, caseworkers at both CYS agencies consistently stressed the importance of family finding and engagement as a way to maintain a youth's relationship with birth family and kin. Caseworkers from both CYS agencies demonstrated awareness of the values and bias they brought to their interactions with youth and birth family as recommended by Cherry et al. (2014). Study participants reported the repeated use of services to increase youth well-being and promote permanency in agreement with the literature (Barth et al., 2009; Renne & Mallon, 2005; Tilbury & Osmond, 2006). PRT CYS agency caseworkers acknowledged the benefit of planning with a team to help youth achieve permanency as recommended by Cherry et al. (2014). These qualitative findings were supported by the mean scores calculated from the caseworker permanency planning survey. Caseworkers who completed the survey also agreed with Avery (2000), Louisell (2009), and Renne and Mallon (2005) that older youth need and deserve legal permanency. Despite these promising findings, caseworkers from both CYS agencies admitted that they lacked confidence in their ability to help youth achieve permanency. Specifically, study participants struggled with how to ensure safety and achieve permanency at the same time.

Contrary to recommendations from the literature, study participants did not discuss the importance of repairing “compromised” relationships or ensuring frequent and meaningful visitation with birth parents (Tilbury and Osmond, 2006, p. 275). While PRT CYS agency caseworkers recognized the benefits of teaming, the use of an individualized case assessment and planning process (Barth et al., 2009; Renne & Mallon, 2005; Tilbury & Osmond, 2006) that was sensitive to the youth’s gender, race, culture, religious preference, and sexual orientation (Avery, 2000) was not mentioned in either focus group.

External factor findings from this study had support in the literature. Identifying the court system to be a barrier was supported by the findings of Forehand et al., (2016). The unique challenges of permanency planning in rural areas such as travel distances and lack of resources, identified by study participants in both CYS agencies, confirms the findings of Forehand et al. (2016). Study participants, while acknowledging the benefits of collaboration with other systems identified by Cherry et al. (2014), also shared the challenges they experienced.

Even though the PRT intervention is not evidence-based, research findings related to implementation research are relevant to the findings of this study. The total fidelity score of 70% was below the 80% threshold identified by Perepletchikova and Kazdin, (2005) as indicative of high implementation fidelity. However, further analysis confirmed a high level of implementation fidelity in all areas except training of PRT team members and consistent participation of legal and policy consultants and the agency administrator at PRT sessions. The challenges involved in training all of the PRT team members and getting them to consistently attend PRTs was confirmed by this study’s participants and caseworkers involved in the PRT evaluation conducted by Forehand et al., (2016). This finding is particularly important given the positive influence agency administrator attendance at a PRT had on the youth’s permanency

outcomes as reported by this study's participants and documented by Forehand et al., (2016). Fidelity of the PRT process was scored at 82% which corresponded to the 84% process fidelity measured by White et al., (2013) in their study. As noted by Aarons and Palinkas (2007) and Fixsen et al., (2015) implementation fidelity may have been positively affected by caseworker belief in the usefulness of PRTs, support for PRT implementation from agency leadership, and the technical assistance provided by SWAN.

Although no statistically significant differences were found between the two CYS agencies, there were some unique qualitative findings. PRT CYS agency caseworkers were able to describe the importance of training and role models in their ability to help youth achieve permanency. PRT CYS agency caseworkers could identify the benefits of teaming in order to expedite permanency for older youth and promote caseworker skill development as recommended by other researchers (Cherry et al., 2015; DePanfilis & Girvin, 2005; Hackett & Taylor, 2014; Helm & Roesch-Marsh, 2017; Pecora et al., 2019). PRT CYS agency caseworkers described an improvement in their ability to collaborate more effectively while, non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers continued to experience problems with collaboration. Unlike PRT CYS agency caseworkers, non-PRT CYS agency caseworkers shared the negative impact their jobs had on their personal and professional lives, similar in many ways to the caseworkers studied by Tao et al., (2015). This finding potentially suggests the positive effect PRTs have on caseworker morale if they are able to experience successful permanency planning experiences. The lack of statistical difference found between the two CYS agencies could be attributed to leadership at both agencies that values permanency and devotes resources to supporting

caseworker permanency practice. In addition, the high survey scores reported by respondents in both CYS agencies could reflect the effect of permanency-oriented technical assistance provided by SWAN that is designed to identify and address permanency practice needs.

