

SUPERVISORY TRAINING TO ENHANCE PERMANENCY SOLUTIONS: THE MASSACHUSETTS EXPERIENCE

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Project Conceptualization

The Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS) was awarded a discretionary grant by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to provide a series of trainings for DSS supervisors to support and promote adolescent permanency. In partnership with the Center for Adoption Research, at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, the training series—Supervisory Training to Enhance Permanency Solutions (STEPS)—was developed to enhance supervisory practice in supporting and guiding the efforts of social workers to help youth in foster care achieve permanency and life long connections. Drawing upon lessons learned during a 2000-2003 social worker training partnership between DSS and Boston University School of Social Work (also supported as a demonstration project by ACF), key fundamentals for the STEPS program were identified. The process evaluation from that partnership suggested the need to stress the philosophy and principles of Positive Youth Development (PYD) more than specific skill acquisition. Furthermore, the evaluation revealed that even in a state like Massachusetts which has an Adolescent Outreach Program that is advanced in its adoption of PYD theory and practice, many constituencies (e.g., service providers) who were trained knew little about PYD and how to apply it. The evaluation also highlighted that DSS supervisors stand at a pivotal point in the system; they can be the connection between the individual case worker and the new policy directions and systems change coming from executive management. Therefore, their knowledge of this practice is crucial. Thus, the goal of the STEPS project was to enhance supervisory support in this essential area of service.

In Massachusetts this award was particularly timely; providing youth-focused services based on a sound understanding of PYD was an integral element in numerous initiatives DSS was undertaking as this training program was being implemented. For example, beginning in October 2005, Massachusetts initiated a Breakthrough Series Collaborative focused on Adolescent Permanency (BSCAP). The goal of the Breakthrough Series was to bridge gaps in knowledge and practices

related to permanency and to create immediate positive changes. As a scaffold to the Breakthrough Series, DSS also hosted two one-day forums on issues in adolescent permanency. The first, in collaboration with the Center for Adoption Research at the University of Massachusetts, *"No Place Like A Home"* was designed to be a call to action for solution-focused strategies to work with adolescents and adolescent permanency planning. The day was reflective, interactive, and provided an opportunity for sharing strategies, techniques, and perspectives on adolescent permanency. The second forum focused on 'family finding' and included Kevin Campbell as a guest speaker. The goal of STEPS, in combination with these other efforts initiated by DSS, is to build strength-based practices inclusive of the departmental core values. The six core values are child-centered, family-focused, strength-based, community-based, culturally competent, and committed to continuous learning. As presented to supervisors, this program offers them a strength-based approach to working with their staff and with youth and families to respond to critical needs in service planning. It builds on knowledge and skills that participants already possess and strives to deepen their understanding of the impact of informed strength-based and culturally-sensitive management practice.

Development of Curriculum and Content

A curriculum framework focusing on youth development and adolescent permanency was designed. The overall program goal of STEPS is for supervisors to develop techniques to lead, support, and positively engage social workers in facilitating youths' successful transition to adulthood. Development of the curriculum included conducting a needs assessment, creating an advisory board, designing a curriculum framework, planning the curriculum content, developing complementary material for each curriculum module, and compiling a resource guide that lists providers of strength-based youth services throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Curriculum development was initiated through a needs assessment during which focus groups were held to gather input from DSS managers and staff, DSS-contracted service providers, foster parents, youth currently in foster care, and youth who had recently exited the foster care system. Focus groups were designed to provide information that would inform content development and result in processes that would most effectively implement the proposed training modules and actualize the outlined projected outcomes. Facilitated by the Department of Social Services (DSS) and its partner, the Center for Adoption Research, at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, the goal of the focus groups was to identify perceptions, beliefs, and practical realities that influence permanency for adolescents in foster care. The information yielded a broad scope of experiences and perspectives and was indispensable during the design of the modules and in the development of practices that would offer maximum effectiveness for supervisory professional development.

To further enhance the needs assessment results, and to provide ongoing input throughout the life of the project, a STEPS Advisory Board was established to oversee and coach all activities of the project. In addition to key DSS staff and project leaders from the Center for Adoption Research, the Advisory Board consisted of a total of 20 members, representing a diverse constituency of stakeholders: youth currently in foster care, youth formerly in foster care, academic and medical partners, experts who work with youth and families, professionals from the legal community, and community partners such as employment preparation programs.

