

30 Days to Family Program Description

The principle of 30 Days to Family is to assist the case manager in searching for relatives/kin within 30 days of the child entering the foster care system. The pilot was launched in March 2011 with great success: 71.4% of the children were placed with relatives/kin by case closure.

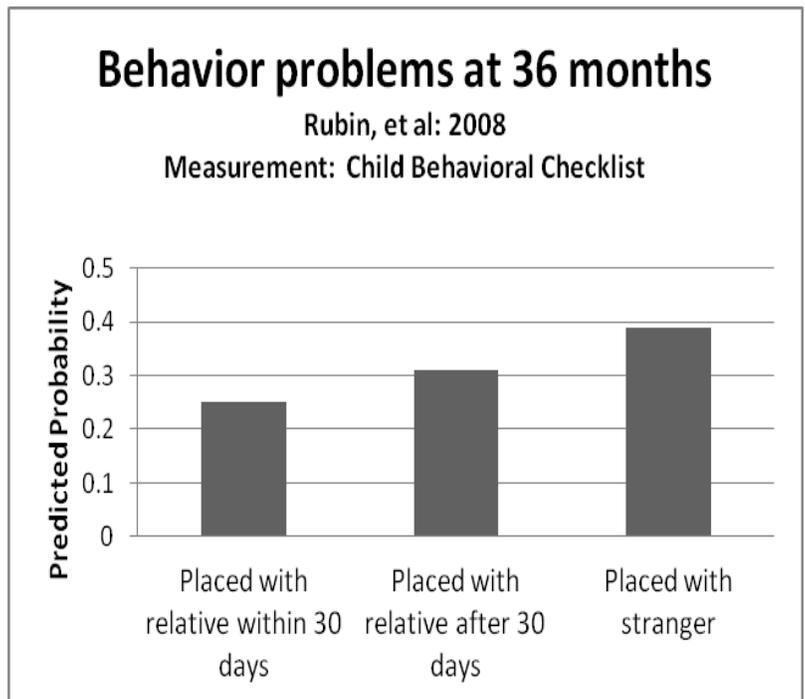
Benefits of Relative/Kin Placement

Why relatives, when it was likely abuse from the family that caused the child to enter the foster care system in the first place? In 30 Days to Family, we scour the child's family tree to find a safe, appropriate relative to provide him/her with a secure and nurturing home. On average, we can find more than 80 relatives within a month...but it is often closer to 200!

But wouldn't it just be better to remove the child from potentially poor family dynamics? Besides, what if the relative is not well off? Wouldn't the child benefit from living with a stranger who could give him/her more benefits? These misconceptions have been emphatically defeated by research. Foster children living with relatives:

- Experience fewer placement changes (Testa, 2001)
- Are more likely to live with their siblings (Shlonsky, Webster, Needell, 2003)
- Are less likely to run away (National Study of Child and Adolescent Well-Being or NSCAW, 2005)
- Are less likely to change schools (NSCAW, 2005)
- Have fewer behavioral problems (NSCAW, 2005)
- Are more likely to report that they "always felt loved" (Wilson, 1996)
- Are less likely to re-enter foster care (Courtney and Needell, 1997)
- Are more likely to report liking those with whom they live (NSCAW, 2005)

Furthermore, a 2008 study (Rubin, et al) demonstrated that when placed with relatives within 30 days, children are at lower risk for behavior problems.



Program Overview: 30 Days to Family is a short-term intervention to search for children's relatives/kin. The initial search is for grandparents, but the goal is that at least 80 additional relatives will be identified and explored. Because foster care placements can be fragile, the goal is to identify 1-2 other relatives or kin as potential placement providers. Maternal and paternal relatives are explored with equal interest. In all cases, every effort is made to search for relatives/kin who will keep siblings together, maintain children in their school of origin, and preserve the child's important relationships with friends and supportive adults.

The results of the first 9 months of 30 Days to Family are very encouraging:

- An average of **165 relatives** were identified within 30 days.
- **71.4% of children** were placed with relatives/kin by case closure.

Free services: 30 Days to Family services are provided free-of-charge to the public or private agency that has case management responsibility for the child.

Intake: We receive the referral as soon as the child enters the foster care system because of the suspicion of abuse or neglect. The case management agency provides 30 Days to Family with the name of the child and siblings, the name of the parent(s), where the child is placed, information about why the child came into care, and contact information for the case manager and the case manager's supervisor.

Family search: Our 30 Days to Family Specialist starts the search immediately. Our goal is to find at least 80 family members in the shortest amount of time possible. The first step, generally, is to interview mom and/or dad. Sometimes parents provide helpful family information because they would rather have their children placed with relatives/kin. Other times, parents are resistant because they are alienated from the family and have the belief that no family member will help. In this case, our Specialist will try to encourage cooperation saying, "Even if your (mom, aunt, cousin, etc.) won't help *you*, they will want to see *your child* happy and healthy."

