



## Fact Sheet N° 4

### A global policy for Children and the Family

## ELABORATING A PERMANENCY PLAN: GETTING TO KNOW THE CHILD AND HIS/HER FAMILY

Permanency planning must be based on an *exhaustive psychological, medical and social study of the child*.

### The objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are to provide the clearest possible picture of the child and his/her family of origin, with their strengths and weaknesses, their individual and group resources and their limitations; to assess the capacity of the family environment and to identify the child's needs. This should lead to the evaluation of the specific chances of retaining the child in his/her family or, if he/she is separated from it, of maintaining his/her ties with the family and the possibility of a future reintegration in the family.

### Method

The study should, if possible, be carried out by *professionals specialised in childhood and family matters* (in general, social workers, psychologists, social instructors, etc.) and decisions should be taken by a team, a *multidisciplinary one if possible*.

As soon as a professional makes contact with a child in need of protection (social services, the judiciary, the police, etc.) or a child is admitted to an institution (hospital, maternity, temporary or permanent custody) or to a foster family, all available information about the child, the mother, his/her family and environment must be gathered. Then, the personal and family situation must be analysed very rapidly. This will avoid the harm done by inconsiderate retention of the child in an institution or in other

provisional situations. *Time must not be wasted, because keeping the child in a transitional or dubious situation harms his/her development.*

### Content

The study, which is of a confidential nature, should, to the extent possible, describe:

- *The identity of the child, his/her parents and extended family:* if the child's parents are unknown, a search has to be carried out in order to try to identify them and consider with them the child's future.
- *The child's past and personality:* the stages of the child's personal history and that of the family, his/her physical, emotional, relational and intellectual development; his/her own successive living environments (family, institution, etc.); the life style that he/she has experienced, as well as the relationships that he/she has been able to build; his/her state of health; his/her medical history (including available information about the course of the mother's pregnancy, the delivery, the vaccinations, etc.) and that of the family of origin; his/her physical and general appearance, personality, behaviour; the child's present life, providing all possible information about his/her life style, habits, capacity to be independent, relations with other children and with adults around him/her, his/her bearing, etc.

- *The child's family*: the composition of the immediate family (mother, father, brothers and sisters) as well as the extended family (grandparents, aunts and uncles...); the parents' current whereabouts (current residence; when it applied if the social services and the police are searching for it) and of the main members of the family; their psycho-socio-economic situation, their family relationships, their relations with the social environment, their professional training and/or schooling and current employment; their ethnic grouping and religion; their state of health; etc.
- *The child's relations with his family*: the background to these relationships, with special emphasis on the periods of separation and upheaval; the nature of current relations; the reasons for the child's need of protection, of his/her abandonment or neglect, of possible fostering; the plans of the child's relatives. The study should allow to assess whether or not the basic needs of the child in his/her family environment are fully fulfilled and, when not, whether they can be improved and within which time frames.

However, one has to understand the quality of the bond between child and parents.

The study must be carried out with great rigour and thorough intellectual honesty and must be as exhaustive, *as deep and as descriptive as possible*. The people who prepare it must ensure they distinguish clearly between the actual facts they are reporting on and their own personal assessment of these facts. In any case, one must avoid making final judgments that obscure the child's chances of evolving.

### Results

As a result of the study a report must be prepared that extracts the most significant data. It is useful to accompany it with photographs whenever possible. It is put together at each stage or whenever required. And it is included in the child's file in order to enhance the various intervening social workers' knowledge of the situation without needing to repeat what has already been done. It will be an essential tool for decision making from this point onwards and for granting the child access to his/her life story.

### For more information:

ISS/IRC, *Focus on the Family of origin: Knowing it Better to Improve National and Inter-country Adoption Practice*, Documentation Review, Geneva, ISS/IRC, 2004, 10 pp.

HERST Beth (Ed.), *Permanency Planning in the Child Welfare System*, Canada, Sparrow Lake Alliance, 2002, 187 pp.

CHILD WELFARE LEAGUE OF CANADA, "From Permanency Planning to Family Preservation", *Canada's Children*, N° 1, Vol. 2, 1995, 32 pp.

**We are interested in your opinion!** To tell us your experiences, ask us your questions about the themes addressed in this file, or to send us your suggestions for changes, don't hesitate to write to us at [irc-cir@iss-ssi.org](mailto:irc-cir@iss-ssi.org). We also invite you to share this file with other interested persons in your country. Thanks in advance!

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