The findings of this study cannot conclusively attribute change in the permanency planning DME to PRTs. However, PRT CYS agency caseworkers reported a favorable opinion of PRTs in the survey and focus group, confirming the conclusions of other researchers (Forehand et al, 2016; White et al, 2015). PRT CYS agency caseworkers attributed the intervention with addressing youth factors by helping them identify and utilize community resources to increase youth well-being and the number of connections they had with adults. Caseworkers attributed PRTs with addressing agency barriers such as high staff turnover and a focus on safety. PRTs were thought to reduce agency barriers identified as long as agency leadership attended the meetings. PRTs were thought to improve permanency planning and support caseworker efforts to help youth achieve permanency. Supporting the findings of Hackett & Taylor (2014) and Helm & Roesch-Marsh (2017), the diversity of PRT team members was thought by study participants to increase knowledge of resources, provide new and different ideas, encourage the caseworker to try something new, and provide the caseworker with a more complete understanding of the case. Similar to study participants interviewed by Thompson et al., (2017), caseworkers involved in PRTs reported improved collaboration which increased support and learning. Study participants attributed PRTs with breaking down isolation, and promoting self-efficacy by providing support to learn and practice new skills while exposing caseworkers to effective role models. As recommended by Dettlaff et al. (2015) PRTs were thought to address the attitudes and perceptions of caseworkers by changing what caseworkers' thought was important, confirming the findings of Forehand et al., (2016). Caseworkers also

reported that PRTs increased their hope and energy. Although a majority of survey respondents reported that system barriers were identified as a result of PRTs, focus group participants could not identify any specific barriers or actions taken to resolve them and provided no feedback regarding the effect PRTs had on external factors.

Strengths and Limitations of Study

The strengths of this study start with the use of an ecological perspective that recognizes the complexity of public child welfare work, the central role of the caseworker, and how one influences the other. The use of a mixed methods research design took advantage of the benefits of both quantitative and qualitative research methods while addressing each method's limitations. The use of the DME as a theoretical foundation enhanced the findings by providing a similar way to organize the way the quantitative and qualitative data were gathered, analyzed, and applied. Addressing a gap in the research identified by Dettlaff et al. (2015) and Shlonsky (2015), this study applied the DME to the case, individual, organization, and external factors involved in the child welfare permanency planning process. Attention to implementation fidelity acknowledges and identifies the gap between the theoretical PRT and the PRT experienced by the study participants. The results of this study further the efforts of past research that explored the impact PRTs had on permanency outcomes for youth in foster care by focusing on the perceptions of caseworkers (Davis et al., 2013; Forehand et al., 2016; O'Brien et al., 2012; White et al., 2013; White et al., 2015; White et al., 2016). This attention to the experience of the

caseworker addressed gaps in research identified by other researchers (Packard, 2013; Packard et al., 2015; Skivenes & Tonheim, 2016; Tao et al., 2013). The use of a comparison group addressed recommendations made by White et al., (2014). Finally, learning about the experiences and seeking out the opinions of caseworkers provided an opportunity to empower caseworkers, not just study them.

Keeping in mind Watt's (2007) argument that "conducting research, like teaching and other complex acts, can be improved, it cannot be mastered" helps put into perspective the limitations of this research study (p. 82). As Watt notes it can be challenging to learn to do many things at the same time and to try to accomplish something meaningful in a short period of time. Being uncomfortable signaled change, growth, and the development of new skills on the part of the researcher. In many ways, the dissertation process paralleled the typical caseworker experience of learning while doing. Influence that the researcher had on the study and a lack of diversity amongst the study participants were consistent limitations in the qualitative and quantitative components of this research. While a 25-year career in child welfare provided a strong foundation upon which to anchor the study, the purpose of this research was to understand the experiences and opinions of others. A more diverse group of study participants would have added value to the findings by providing the researcher with access to a wider variety of life experiences and perceptions.