Based on the input from the focus groups and the advisory board, goals and objectives were outlined for each curriculum module. To maximize supervisors' ability to access this training opportunity, each of the six modules were delivered at five locations across the Commonwealth. Using an emergent design and relying heavily on adult learning theories to plan and develop the curriculum, supervisors' input, resources, and ideas were incorporated into each module. An emergent curriculum design allowed curriculum developers to identify best practices that supervisors are currently using, and promising practices worthy of replication. After each training session, materials produced during the training were compiled for distribution at the next session, making it possible to share participant generated best practices across regions of the state.

Training Content

Content focusing on positive youth development and adolescent permanency was developed based on the fundamental principles and practical implications of PYD. Specific overall training objectives were identified:

- Supervisors will have a holistic perspective about the various needs of youth in care
- Supervisors will learn specific supervisory techniques to engage and support social workers in the management of adolescents in care and their preparation for young adulthood
- Supervisors will have opportunities for ongoing self reflection regarding older youth and their potential for permanent relationships

The six modules of the STEPS training program provide a holistic and comprehensive perspective on adolescents' strengths and needs. Each module addresses a different area critical to adolescent development, life in care, and the implications of permanent relationships. Expert presenters were identified for each module with the final selection of a presenter being based on their ability to speak to strength-based practical management strategies in their area of expertise. In addition to the topic presenters, four of the six modules included a "youth voice" on the topic. Various mediums were used to present the youth voice including a

youth panel, digital stories, and a digital testimonial on one youth's experience in the education system.

Each module consists of a full day (6-hour) session, and is designed to enhance the DSS supervisory practice with respect to specific strategies to engage and support social workers in the management of adolescent care, promotion of permanency, and preparation of adolescents for young adulthood. All modules include a topical presentation, activities to use with staff members, and facilitated discussions. Cultural competency and heightening cultural sensitivity is interwoven into the content of all sessions as opposed to being a stand-alone content component. This strategy encourages participants to think about a youth's multi-faceted identity and the implications for practice in all areas of development presented. The six modules include the following areas of development:

1. Positive Youth Development
2. Building Community Ties and Permanent Connections
3. Collaborating with Education and Workforce Partners
4. Physical and Mental Health Needs of Youth in Care
5. Public Safety and Juvenile Justice
6. Impact on Practice

Expert presenters were engaged for each module to facilitate in-depth discussion of each topic area. Presenters were identified by the project director in collaboration with DSS and the STEPS Advisory Board, and were selected based on direct experience and expertise in each area of development they were invited to address. See Table 1 for the goals and objectives for each module.

The following module summaries highlight the key elements presented in each session.

Module 1: Positive Youth Development.

Knowledge objectives for the first module include understanding the definition of positive youth development as it affects relationships and lifelong family connections. As an introduction to the entire training series, participants discuss key influences on youth development such as community ties, education, vocational learning, work skills and career planning, physical health, sexuality, mental health, juvenile justice, adolescent development across cultural variations, understanding adolescent cultures, and adolescent sexuality. An interactive experience demonstrating society's impressions of adolescents and particularly youth involved in the child welfare system enhances the broad definition of positive youth development.

