

Family Finding

Frequently Asked Questions

Who does Family Finding search for?

Family Finding is more than the name suggests – we search on both sides of the child or young person's family as well as for friends and community (kith and kin). After we have located at least 40 people there are two meetings that keep people informed about the current situation, the things the child or young person needs and plans for the child or young person's long term future (not just until s/he is 18). There are then follow up meetings with the kith and kin to support the plan being enacted.

How is the Family Finding Model different to the Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making (AFLDM) process?

The AFLDM program is a specific decision making meeting that is usually focussed on immediate safety concerns and identifying where the child or young person might live. Depending on how quickly the meeting is held, there may not be sufficient time for people who are not currently known to the family or child protection to be found, contacted and engaged. The longer time frame and additional meetings that Family Finding holds allows family, close friends and community of the child or young person and family to come together to make an informed, self reflective decision about their capacity or ability to form a lifelong connection with the child or young person.

When does the child or young person become involved with Family Finding?

Usually the child or young person is not involved until after the first meeting of professionals. The purpose of that first meeting (Foundations meeting) is to ensure that the system is aligned and everyone is working to the same goals and is in agreement

with the process. Evaluations from hundreds of children and young people in the US have shown that involving a child or young person before the professionals have agreed to proceed can lead to a promise of finding and connecting, only to have that taken away if the system moves in another direction.

Immediately after the professionals agree that they want to follow the Family Finding process, the Family Finder and a support person for the child or young person, meet with the child or young person and discuss what Family Finding is and what the child wants.

How do you determine the goals for Family Finding?

When children and young people have a case plan, and/ or a cultural plan the goals are guided by these documents. The child's or young person's need for permanent, lifelong connection and support are always the primary goal; for many children or young people, the ability to live with their family, close friends or community may also be a hoped outcome. The family, friends and professionals all meet at the Blended Perspectives meeting to hear what the young person wants and to identify what needs to happen for the child or young person to feel permanent connection. The goals, therefore, are what it is that the child or young person needs most in order to gain lifelong connection and support. People are then given one to two weeks to think about what they can reasonably and sustainably offer, kith, kin and workers then meet again (the 3-plans meeting) to make plans that meet the needs of the child or young person and the requirements of child protection and the cultural plan (where there is one); the child's or young person's wishes are paramount in making these plans.

Do you work with siblings of the child referred?

Yes, this is essential. In the initial phase, the child's siblings are identified and if they are involved with child protection, their workers and carers would also be involved in the Foundations meeting and preplanning. When the information sharing and planning occur it is important that the family are supported to consider the needs of all of the children, as individuals and as siblings.

How are safety concerns addressed in this process?

During the time we are searching for people we are in contact with the Department of Health and Human Services to ensure we are aware of any known safety concerns. Also, people we contact are asked directly if they have concerns for themselves or others (family members often have information that the system doesn't know). If there is a plan for the child or young person to go to live with someone new, that household undergoes a standard kinship care assessment, which includes a safety check; and the ongoing meetings that are held with the family allow both family and workers to test out and discuss plans for safety and sustainability.

If children are in a safe placement why do we need Family Finding?

Family Finding supports any current family supports or stable placements however, the belief that underpins the Family Finding model is that every young person need a network of support for life, not just a placement for the time being (or until they are 18 – research shows that about half the young people who 'age out' of care become homeless within 6 months of leaving care). Where the child or young person has a permanent living arrangement but needs extra support, the family finding aim is to extend what is already happening to form a network of people who have agreed to make a lifetime commitment to that young person, and support their carer.

How will the case management work?

Case management remains with the allocated case manager, the family finding workers support the case manager's relationships with the child or young person, family and professionals. The family finding worker provides information about the process, manages the searching, and co-facilitates meetings.

What are the timeframe and tasks for workers?

The Family Finding team remains involved for about six months, as a rough guide:

FOUNDATIONS MEETING

Occurs as soon as possible after allocation to the Family Finding worker. The meeting takes about 90 minutes (depending on the number of children/ siblings referred) and involves case managers for child protection and the CSO.

SEARCH PHASE

30–60 days is allowed, the goal is to find at least 40 people.

BLENDED PERSPECTIVES MEETING

Is planned for as soon as possible after the searching is complete. Child protection and CSO professionals and the kith and kin attend the meeting, which takes no more than 90 minutes.

3-PLANS MEETING

Held about 7 - 14 days after the Blended Perspectives meeting. Professionals and kith and kin develop plans for the child. This meeting takes no more than 2 hours.

LIFETIME NETWORK MEETINGS

Predominantly, these are ongoing meetings for the kith and kin to enact the planning; they occur every week or fortnight. Involvement of professionals is for support, and decreases over time.

If you have further questions or would like more information, you can contact the Family Finding team on familyfinding@berrystreet.org.au or familyfinding@vacca.org