Limitations of the qualitative portion of the study center around the validity of the findings. These limitations include the influence of the researcher's values, assumptions, and bias; lack of coding validation, inability to review the findings with the study participants, and lack of negative feedback about the PRT intervention. While identified as a strength, utilizing

the DME factors and PRT framework to create questions and organize the data may also have influenced the coding and interpretation of focus group data. To address these concerns, several reviews of the codebook were conducted and shared with peers and a qualitative research professor (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, peer debriefing of the research process was conducted during the data gathering and analysis phase of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Permission to recruit and interview a broader sample of caseworkers at the PRT CYS agency while requested, was also denied.

Limitations of the quantitative component of the study center around the quasi-experimental research design and inability to control the research environment (Thyer, 2010). The results of this study cannot be generalized to other child welfare settings due to the use of a convenience sample, small sample size resulting in low statistical power, the inability to survey the PRT CYS agency before PRT implementation, and the inability to randomly select who to expose to the PRT intervention (Thyer, 2010). Changes that occurred as a result of the caseworkers' knowledge that they were participating in a study and experiences in their lives may have affected their perception of the DME factors and the influence of PRTs, potentially affecting the validity of the study (Thyer, 2010). Additional threats to the validity of the study included the inability to identify confounding factors because a baseline score was not available for the PRT CYS agency (Scher et al., 2015). This baseline score could have been used to identify similarities with the non-PRT CYS agency (Scher et al., 2015).

Another limitation of this study involves the survey used to gather the quantitative data. Based on a survey created by White et al. (2013), established experts in child welfare and permanency practice, the caseworker permanency planning survey may not have measured

what was intended, despite efforts on the part of the researcher to establish validity. In addition, responses provided by study participants may have reflected what was thought to be the correct answer rather than the answer that accurately reflected the attitudes, opinions, and behavior of the respondents. The tendency to respond in what is thought to be a socially desirable manner is a common source of bias in studies that utilize self-report to measure variables (Brenner & DeLamater, 2016; Rubin & Babbie, 2017).

Implications for Social Work Practice, Policy, Research, and Education

Findings from this study have implications for child welfare technical assistance and research. Because the hypothesis that PRTs affect the permanency planning DME of caseworkers is tentatively supported, there is still work to be done to fully understand the influence and efficacy of this intervention. Future research on PRTs is recommended to explore the perceptions of PRTs by CYS agency supervisors and a larger sample of caseworkers. An exploration of the influence of SWAN technical assistance on fidelity of PRT implementation and effectiveness of the intervention is recommended. Recommendations related to ongoing PRT implementation include inviting intake workers to PRTs, revision of PRT related training in order to engage all caseworkers, identification and documentation of agency and system barriers, and continued involvement of SWAN technical assistance. It is also recommended that CYS agency leadership participate in PRTs.

Further development of the caseworker permanency practice survey is recommended to improve the validity and reliability of the tool. Potential uses for this survey involve its use as a training and supervisory needs assessment, for use as a technical assistance needs assessment,

and for use as a technical assistance evaluation tool. This information could be used to tailor technical assistance designed to meet the permanency planning needs of county CYS agencies and track the effectiveness of technical assistance provided.