Table 1: Module Goals and Objectives

Module	Goal	Objectives
1. Positive Youth Development	Supervisors' practice reflects knowledge of developmental and cultural needs of adolescents in foster care via strength-based case management and supervision of caseworkers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Supervisors will learn about Positive Youth Development as it relates to youth in care Supervisors will develop strategies to support caseworkers in engaging youth in planning and decision making Supervisors will understand skills young adults need to achieve self sufficiency
2. Community Ties and Life Long Connections	Supervisors and social workers will engage community resources and social networks to support youth in developing relationship skills and life long familial and community connections.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Supervisors will understand the importance of permanent connections in supporting youth's successful transition to adulthood Supervisors will learn strategies for identifying youths' personal connections as potential permanency relationships Supervisors will learn strategies to communicate with kin and foster families in planning for youth Supervisors will have an understanding of what resources are available to help youth build the skills needed to achieve self sufficiency
3. Education and Workforce	Supervisors will learn strategies to lead and support social workers' efforts to foster and advocate for youths' educational and vocational skills and attainment.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Supervisors will learn about the educational system and its impact on the lives of youth Supervisors will gain a deeper understanding of the significance of continuity of educational programming and its importance in life long outcomes of youth Supervisors will learn how to guide social workers in the successful navigation of educational resources to ensure youth are provided the services needed Supervisors will learn about IDEA and the IEP process to support social workers engaging the educational system on a youth's behalf Supervisors will be informed of post-secondary education opportunities and funding resources Supervisors will have an understanding of what educational/vocational skills young adults need to acquire in order to achieve self sufficiency and how to assess their skill level
4. Physical and Mental Health Needs	Supervisors will obtain a greater understanding of the importance of physical and mental health for youths' successful transition to adulthood and the unique considerations of adolescents in foster care.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Supervisors will learn specific physical and mental health needs, as well as the cognitive development of adolescents Supervisors will be sensitive to the necessity of physical and mental well being for young adults' achievement of self-sufficiency Supervisors will build skills for identifying risk behaviors and the need for mental health services Supervisors will understand the unique needs of GLBTQ youth, how to understand and validate their needs, and how to keep them safe Supervisors will be knowledgeable about accessing medical and mental health resources for older youth in care

Table 1: Module Goals and Objectives

Module	Goal	Objectives
5. Public Safety and Juvenile Justice	Supervisors' will support social workers on strength-based management with youth involved in the juvenile justice system	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Supervisors will become knowledgeable about the juvenile justice system 2. Supervisors will learn how to oversee case management for youth involved with the juvenile justice system 3. Supervisors will learn strategies for managing communication with the juvenile justice system 4. Supervisors will gain knowledge of alternative programs for youth involved with the juvenile justice system
6. Implementing Strength-based Practices	Supervisors will have the opportunity to reflect upon the information and skills acquired in modules one through five and to share thoughts and practical strategies with colleagues about practice implementation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Give supervisors an opportunity to share how series has impacted their leadership practice with social workers' management of older youth in care in achieving permanency 2. Provide a community environment to allow supervisors to share and learn from others experiences and strategies for supporting social workers managing older youth in care 3. Provide forum for supervisors to share what issues or barriers impede effective supervisory practice related to permanency planning for older youth in care 4. Identify specific areas of the training that should be revised or expanded in future offerings

Module 2: Building Community Ties and Permanent Connections.

Placing community ties in the context of launching into adulthood, changes in social status and role, and demands as one moves into adulthood, are all themes explored in the second module. Some discussion of resiliency is included, as is the role that physical (e.g., income, inheritance, property); human (i.e., physical development, intellectual development, psychological development, emotional development, social development); and social assets (e.g., connectedness with family, peers, and others) play in a youth's launch into adulthood. An important point explored in the second module is re-engagement with kin families and building a network of community connections for youth in foster care. The role held by professionals in support of changing relationships as youth move into adulthood is examined.

Module 3: Collaborating with Education and Workforce Partners.

Navigating the educational system and understanding the significance of educational continuity are key themes in the third module. Distinctions are drawn between general education supports and special education supports and services. Overviews of the provisions of IDEA and 504 plans are provided. Planning for post-secondary education and workforce preparation is highlighted, as are timelines for key activities as youth prepare for post-secondary education and entrance into the workforce.

Module 4: Physical and Mental Health Needs of Youth in Care.

This session addresses the physical and mental health needs of adolescents in care. Starting from a normative perspective, physical, cognitive, social, sexual, and moral transformations that take place during adolescence are addressed. The presentation includes a discussion of adolescent sexual behavior and sexually transmitted diseases. Adolescent brain development and the impact of trauma on youth are discussed. Working with youth with serious mental health conditions during their transition to adulthood is a key element of this session as well. This element includes a comparison between typical cognitive, moral, sexual, and identity development of young people with that of those who have a mental health condition. An examination of outcomes for youth with mental health conditions with respect to completion of high school, trouble with the law, residing with family, pregnancy, and substance abuse is an important component of this module. Family development and the implications of segregated mental health systems for children and adults are included.

Module 5: Public Safety and Juvenile Justice.

