



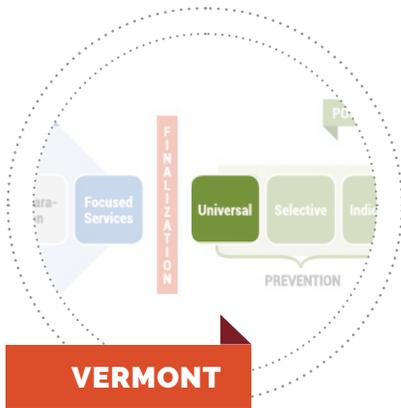
VERMONT

VERMONT PERMANENCY SURVEY

**INTERVENTION IMPLEMENTED IN VERMONT
FOR THE QIC-AG PROJECT**

OVERVIEW OF THE QIC-AG

The Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation (QIC-AG) is a 5-year federally funded project that promotes permanence (when reunification is no longer a goal) and improves supports for adoptive and guardianship families. Working in partnership with eight sites, the QIC-AG is identifying and testing promising practices and evidence-based models of support and services for children and families both pre and post permanence. Effective interventions are expected to achieve long-term stable permanence in adoptive and guardianship homes not only for waiting children but also for children and families after adoption or guardianship has been finalized. To learn more about the work of the QIC-AG, please go to www.qic-ag.org.



The QIC-AG created a Permanency Continuum Framework to help structure work with sites and families pre and post permanency. The Continuum Framework was developed on the premise that children in adoptive or guardianship families fare better when their families are fully prepared and supported to address issues before they arise, and if issues arise, before they escalate into a crisis. The Continuum Framework is comprised of eight intervals; three intervals start prior to finalization (*stage setting, preparation, and focused services*); three intervals continue after finalization and focus on prevention services (*universal, selective, and indicated services*); and the last two intervals focus on the provision of *intensive services* and *maintenance of permanency*.

Vermont has designed and is implementing an intervention that falls into the **universal interval** on the Permanency Continuum Framework. Post-permanency universal prevention includes the child welfare system's ongoing outreach efforts and engagement strategies that are designed to keep families connected with available supports, to improve the families awareness of the services and supports available for both current *and* future needs, and to educate families about issues before problems arise.

OVERVIEW OF INTERVENTION SELECTED BY VERMONT

The Vermont QIC-AG project developed the *Vermont Permanency Survey* to learn about the experiences of families both pre- and post-permanency. The project sought to identify strengths of families who report that they are doing well since their adoption or guardianship was finalized. Further, to inform both pre-permanency and post-permanency practice, the project also sought to proactively identify families who were struggling or who might be at risk of post-placement discontinuity (instability).¹ The survey included a mechanism that enabled families to self-refer to post-permanency services.

The project's target population includes all families with children residing in Vermont whose parents or guardians receive an adoption or guardianship assistance agreement subsidy (N = ~1,400) from the State. In addition, other families eligible to participate in the survey include families who have adopted through an intercountry or private domestic process and who have either self-identified or been identified by a local private adoption agency.

Short-term outcomes results include the following:

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

- » earlier identification of post-permanency service needs by region and system of care provider type
- » improved ability to share information on post-permanency needs, risks, and protective factors within the state system of care
- » improved capacity to deliver data-driven, relevant, and timely prevention and intervention services to families post-permanency

¹ Post-permanency discontinuity encompasses the following: displacement (child no longer in the physical custody but guardianship/parental rights remain intact); post-adoption placement; dissolution (guardianship or adoption legally terminated for reason other than parent death or incapacitation); and subsidy ended prematurely (subsidy payment ends prior to the child reaching age 18; may be related to child's absence from household or caregiver death).

The *Vermont Permanency Survey* consists of validated measures and questions identified by the Vermont site team that fall into several categories:



- » **Family well-being.** These items aim to better understand the factors that can impact the family's safety, permanency, and stability. Measures include the Family Protective Factors Survey, Family Functioning/ Resiliency, Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, Nurturing and Attachment, Belonging and Emotional Security Tool, and items selected from the National Survey of Adoptive Parents.
- » **Child well-being.** These items are intended to identify and understand the strengths and challenges of children and youth who were adopted or are being cared for through guardianship. Measures include educational items selected or adapted from the National Children's Health Survey, National Survey of Adoptive Parents, National Survey Children of Child and Adolescent Well-being, and the child strengths subscale-adapted and behavior problem index of the Child and Adolescents Needs and Strengths measure.
- » **Caregiver well-being.** These items are used to identify and understand the strengths and experiences of caregivers who have adopted or assumed guardianship of a child. Measures include the Brief Resilience Scale; Caregiver Strain Questionnaire, adapted for adoptive and guardianship families; the Caregiver Adverse Childhood Experiences survey; and Illinois caregiver commitment items.
- » **Community services.** These items are designed to identify and rate the level of helpfulness of the preparation services families used prior to adoption or guardianship. In addition, families were asked about family support services, school/ childcare services, medical services, mental health services, and post-permanency services available in their community. The questions were developed to identify strengths and areas for improvement across the Vermont system of care. These survey items were not based on validated measures.