Findings from this study also have implications for schools of social work and policy related to training provided to Pennsylvania child welfare workers. Ensuring that the value of permanency and permanency planning skill training are parts of all child welfare curricula at schools of social work is recommended. Integration of permanency values into all training provided by CWRC is also recommended. Due to the discrepancy between what caseworkers report knowing about permanency planning and their continued lack of confidence in their permanency planning skills, efforts to help caseworkers transfer knowledge to the field seems crucial. Other researchers, in accordance with adult learning theory, have recommended that training in child welfare be provided when caseworkers need it and focus on what is useful and practical (Collins, Amodeo, & Clay, 2007; Deglau et al., 2015). Providing opportunities to apply what has been learned as quickly as possible are also suggested (Collins et al., 2007). PRTs appear to offer a model for permanency training that occurs in the context of the CYS agency, is more “consultative” in nature, encourages dialogue and interaction, involves the supervisor, and can be reinforced by co-workers, all elements of child welfare workforce development recommended by other researchers (Collins et al., 2007, p.115; Deglau et al., 2015).

Conclusion

Social workers offer a vision of change within complex and ever changing environments that is possible only within the context of shared understanding. This mixed methods research study explored the effect of an intervention designed to influence the permanency planning environment of caseworkers. Individual and system orientations were used to organize the

theories reviewed and conclusions drawn about the phenomenon of aging out of foster care. Developmental perspectives laid the foundation for understanding the critical role secure and healthy relationships play beginning at birth and throughout the rest of one's life. For transition-age youth in foster care, attachment and resilience theories speak to the power of relationship to heal and transform. Theories of adolescent development put in context the reason support from adults is a necessary and normal part of maturation. Sociological theories such as life course, emerging adulthood, social capital, and cultural-relational explain why expectations for transition-age youth in foster care are at times unrealistic and even harmful. These theories also provide evidence for the power that comes from being claimed and connected to a family. The negative consequences of not having family privilege, documented by foster care alumni and years of outcome studies provided the motivation to explore interventions designed to reduce the number of youth who age out of foster care. Organizational theories provided perspective and implementation science set parameters within which to better understand the influence of PRTs on the micro and macro environment of child welfare casework. An ecological perspective, the DME, was used as the scaffolding upon which this exploration of change was designed.

Findings from this study confirm the results of other studies regarding the barriers faced by caseworkers along with factors they believe positively influence their permanency planning efforts. From the perspective of caseworkers, the hypothesis of this study was partially supported and PRTs were thought to be a useful strategy. Although no statistically significant differences between the two CYS agencies could be attributed to PRTs, qualitative data suggest more research is warranted. Implications from this study potentially affect social work theory, policy, education, and practice within Pennsylvania's child welfare system. Caseworkers involved in this study have added to the body of knowledge devoted to permanency planning and

PRTs. Their self-assessments and perceptions further our knowledge of what happens when help is offered. Their experiences offer a glimpse into what happens when theory and intention collide with reality. Their opinions and insights inform future research and technical assistance efforts. Finally, their passion and commitment offer hope and a vision of action and change to come.

Appendix A

Caseworker Permanency Planning Survey

1. Please enter your email address if you wish to be entered into the drawing for one of three \$50.00 Amazon Gift cards.

*2. Identify your current gender.(*Required)

*3. What is your age in years?(*Required)

*4. How would you describe your race/ethnicity?(*Required)	
<i>Select between 1 and 7 choices.</i>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	American Indian or Alaskan Native
<input type="checkbox"/>	Asian
<input type="checkbox"/>	Black or African American
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish
<input type="checkbox"/>	Middle Eastern
<input type="checkbox"/>	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
<input type="checkbox"/>	White
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other: <input type="text"/>

*5. How many years have you worked in public child welfare?(*Required)
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>

*6. How many years have you been employed at your current children and youth services agency?(*Required)

*7. What is your highest educational degree?(*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Bachelors
<input type="radio"/>	Masters
<input type="radio"/>	Doctorate
<input type="radio"/>	Other: <input type="text"/>

*8. What did you major in?(*Required)	
<i>Select one.</i>	
<input type="radio"/>	Social Work
<input type="radio"/>	Psychology
<input type="radio"/>	Human Services
<input type="radio"/>	Education
<input type="radio"/>	Other: <input type="text"/>