The fifth session examines working with youth involved with juvenile justice system. The expertise of professionals from the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services and The Children and Family Law Program is used to discuss youth engagement across public service agencies. The population of children in the care of Department of Youth Services is reviewed and the session includes discussion of family, school, and individual risk factors. Additionally, protective elements such as family, community, school, and peers are discussed. Issues relative to youth and the court, including when youth might need an attorney and when youth are entitled to a court appointed attorney are addressed.

Module 6: Impact on Practice.

The final session is a facilitated discussion to weave together the threads of the first five sessions and to consider implications for practice. Facilitated by Casey Family Services, the thrust of this discussion was to identify practice strategies using a holistic approach. During each session offered in Massachusetts, promising practices were generated and shared statewide. In addition, DSS regional directors were invited to attend and participate in these discussions to consider ways to integrate promising practices into existing approaches and to influence policy development.

Addressing attitudes and bias was a significant consideration of the curriculum design. While content knowledge is important, awareness of overt and covert attitudes or bias and its influence on practice was a major consideration and theme throughout all six modules. The STEPS training series was designed to address implicit bias toward older youth in foster care by promoting self reflection and consideration of supervisors' own and others' perceptions of older youth in foster care.

Journals were supplied to all participants to encourage personal reflection and to capture supervisors' impressions and growth, with the intention that their thoughts would be used in the final session in which the discussion centered on the impact of the training on their supervisory practice.

A key thread integrated into all the sessions was an examination of associations and biases that professionals, and society at large, make regarding adolescents and the notion of permanency for adolescents who live in foster care. The entire series offered supervisors an opportunity designed to help them understand the impact of bias on their work with youth and families, while also making it possible for them to build strategies and techniques to help them better manage staff members and acknowledge that such bias may influence practice. Project Implicit and Mahzarin Banaji, Ph.D., of Harvard University worked in collaboration with the Center for Adoption Research to develop an Implicit Association Test (IAT) designed to specifically examine the issue of bias relative to youth for a child welfare audience. This tool provided supervisors with a mechanism to reflect on their unconscious associations toward adolescents and the impact that these associations have upon their practice. Specifically, two tests were developed that highlight implicit bias about older youth and permanency, and older youth and stereotypical negative behaviors. The STEPS program offered a venue to introduce the IAT to an audience of child welfare workers. It appears that this tool holds enormous potential to enhance thinking and practice in adolescent permanency for child welfare workers at all levels.

Supporting Materials

Each participant received a program binder at the first training session they attended. These binders included module materials for the first session. For participants who had not attended from the beginning of the training series, binders contained all previously covered materials. At the beginning of each subsequent training session, attendees were provided with participant generated materials from the previous session and materials for the current module. These materials, including supervisor identified best practices from the previous session, were distributed at each subsequent session to encourage field input and sharing. The binder materials were designed so that upon completion of the six modules, participants would possess a complete set of materials.

A user-friendly binder was designed with labeled dividers to separate the materials for each module covered. Each section included the goals and objectives of the module, a list of key terms and definitions, frequently asked questions, practice tools that were discussed during the module, and related articles. In keeping with an emergent curriculum model, materials were developed as each module was planned and not as an entire entity prior to the start of the project. Materials were designed to allow supervisors to maximize the parallel learning process that was imbedded in the curriculum. That is, materials were included that supervisors could immediately reproduce and use directly with their staff for added support of prom-

ising practices in serving youth. At the end of the STEPS program, multiple copies of the binder were provided to each area office in the Commonwealth so that all supervisors in the state would have direct access to the information.

A STEPS web site was built that includes all materials from all modules—<http://www.steps-umms.org/index.aspx>. In addition to the presentations, handouts for all sessions, and activities to use with staff members, visitors to the website can access lists of best and promising practices, and concerns and barriers that were identified throughout the series. The web site also includes the STEPS Resource Guide that is described later in this article. The STEPS Resource Guide will be available and continuously updated on the web site. A license was obtained to keep the web site active for a minimum of five years to ensure access to all materials going into the future.

Youth Participation

An essential component of this program was youth participation. It would not have been possible to suggest strategies to foster permanency and prepare adolescents for young adulthood without including acknowledgement of youths' own perspectives. To include the youth voice in each training session, various mediums were used. These included a youth panel, digital stories, recorded youth testimonies on experiences in the educational system, and a youth discussion group whose participation consisted of their discussion response to a digital story of a youth's experience while in foster care.