Within a few hours, we may have no names from mom and/or dad or we may have 40. Either way, our Specialist begins expanding the search. Finding relatives/kin takes an extraordinary amount of time, but we are dedicated to using any and all resources necessary.

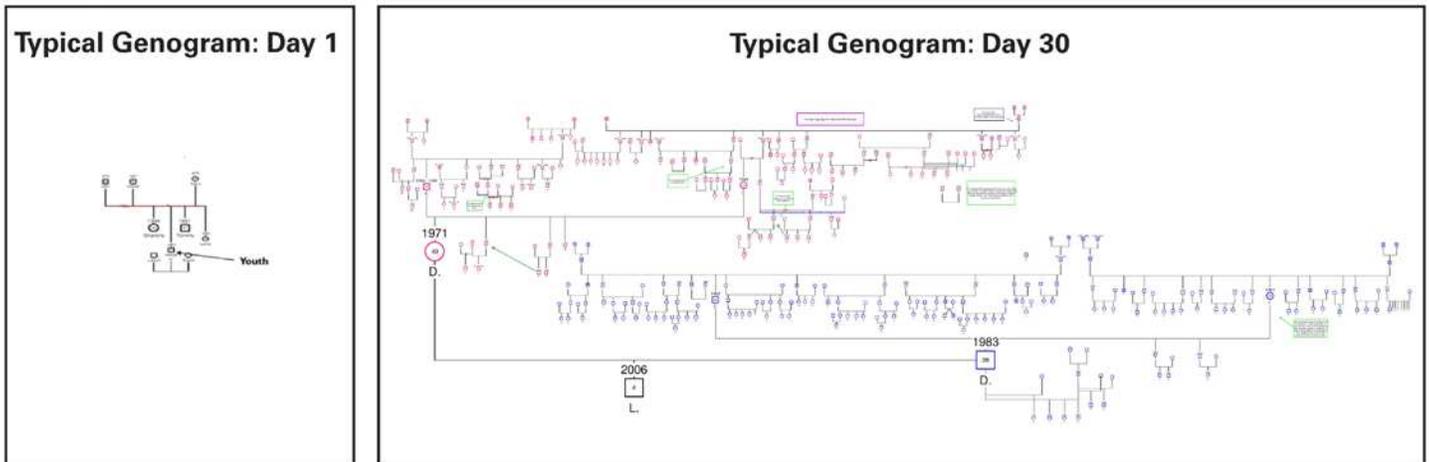
These resources may include:

- Birth certificates to provide grandparent information
- Children's Division records to identify other siblings in foster care
- Child support databases to identify a child's father and possible contact information
- Department of Revenue to determine property ownership
- Apartment complex leasing offices for tenant verification
- Obituaries to find the names of relatives of the deceased
- Funeral homes to find who made arrangements for the deceased
- Death certificates to find the city in which a relative died
- Missouri Department of Corrections (doc.mo.gov), Bureau of Prisons (www.bop.gov), and Vinelink (www.vinelink.com) to locate inmates (it's amazing how much family information an inmate will give!)
- Public sites
 - www.courts.mo.gov/casenet

- www.privateeye.com
- www.whitepages.com
- www.facebook.com
- www.spokeo.com
- www.pipl.com
- www.archives.com
- www.ancestry.com
- www.zabasearch.com

These resources are only the first step. Generally, at the opening of a case, our Specialist spends 40% of her time using search tools, and 60% in the field conducting face-to-face interviews with relatives. We have discovered that one-on-one interviews expand the family tree significantly, which is one reason the work takes so much time.

As family members are found, they are logged into a genogram. Because the family tree grows so quickly, the genogram serves as a valuable tool to both the family and the child's Family Support Team.



Family Engagement: The Specialist's must build trust with the relatives/kin. Often, the relative/kin may be defensive because the child is in Children's Division custody. The Specialist can act as a neutral party and liaison.

Connections are built with the relatives/kin through a family-centered approach. We look for family strengths, and address the family with the philosophy that they want to and are capable of caring for the child. We respect the family's time, and meet with them when (i.e. evenings and weekends) and where they are comfortable. We can spend as much time as needed with an individual to collect family information, which is forwarded to case managers and Family Support Team members. We also have the time to follow up with relatives/kin, as needed. It may require 2 or 3 visits to get in-depth family information from an individual.