*9. What unit do you work in?(*Required)	
<i>Select one.</i>	
<input type="radio"/>	Intake
<input type="radio"/>	Placement/Ongoing
<input type="radio"/>	Social Work
<input type="radio"/>	Other: <input type="text"/>

*10. It is acceptable to consider reunifying older youth (age 11 to 21 years) with parents whose rights have been terminated. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

*11. Older youth (age 11 to 21 years) who are in a stable placement do not need legal permanency (reunification, adoption, PLC). (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

*12. Biological families can be barriers to planning and making decisions about legal permanency (e.g., they do not follow the case plan or respond to treatment).(*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

*13. It is a better use of limited time and resources to pursue legal permanency for younger youth (under 11 years) since they have a better chance of achieving legal permanency than older youth (age 11 to 21 years).(*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

***14. Group home or residential care is an acceptable option for older youth (age 11 to 21 years) who do not have legal permanency (reunification, adoption, or PLC).(*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

***15. It is a better use of limited time and resources to focus on older youths (age 11 to 21 years) independent living skills rather than achieving legal permanency.(*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

*16. Locating and engaging extended birth family and kin of older youth (age 11 to 21 years) is worth the time and resources. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

*17. Older youth (age 11 to 21 years) need legal permanency even if they do not realize it. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

*18. Older youth (age 11 to 21 years) with a history of behavioral, physical, and/or mental health issues can still achieve legal permanency (reunification, adoption, or PLC).(*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

*19. Resource families can play a major role in permanency planning for older youth (age 11 to 21 years).(*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

*20. Older youth in foster care are entitled to a legally permanent family (reunification, adoption, or PLC).(*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

*21. I spend as much time pursuing legal permanency with older youth as needed. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Never
<input type="radio"/>	Rarely
<input type="radio"/>	Occasionally
<input type="radio"/>	Frequently
<input type="radio"/>	Always
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

*22. I try permanency strategies with older youth that, in the past, have failed. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Never
<input type="radio"/>	Rarely
<input type="radio"/>	Occasionally
<input type="radio"/>	Frequently
<input type="radio"/>	Always
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***23. I continue to pursue legal permanency for older youth who want to emancipate from foster care. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Never
<input type="radio"/>	Rarely
<input type="radio"/>	Occasionally
<input type="radio"/>	Frequently
<input type="radio"/>	Always
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***24. I involve older youth in discussions regarding their legal permanency options. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Never
<input type="radio"/>	Rarely
<input type="radio"/>	Occasionally
<input type="radio"/>	Frequently
<input type="radio"/>	Always
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***25.** I include mentors and other significant adults such as coaches and teachers, identified by older youth, in permanency planning efforts. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Never
<input type="radio"/>	Rarely
<input type="radio"/>	Occasionally
<input type="radio"/>	Frequently
<input type="radio"/>	Always
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***26.** I ensure early and ongoing engagement of birth families in permanency planning for older youth. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Never
<input type="radio"/>	Rarely
<input type="radio"/>	Occasionally
<input type="radio"/>	Frequently
<input type="radio"/>	Always
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

*27. I ensure that efforts are made to locate other significant adults in an older youths life.(*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Never
<input type="radio"/>	Rarely
<input type="radio"/>	Occasionally
<input type="radio"/>	Frequently
<input type="radio"/>	Always
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

*28. I ensure that SWAN services such as child profile, family profile, and child preparation are referred in order to prepare/support the youth and family for legal permanency.(*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Never
<input type="radio"/>	Rarely
<input type="radio"/>	Occasionally
<input type="radio"/>	Frequently
<input type="radio"/>	Always
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

*29. I ensure that there is frequent and meaningful visitation between older youth and their biological family. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Never
<input type="radio"/>	Rarely
<input type="radio"/>	Occasionally
<input type="radio"/>	Frequently
<input type="radio"/>	Always
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

*30. I ensure that recruitment strategies and resources such as Child Specific Recruitment (CSR), the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange (PAE) and the Older Child Matching Initiative (OCMI) are repeatedly utilized to locate and engage possible permanency resources. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Never
<input type="radio"/>	Rarely
<input type="radio"/>	Occasionally
<input type="radio"/>	Frequently
<input type="radio"/>	Always
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