As part of the first module, "*Positive Youth Development*", a youth panel was organized to share their "voices of experience." Panels consisted of two to four youth and a facilitator. Each youth presented his or her story and then responded to questions from the supervisors. Prior to the panel discussion, youth were provided with a list of potential strength-based questions they could anticipate being asked. As a result, youth were quite open about their experiences in foster care and highlighted what supervisors can do to support social workers and their youth clients seeking permanency and preparation for adulthood. One particular issue reported repeatedly by the youth was the importance of maintaining appropriate geographical closeness between siblings, or at a minimum informing youth of where their siblings are and how they can contact them. Another theme frequently mentioned by youth was in regard to their need to participate in their own case planning activities. The facilitator helped connect the youth perspective with theoretical perspectives of positive youth development that could apply to both supervisory and direct practice of social workers.

In the "*Community Ties and Life Long Connections*" module the digital stories, "*Telling It Like It Is: Foster Youth and Their Struggle for Permanency*," created by the California Permanency for Youth Project were shown to participants. These digital stories document the experiences of ten former foster youth as they searched to find permanent connections. Each viewing was followed by facilitated discussion about

potential opportunities to assist adolescents in attaining permanency that may have been missed by social workers or others involved in the youth's life. Following this discussion, local community agency speakers provided a community perspective on how to initiate and foster conversations to enhance connections.

Youth digital testimonials on their educational experiences while in foster care were shared for the module on "*Education and the Workforce*". One particularly gripping testimony came from that of a girl who had attended 17 different high schools while in foster care. She was unable to receive her high school diploma due to failure of appropriate transfer of credits from school to school. This powerful testimony highlighted the frustration this young woman experienced over the lack of communication between multiple school departments, the Department of Social Services, and other service providers. Even though she was unable to obtain a high school diploma due to inappropriate transfer of credits, she eventually did go back and complete her GED and is now attending community college.

For the concluding module, "*Impact on Practice*", we returned to a youth panel format. The youth shared their perspectives on the need not only to have family connections, but more importantly, they emphasized how critical it is to be involved in their own planning. The supervisors and the youth viewed a digital story together. After the video, staff from Casey Family Services facilitated a discussion on the successes, struggles, and what might have been done differently from the youth's perspective in this particular story.

Challenges were encountered regarding the inclusion of youth throughout the series. Although there are established youth advisory boards throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, many of these same youth have been tapped repeatedly to present at various venues. Recruiting appropriate youth proved to be difficult at times. During the planning stage it was decided that in order to present a broad range of needs and experiences, a variety of adolescent voices and stories would be needed. These volunteer youth met with STEPS training staff prior to module presentations to prepare them for the session. Since these youth were new to the idea of discussing their experiences in foster care before an audience, this preparation session was an opportunity to describe the STEPS training in more detail, the make-up of the audience, and to ease their mind about their participation on the panel and speaking to a group of adults. Youth were encouraged to stay focused on the topic and to understand that this panel was not an opportunity to condemn their social workers to the supervisors. This strategy of preparing the youth ahead of time helped them realize that the panel was a time to offer suggestions on how social workers could better prepare youth for adulthood. All the youth who spoke were forthcoming with suggestions on how to promote permanency and prepare adolescents for adulthood.

Resource Guide

A supplementary strength-based resource guide listing adolescent services and support organizations in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was provided to all

Massachusetts Area DSS offices. A central concern during the development of the resource guide was how to make it user-friendly for supervisors, social workers, and most importantly for adolescents exploring resources. Two key issues were identified during early discussions regarding development of the STEPS Resource Guide. One issue was the need to identify an easy-to-use format, and secondly, to decide which youth oriented programs and services should be included. It was decided early on that resources for all DSS regions of Massachusetts would be included in one volume. Previously, the Department had produced region-specific resource guides in which listings were exclusive to a specific region. Because cross-regional placement frequently occurs, it was determined that a state-wide resource with regional sections would be more effective. Thus, any worker placing a youth anywhere in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will have access to strength-based programs for any location in which the youth is placed. The guide is divided into six sections, each representing a region of the Massachusetts Department of Social Services. The format for each section is identical and contains categories that delineate specific programming for that region. Strength-based programs that promote and support the needs of adolescents as they prepare to enter adulthood were carefully selected. Categories in each regional section include: education; job training and employment assistance programs; housing opportunities; transportation; basic need services (including food, clothing, and furniture resources); health and wellness programs; recreational, arts, cultural, and leisure programs; gay, lesbian, bisexual, questioning, and transgender networking; mentoring programs and faith-based institutions.