As our Specialist helps build the family tree, she is gathering:

- Names
- Ages/birthdates
- Addresses and phone numbers
- Email addresses

- Relationship status
- Family health information (physical and mental)
- Work history
- Criminal history

Case Support: Our Specialist is in constant communication with the child's case manager and Family Support Team. Immediately upon referral, our Specialist contacts the case manager, Deputy Juvenile Officer, and Guardian Ad Litem to clarify our role in the case. We interview these professionals for any family information they may have.

We like to attend Family Support Team meetings and court hearings with the case manager, because participating relatives/kin are often available to share information.

Throughout the family search process, we keep the case manager and Family Support Team updated between meetings via emails and phone calls. There is a constant back-and-forth between our staff, the case manager, and the Family Support Team as relatives are identified and background checks are conducted. There is a 3-step process for background checks:

- Coalition staff (private investigator or Specialist) conducts an initial search of the individual through the Missouri Courts website (www.courts.mo.gov/casenet)
- Case manager checks the Missouri Child Abuse and Neglect database
- Deputy Juvenile Officer checks law enforcement database

As appropriate relatives are identified and approved by the team, the Specialist is available to assist the case manager in reconnecting the family members with the child as quickly as possible. This helps alleviate the child's fear and confusion of being removed from his/her family. Quick action shows the relatives that the professionals are intent on getting the child back with their family.

Family Decision-Making: From the first meeting, relatives/kin will often have ideas of who might be an appropriate placement for the child(ren). In addition to one relative home to provide a placement for the child(ren), we assist the case manager in seeking 1-2 backup plans, in case the 1st is not viable. We also assist the case manager in getting the family's advice regarding relatives who might support the child(ren) with:

- Respite Care
- Assistance with homework
- Mentoring the child
- Emotional support
- Financial support (for additional clothing, sporting activities, class ring, etc.)
- Community activities (Church, Boy or Girl Scouts, sports, etc.)
- Employment
- Transportation (to school, medical appointments, mental health appointments, or family visits)
- Supervision during the summer and/or non-school hours
- Celebrating holidays and birthdays

All of the above information is provided to the case manager and Family Support Team. We are also available to attend Team Decision Making Meetings to provide information about potential placement options.

After exhausting the family search, we assist the case manager in helping family members make decisions about who they want to provide care for the child(ren). Sometimes this discussion takes place in a group

setting. If so, we follow the evidence-based practice of Family Group Conferencing. Other times, the discussions are one-on-one. In all cases, we recognize that:

- Every family is unique.
- Every family has its own culture, personalities, personal dynamics, and history.
- Only the family members are experts on the family.
- All families are entitled to respect from the child welfare system.
- Children have a right to maintain kinship and cultural connections.
- Children and parents are nested in a wider family system.
- Active family participation is essential for good outcomes.
- The family is the context for resolution.
- Families are capable of solving problems.

Team Decision Making: We are available to attend Team Decision Making Meetings to provide information about potential placement options.

Preparing the family for licensure: If the case manager wishes, we can help move the licensing process along by gathering information needed for the background checks (name, date of birth, social security number), conducting a walkthrough of the home and completing the *Missouri Children's Division Resource Home and Safety Checklist*, and helping the relative overcome any deficiencies in these areas.

For example, some of the families we work with have minor issues that would normally preclude them from licensure, such as unpaid traffic tickets. We can help them take care of the tickets, and if necessary, will pay up to half of the cost. Other families have problems with meeting the standards outlined in the Home Safety Checklist, such as a lack of fire extinguisher or a bed. We can also help in these situations.

Case closure: At case closing, the Specialist provides the child's case manager, Deputy Juvenile Officer, and Guardian Ad Litem with a thorough report of the 30 Days to Family efforts, including:

- Summary of efforts
- Family search activities
- Family participation
- Maternal information, including family history
- Paternal information, including paternity and family history
- Potential relative placements
- Additional family supports
- Initial and final genograms
- Family contact information

Projected Program Outcomes:

- At least 80 family members are identified in 100% of cases
- At least two family or kin placement resources (1 primary resource and 1 backup resource) are identified in 100% of cases
- Three family or kin placement resources (1 primary resource and 2 backup resources) are identified in 70% of cases
- 70% of youth are placed with relatives or kin within 30 days

Follow-up:

We follow-up by participating in the child's 60-day Family Support Team meeting, and contacting the child's case manager at 3-months, 6-months, and 12-months after case closure. If, at any point, the child's placement falls through, we are able to assist in preparing the family for one of the backup placement plans.

What do referring agencies say about 30 Days to Family?

- "I can't believe you found his father. We would've never had the resources to find him!"
- "I didn't know that many family members could exist!"
- "I wish I could have 30 Days to Family on all of my cases!"
- "It's amazing to see how much work can be done in such a short time!"
- "The difference this program makes in a child's life is amazing. Every child deserves to be placed with family and you make it your mission to find that family. Thank you!"

For more information, please contact:

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