*31. I am comfortable working with older youth to achieve legal permanency. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

*32. I can apply my understanding of how the developmental needs of older youth impact legal permanency. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***33. I am aware of resources available to help me pursue legal permanency for older youth on my caseload. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***34. I can build positive and collaborative working relationships with community agencies to help older youth achieve permanency. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

***35. I have the skills needed to engage older youth in planning for legal permanency. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***36. I can successfully find legally permanent homes for older youth with behavioral, physical, and/or mental health issues. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***37. I understand how SWAN units of service can be used to help older youth achieve legal permanency.(*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

***38. I can build positive and collaborative relationships with families from diverse backgrounds (race, religion, culture, sexual orientation, gender identification)(*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

***39. I can successfully pursue concurrent permanency goals to expedite permanency for older youth on my caseload.(*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***40. I can apply my understanding of how the grief and loss experienced by older youth impacts legal permanency.(*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***41. I can partner with resource families to expedite permanency for older youth on my caseload. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***42. I can identify a path to permanency for older youth on my caseload. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***43. I do not feel that I have the skills needed to help older youth achieve legal permanency>(*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***44. I feel supported by my agency to explore all legal permanency options for older youth(*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***45. My agency provides me with the training necessary to effectively pursue legal permanency for older youth. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***46. My agency makes legal permanency for older youth a priority. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

***47. My agency supports me in arranging permanency planning meetings that involve older youth and their families. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***48. My current work responsibilities do not allow me to spend the amount of time I need with older youth. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

*49. Information about policies, procedures and work expectations such as paperwork and documentation related to older youth in care is clearly communicated within my agency. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

*50. The relationship between the child welfare and legal agencies in my county is a barrier to achieving legal permanency for older youth. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

*51. Administrative demands such as paperwork, prevent me from effectively pursuing legal permanency for older youth. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

*52. My agency provides resources to maintain connections between older youth and their siblings. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

***53. My supervisor provides guidance and support to help me achieve legal permanency for older youth. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***54. My supervisor regularly discusses strategies to help me address barriers to permanency for older youth on my caseload. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***55. I have role models in my agency that demonstrate skills needed to successfully achieve legal permanency for older youth. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree
<input type="radio"/>	N/A

***56. Have you presented a youth at or attended a Permanency Roundtable (PRT)? (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Yes	
<input type="radio"/>	No	Go to end of chapter

*57. Identify the number of youth you have presented or observed at a PRT.(*Required)

*58. Did you attend the permanency values training before presenting a youth at or attending a PRT?(*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	No
<input type="radio"/>	Yes

*59. Did you attend the PRT skills training before presenting a youth at or participating in a PRT?(*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	No
<input type="radio"/>	Yes

*60. A permanency consultant (external resource) was present at the PRTs you attended. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*61. A master practitioner (internal resource) was present at the PRTs you attended. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*62. The case supervisor was present at the PRTs you attended. (*Required)	
<i>Select one.</i>	
<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*63. The agency Administrator or representative was present at the PRTs you attended. (*Required)	
<i>Select one.</i>	
<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*64. A scribe was present at the PRTs you attended.(*Required)	
<i>Select one.</i>	
<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*65. A facilitator was present at the PRTs you attended.(*Required)	
<i>Select one.</i>	
<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*66. There was access, onsite or by phone, to a legal consultant/expert at the PRTs you attended. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*67. There was access, either on site or by phone to a policy consultant or expert at the PRTs you attended. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*68. There was access, either onsite or by phone, to a mental health consultant or expert at the PRTs you attended. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*69. There was access, either onsite or by phone, to an educational consultant or expert at the PRTs you attended. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*70. At the PRTs you attended, the meeting began with an overview of the purpose, process, and ground rules for the meeting. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*71. At the PRTs you attended, the case manager was provided 20 minutes to present the case. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