Based on findings from the usability testing of the survey instrument, the following changes were made to survey items:

CHANGES TO THE SURVEY

- » questions were added about contact between the identified child and his or her birth parent; these questions were developed to elicit additional details regarding the frequency and parental acceptance of contact between the child and the birth parent.
- » questions were added related to developmental disabilities of the identified child.
- » questions were added specific to families who adopted via the intercountry (international) or private domestic process.
- » questions were added related to transracial and cross-cultural adoption and guardianship experiences.

The *Vermont Permanency Survey* can be viewed by going to <http://qic-ag.org/vt-site>.

WHY THE VERMONT PERMANENCY SURVEY WAS SELECTED BY VERMONT



Vermont wanted to obtain an in-depth understanding of the needs of adoptive and guardianship families in their state so that they could (1) identify and understand the strengths of families who are doing well; (2) develop a valid process to enable the early identification of families who are struggling or might be at increased risk of discontinuity; (3) develop a better understanding of the profile of adoptive and guardianship families who respond to varying degrees of assertive outreach; (4) determine, by district, the ongoing needs of families for post-permanency service, support, and training; (5) provide system of care feedback; and (6) determine methods to increase survey response rates.

Data from the survey will be analyzed by district and the project results will be distributed across the Vermont system of care through *district meetings*. The forum for these meetings is the Local Interagency Team (LIT). At a minimum, LIT includes district leadership from Children's Mental Health; Education; Department for Children and Families (DCF), Family Services; and parent representatives. As Vermont progresses through intervention cycles, the site team will compare district and state-level survey data as well as service needs, gaps, and barriers identified by parents and caretakers.

In addition to sharing project data with the wider system of care, the district meetings are a jumping-off point for a broader future discussion on sustainability. This broader discussion can impact sustainability by exploring options to improve collaboration, coordination, and service delivery among the various agencies serving the post-permanency population to more effectively and efficiently serve families formed by adoption or guardianship. When the final data report, including qualitative data is available, a statewide conference will be held to disseminate project findings.

RECRUITMENT: OUTREACH TO FAMILIES



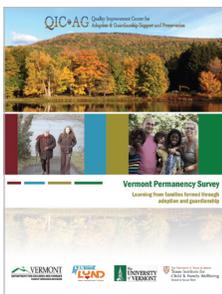
Vermont created a systematic process to encourage parents to participate in the survey. In the earliest stages of the project, Lund, a private agency in Vermont, was contracted to assist with this project. Lund took steps to obtain e-mail addresses of post-permanency families. In advance of the survey rollout, an introductory postcard was mailed to all subsidized adoptive and guardianship families. In addition, introductory phone calls were made to engage participants in the intervention and, if possible, to obtain their e-mail address. Two weeks after the survey was mailed, another call was made to participants who had not responded to the survey. One month after the initial survey packet was mailed, duplicate copies (electronic and paper) were mailed or e-mailed to all non-responders. Several reminders were sent to non-responders prior to survey close-out. Additionally, the following processes were put in place to implement the survey, identify and invite participants, and increase the response rate:

- » **Survey cycles.** Families in the target population were assigned to 1 of 5 survey cycles based on the district in which they lived. Districts, which are geographic coverage areas served by a specific human services agency, were grouped together to allow for relatively equal distributions of children while maintaining a regional structure. One cycle includes only those families who adopted via the intercountry or private process. These adoptive families do not traditionally receive adoption subsidy, and otherwise would be excluded from the survey. Unlike the other cycles, participants in the intercountry/private process adoption cycle participants are statewide.
- » **Engaging families.** DCF identified the eligible survey participants and provided contact information. Although mailing addresses were available for all participants allowing for postal delivery of a paper survey, obtaining e-mail addresses for electronic

survey delivery was challenging. Obtaining e-mail addresses was a high priority given the site team's concern about survey length juxtaposed with the relative ease of completing the survey electronically, and issues around tabulation of a large dataset. A number of emails were obtained using the Lexis-Nexus search engine.

- » **Assertive outreach.** A high response rate was needed to achieve the short-term outcomes of identifying the strengths of families doing well and the characteristics of families who are struggling. Vermont employed assertive outreach strategies to increase the response rate and modified their plan with each cycle.

RETENTION: KEEPING FAMILIES CONNECTED TO THE PROCESS



VERMONT
PERMANENCY SURVEY

Retention is not an issue in Vermont because the survey project is a universal outreach effort and does not involve ongoing participation after completion of the survey, however the site developed a support guidebook titled *After Adoption: The Continuing Journey for Children and An Informational Guide For Adoptive Parents and Guardians*. This resource provides an additional opportunity for Vermont to connect with and engage families. The guidebook was developed in response to feedback obtained from parents and caregivers through a previous survey that indicated a need for proactive guidance regarding what to expect at various points of the adoption or guardianship continuum. Content includes typical challenges and experiences of the child and the parent/guardian, guidance on when to seek assistance, and links to services and resources. Every family participating in the survey will receive the guidebook. The guidebook will also be distributed across the system of care to post-permanency staff, clinicians, educators, and physicians. All families will receive the guidebook at finalization. The guidebook can be viewed by going to <http://qic-ag.org/vt-site>.

LINKS

Vermont Permanency Survey and the Anticipatory Guidance: A Support Guidebook can be viewed by going to: <http://qic-ag.org/vt-site>

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MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the QIC-AG visit www.qic-ag.org