Barriers and Facilitators Relative to Training Roll Out

On a practical level, the logistics of planning the STEPS program was the major challenge encountered. It was a significant task to identify appropriate space with necessary equipment and catering services for a full-day event in every region. Considerable planning went into the development of an efficient registration system to allow for six different modules at five locations. Breeze© software was used to accommodate this need. Breeze© allowed participants to visit the web site, click on the date and location for which they planned to register, and complete registration online. This system was quite effective; however, it was not flawless, and on-site registrations were also completed at all sessions. During the early planning stages it was envisioned that a cyber café would be made available at each session to allow people to explore the Implicit Association Test (IAT) that had been developed for child welfare professionals as well as additional IATs that have been developed for other professions and for the general public. The cyber café plan required that all locations have simultaneous internet connectivity for multiple laptops to accommodate multiple users in a limited period of time. This plan proved to be logistically impossible. Thus, the final implementation was to make only the two child welfare IATs available, because the only requirement in that case was for each laptop to run the IAT Inquisit© software independently. Thus, no internet access

was required at any session site.

The entire project was implemented as a successful partnership between the Massachusetts Department of Social Services and The Center for Adoption Research at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. Some regional practice disparities were identified in the course of the series; this opened up the opportunity to discuss various practice models and identify particularly promising practices.

There is no question that a project of this nature could not be undertaken without a good fit of staff. As part of a public medical school, the Center for Adoption Research has access to the many valuable resources of the medical school, including access to expert presenters, space to hold trainings, and consultants to advise on various components of the project. Presenters were drawn from a rich pool of sources including the Departments of Social Work and Education at Salem State College, The Children & Family Law Program, Boston HAPPENS Adolescent clinic at Boston Children's Hospital, Private Consultants, the Department of Psychiatry at University of Massachusetts, the Department of Social Services Administration, and Casey Family Services. Staff from Casey Family Services facilitated the discussion in the final module, "*Implications on Practice*". The collaborative approach of the project added to presenters' enthusiasm and ready willingness to participate. No prospective presenters declined an invitation to participate and for many sessions we were able to select from a number of well-qualified and interested experts. Additionally, a particular advantage the Center for Adoption Research and the project team was a Center staff member whose previous experience included work as a supervisor for the Department of Social Services. The ongoing access to a supervisor's perspectives and insight was invaluable during all phases of the project. Finally, the project could not have been executed without the input of excellent support staff who managed all logistical details and contracts for expert presenters.

Evaluation Plan

A multi-level evaluation approach was designed to measure the impact of the STEPS training program on participants and their supervisory practice. This approach allows the evaluators to collect information about the participants' initial reactions to the training, any overall changes in participants' perceived competence and practice philosophies, and the real-world impact of newly learned supervisory strategies and techniques. The evaluation plan consists of module-specific process evaluations, a pre/post training survey tool, and post-training telephone interviews with supervisors and social workers. Table 2 provides a brief overview of each element of the evaluation, and the status of each element. The following sections provide more detailed information about the evaluation progress to date and anticipated future activities.

Process Evaluation

Process evaluations were collected, summarized, and reviewed by STEPS training leaders throughout the course of the program. The purpose of the process evalu-

ation was to gather feedback about training implementation and facilitation, as well as reaction to specific content areas. Information collected from the process evaluations was used to make adjustments to current and future training modules in an effort to best meet the needs of the participants. The results of the process evaluations were overwhelmingly positive. For example, a vast majority of participants (ranging from 70% to 96%, depending on the specific training module) indicated they would recommend the training to a colleague.