***72.** At the PRTs you attended, time was provided for clarifying questions. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% if the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

***73.** The youths permanency status was rated at the PRTs you attended. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% if the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

***74. At the PRTs you attended, time for brainstorming was provided. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

***75. A permanency action plan was developed at the PRTs you attended. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*76. A debrief was held at the end of the PRTs you attended.(*Required)	
<i>Select one.</i>	
<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*77. A monthly follow-up was scheduled at the end of the PRTs you attended.(*Required)	
<i>Select one.</i>	
<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*78. Monthly follow-ups occurred for the youth presented at PRTs. (*Required)	
<i>Select one.</i>	
<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*79. The PRTs you attended focused on identifying and engaging possible permanency resources. (*Required)	
<i>Select one.</i>	
<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*80. The PRTs you attended focused on creating permanent connections for the youth presented. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*81. The PRTs you attended focused on identifying and securing appropriate services and supports. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

***82.** The PRTs you attended identified system barriers (policies, resources) to achieving legal permanency for the youth presented. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

***83.** The PRTs you attended identified agency barriers to achieving legal permanency for the youth presented. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*84. The PRTs you attended created an independent living plan for the youth presented. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

*85. At the PRTs you attended tasks were divided up between the members of the PRT team. (*Required)

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	0% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	25% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	50% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	75% of the time
<input type="radio"/>	100% of the time

***86. PRTs are a useful strategy to help caseworkers secure legal permanency for older youth on their caseload. (*Required)**

Select one.

<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Disagree
<input type="radio"/>	Neutral
<input type="radio"/>	Agree
<input type="radio"/>	Strongly Agree

Appendix B

Focus Group Questions

Introduction: “Hello everybody, my name is Tammy Hendrix. I will facilitate the discussion today. I will ask you several open questions. Your personal opinions and view are very important for me. There are no right or wrong answers. Please feel welcome to express yourself freely during the discussion. This conversation will be recorded on tape. This is only for purpose of the research, I will be the only one listening to the tape. No names or personal information will be used in the final report. The discussion will last for about two hours. Please turn off or silence your mobile phones. Please give everyone the chance to express their opinion during the conversation. You can address each other when expressing your opinion, I am only here to assist in the discussion. Is everything clear about the course of the focus group discussion? Does anyone have any questions before we begin?”

Individual Factors:

1. Do you believe that all children and youth in foster care can achieve legal permanency?
2. What skills do you believe are most important to secure permanency for children and youth on your caseload?
3. What development needs do you have in this area?
4. What resources do you find helpful in your permanency practice?
5. How do you use SWAN services to secure permanency for children and youth on your caseload?

Organizational Factors:

1. What support do you believe caseworkers need to help children and youth achieve permanency?
2. What efforts in your agency have been most successful in promoting permanency for children and youth on your caseload?
3. What efforts in your agency have not been successful in promoting permanency for children and youth on your caseload?
4. What factors in your agency influence your own practice related to permanency?
5. What agency barriers interfere with timely permanency for youth in foster care?

Case Factors: What family or youth characteristics are barriers to achieving permanency for youth on your caseload?

External Factors: What system barriers interfere with permanency for youth in foster care?

PRT Feedback:

1. Describe any unintended consequences after the PRT
2. How would you improve the PRT process?
3. Describe how you felt during the initial PRT
4. Describe how you felt during the follow-up meetings
5. Would you recommend PRTs to other caseworkers? If so, why, If not, why?

Individual Factors:

1. What have you learned from the PRT process?
2. What training needs have been identified as a result of the PRT process?
3. Describe how you practiced before PRT implementation.
4. Describe how you practice following PRT.

5. Describe any successes you have experienced regarding the permanency plan that was developed

Case Factors

1. What characteristics of the youth continue to be a barrier to achieving legal permanency?
2. What characteristics of the family continue to be a barrier to achieving legal permanency?

Organizational Factors:

1. Were any agency barriers identified as a result of the PRT?
2. Describe any changes at your agency as a result of participating in the PRT process
3. External Factors: Were any external barriers identified as a result of the PRT?

Closing: Is there anything else you would like to discuss about permanency planning or PRTs before we end?

Non-PRT CYS Agency Focus Group Questions

Introduction: “Hello everybody, my name is Tammy Hendrix. I will facilitate the discussion today. I will ask you several open questions. Your personal opinions and view are very important for me. There are no right or wrong answers. Please feel welcome to express yourself freely during the discussion. This conversation will be recorded on tape. This is only for purpose of the research, I will be the only one listening to the tape. No names or personal information will be used in the final report. The discussion will last for about one and half hours. Please turn off or silence your mobile phones. Please give everyone the chance to express their opinion during the conversation. You can address each other when expressing your opinion, I am only here to assist

in the discussion. Is everything clear about the course of the focus group discussion? Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

Individual Factors:

1. Do you believe that all children and youth in foster care can achieve legal permanency?
2. What skills do you believe are most important to secure permanency for children and youth on your caseload?
3. What development needs do you have in this area?
4. What resources do you find helpful in your permanency practice?
5. How do you use SWAN services to secure permanency for children and youth on your caseload?

Organizational Factors:

1. What support do you believe caseworkers need to help children and youth achieve permanency?
2. What efforts in your agency have been most successful in promoting permanency for children and youth on your caseload?
3. What efforts in your agency have not been successful in promoting permanency for children and youth on your caseload?
4. What factors in your agency influence your own practice related to permanency?
5. What agency barriers interfere with timely permanency for youth in foster care?

Case Factors: What family or youth characteristics are barriers to achieving permanency for youth on your caseload?

External Factors: What system barriers interfere with permanency for youth in foster care?

Closing: Is there anything else you would like to add about permanency planning before we end?

Appendix C

Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted through Millersville University. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before you decide whether or not you want to participate in the study. The University requires that you give your signed agreement if you choose to participate.

This study is being conducted by Tammy Hendrix, LCSW

Title of the Study: A Mixed Methods Exploration of the Perceived Effect of Permanency Roundtables on the Decision Making Ecology of Pennsylvania Child Welfare Caseworkers

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research study is to understand what influence Permanency Roundtables (PRTs) have on child welfare workers involved in this intervention. The experiences, perceptions and opinions of caseworkers who have and have not been exposed to PRTs will be explored and compared. This study addresses gaps and adds to the current research conducted on PRTs while providing a way for caseworkers to provide feedback to Casey Family Programs and the Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN) on their experiences with this intervention.

Procedures: If you agree to participate in this study, we would ask you to:

Participate with other caseworkers in one, 90-minute focus group to explore permanency practice in public child welfare agencies.

The focus group meetings will be digitally recorded.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study: The study has the following risks: Due to the small sample size it may not be possible to maintain confidentiality of research participants. The benefits to participation include helping SWAN and Casey Family Programs understand the PRT process from the view point of the caseworker. This information could be used to improve the PRT process and direct future research efforts.

Compensation: none

Confidentiality: All information will be handled in a confidential manner to the extent provided by law, so that no one will be able to identify you when results are recorded. The records of this study will be kept private. In any report or presentation, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a research study participant.

A copy of the research report will be shared with you at the conclusion of the study.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating. You may discontinue your participation and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is: Tammy Hendrix,
tahendri@millersville.edu, Social Work Department: 717-805-3429

The Millersville faculty member overseeing this study is Heather Girvin, Ph.D.,
heather.girvin@millersville.edu or 717-871-7181

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later regarding the research study, you may contact the researcher listed above. If you have any questions or concerns about the rights of research participants, please contact Rene Munoz at 717-871-4457.

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN APPROVED BY THE MILLERSVILLE UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Statement of Consent:

I have read the information described above and have received a copy of this information.
I have asked questions I had regarding the research study and have received answers to my
satisfaction. I am 18 years of age or older and voluntarily consent to participate in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Thank you for your participation.

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