Table 2: STEPS Training Evaluation Components

	Goal To collect information about:	Sample/Sampling Strategy	Status
Process Evaluation (written)	Participants' reaction to content, trainers, and training format Suggestions for future training modules	All participants who attend the training. Survey distributed at the end of each module.	Complete
Pre/Post Training Survey (written)	Relative importance placed on issues of adolescent permanency Frequency of supervision of staff in the area of adolescent permanency Perceived competency level	All participants who attended the training. Surveys distributed at the onset of training, and again at the end of the final module.	Complete
Supervisor Interviews (telephone)	Identification of any changes in supervisory practice Assessment of how STEPS training fits into the bigger picture of adolescent permanency and existing initiatives/ programs	Supervisors who attended all (6) STEPS training modules. A random sample (stratified to represent all five geographic regions) chosen for participation (n=15).	In process
Social Worker Interviews (telephone)	Changes in supervision regarding adolescent permanency Greatest practice challenge in the area of adolescent permanency How can supervisors best support social workers in the area of adolescent permanency	Social workers whose supervisors had the opportunity to participate in STEPS. Participants will be categorized into two groups: one whose supervisors attended all six training modules, and one whose supervisors did not. Total sample will be 50.	Anticipated start date for social worker interviews is August, 2008.

The final process evaluation (Module 6: "Supervisory Impact on Practice") included three open ended questions designed to gather participants' feedback regarding information gained, service barriers, and future training needs. Responses to these questions were transcribed and reviewed to identify themes within the data. The major themes are presented below:

1. What were the most valuable things you learned from the STEPS series?
 - Hearing the experience of youth during the youth panels

- The importance of permanency/stability to youth
 - The need to think outside the box
 - That youth need to be involved in their permanency planning
 - Provided a great overview of permanency issues
2. In your role as a social work supervisor, what are the greatest barriers you face when addressing the permanency needs of older youth?
 - Lack of resources
 - Staff reluctance
 - Not enough time
 - Office policy/practice (systemic barriers)
 - Caseload size
 3. Please identify any future training needs in the area of adolescent permanency.
 - Need to extend this training to social workers
 - Tools for helping achieve youth permanency
 - More teen presentations/panels
 - Mental health issues
 - Legal training

The process evaluation served as a valuable tool throughout the STEPS training. It provided an opportunity for participants to communicate their thoughts/needs to training staff, and allowed the STEPS facilitators to adjust the training appropriately to meet the needs of the DSS supervisors.

Pre/Post Training Survey

The pre-training survey was completed by 106 social work supervisors during the first training module. This represented a 95% response rate (106/111). The survey was designed to gather information about participants' perceived competency in training-related areas, the level of importance they placed on each area, and the frequency with which they addressed these areas during social work supervision. The survey was anonymous, however participants were asked to create a unique ID code in order to match their pre- and post- training surveys for the purpose of data analysis.

Table 3: Description of Paired Sample (n=35)

		n	%
Gender	Female	25	71.4
	Male	10	28.6
Ethnicity	White/Caucasian	24	68.6
	Black/African American	5	14.3
	Hispanic/Latino	3	8.6
	Multiracial	2	5.7
	Asian American/Pacific Islander	1	2.9
DSS Supervisor	Yes	33	94.3
	No	2	5.7
How many STEPS Modules did you attend?	All Six Modules	24	68.6
	Five Modules	9	25.7
	Three Modules	2	5.7
Were you encouraged by management to attend STEPS?*	Yes	25	73.5
	No	9	26.5
	mean	range	sd
Age**	45.3	30-59	9.1
Length of Employment**	16.6	0-33	9.3
Length of Supervisory Experience**	7.8	0-26	7.6

* Missing data: n=1 ** Measured in year

The post-training survey was very similar to the pre-training survey and was designed to measure any changes in participants' responses. The post-training survey was completed at the end of Module 6 by 58 participants; representing a 100% response rate (58/58).

All survey data were entered into an SPSS database for analysis. In order to identify any changes in perceived competence, level of importance, and supervisory practice, researchers compared pre-and post-survey results for a matched pair sample (n=35)¹. While there were considerably more than 35 participants in the STEPS program (average attendance per training module was 76), only data from participants whose pre-and post-training surveys were able to be matched using their ID codes were used for the evaluation purposes. Table 3 presents some demographic information about this sample of training participants.

The majority of sample participants were female, Caucasian, and employed as supervisors for DSS. The length of their supervisory experience ranged from less than one year to 26 years, with an average length of 7.8 years. The majority of sample participants attended all six training modules (68.6%) and felt that management supported their attendance at the training program (73.5%).

On the pre- and post-training survey, participants were asked a series of ques-

1 Not all supervisors who attended Module 1 and completed the Pre-Training Survey attended Module 6 and completed the Post-Training Survey. Therefore, only 35 participants' surveys were matched using their self-created unique ID codes.

tions about their competency levels in 10 areas of supervision², the importance they placed on 8 issues of adolescent permanency, and the frequency with which they provided supervision to their staff in these areas of adolescent permanency³. Participants responded using 4-5 item Likert scales⁴ and changes in responses between the pre- and post-training surveys were identified. These differences in responses were analyzed using Wilcoxon signed-ranks tests.

The results of the data analysis indicate an overall positive trend in evaluation responses. For 96% (25/26) of the survey items, the average response values increased. These results represent positive post-training increases in perceived competency levels, importance placed upon issues of adolescent permanency, and frequency of supervision in these areas. Statistically significant positive value changes were identified in 6/10 of the Competency Level domains ($p < .01$):

1. Supervising workers regarding what contributes to positive youth development
2. Supervising workers regarding the effects of trauma on adolescent development
3. Supervising workers regarding community resources in the communities you serve
4. Supervising workers regarding the unique mental health needs of foster youth
5. Creating and sustaining a constructive learning environment
6. Supervising workers regarding strategies that enhance permanency focused practice

Supervisor Interviews

A sample of supervisors who attended the entire STEPS series has been invited to participate in a telephone interview about their experience with the training. A total of 15 participants were randomly chosen from an eligible pool who signed

2 Competency domains include issues in the following areas: Positive Youth Development, adolescent development, community resources, mental health, juvenile justice, unit/office performance, practice standards, crisis management, educational environment, and permanency focused practice.

3 Importance and frequency of supervision items included the following areas: Engaging youth in their case plans, transporting youth to appointments/court, advocating for educational needs, addressing mental/physical health needs, assessing relationships with care providers, navigating the juvenile justice system, exploring social opportunities, and searching for resources to support life long relationships.

4 Scales used: Competency (4=Very Competent, 3=Fairly Competent, 2=Somewhat Competent, 1=Not Competent); Importance (4=Very Important, 3=Important, 2=Slightly Important, 1=Not at all Important); Frequency (5=Daily Basis, 4=Weekly Basis, 3=Monthly Basis, 2=Only if there is a Crisis, 1=n/a).

consent forms during the final training module (n=31). This sample was stratified to ensure representation from each of the five geographic regions in which the training was presented. This semi-structured interview is expected to last between 30 and 60 minutes.

Continuation of Project and Material Access

A one-day abbreviated version of the curriculum is being developed to be offered to child welfare programs and allied professionals such as physicians, mental health providers, attorneys, judges, educators, and juvenile justice professionals. This adapted curriculum will be available electronically for professionals to access beyond the life of the grant. It is the hope that this holistic model will begin to stimulate integrated practice across disciplines and help foster a spirit of cooperation in meeting the needs of youth in care.

As previously mentioned, a STEPS web site has been built that includes all materials from all modules—<http://www.steps-umms.org/index.aspx>. In addition to the presentations, handouts for all sessions, and activities to use with staff members, visitors to the website can access lists of best and promising practices and concerns and barriers that were identified throughout the series. The entire strength-based Resource Guide that was developed is also available and will be continuously updated on the web site. As mentioned previously, a license was obtained to keep the web site active for a minimum of five years.

In conclusion, the foresight of the Administration for Children and Families to offer support for the development of leadership in this field provided an opportunity for Massachusetts DSS and the Center for Adoption Research to reflect on the complex and intricate nature of the work of meeting the needs of adolescents in foster care as they strive for permanency. The Massachusetts response to that vision seeks to embed the philosophy and principles of Positive Youth Development (PYD) as opposed to developing exclusively specific skill acquisition. It is hoped, that with time this holistic model will begin to stimulate integrated practice across disciplines and will foster a spirit of cooperation in meeting the needs of youth in care—creating a system of care. Additionally, heightened awareness of overt and covert attitudes or bias and its influence on practice can stimulate reflective consideration of the approaches that can be taken by and with adolescents' cooperation toward securing permanency.

Going forward, all revised and abbreviated versions of this curriculum will continue to encourage strength-based practices across disciplines. In addition, youth voices in this work are critical. It is not possible to suggest strategies to foster permanency and prepare adolescents for young adulthood without acknowledgement of youths' own perspectives.