

SOUL FAMILY

Proposed Legal Permanency Option for Older Youth in Foster Care



The proposed SOUL Family permanency option would create a circle of caring adults who provide support, opportunity, unity and legal relationships for young people ages 16 and older as they move from foster care to adulthood. At this critical point of development, young people need the anchor of a nurturing, lifelong family.

For young people in foster care, the current legal options for permanence are reunification, guardianship and adoption. These options forge families that benefit many young people. However, young people have made clear that these do not meet the needs of many others. Each year, about 20,000 young people age out of foster care without a legal, permanent family, and they need support.

Young advocates with foster care experience proposed SOUL Family to expand the options, making it the fourth legally recognized permanency pathway. The innovators are Jim Casey Fellows supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

WHAT IS SOUL FAMILY FOR OLDER YOUTH IN CARE?

Like adoption and guardianship, SOUL Family would establish a legal connection between a young person and at least one caring adult, ensuring young people exit foster care with a support system as they transition into adulthood.

51.4%

of teens in foster care age out without a lasting, loving, lifelong and supportive family (AFCARS, FY 2021)

SOUL stands for Support, Opportunity, Unity and Legal Relationships — the values embraced by young innovators who created this proposed permanency option.

Unlike adoption or guardianship, SOUL Family would allow young people to make these new connections without severing their legal ties with birth parents and siblings.

When reunification with birth family isn't possible but maintaining bonds with loved ones and community is healthy and desirable, SOUL Family offers choices.

PROMOTING THE PROPOSED SOUL FAMILY PERMANENCY OPTION

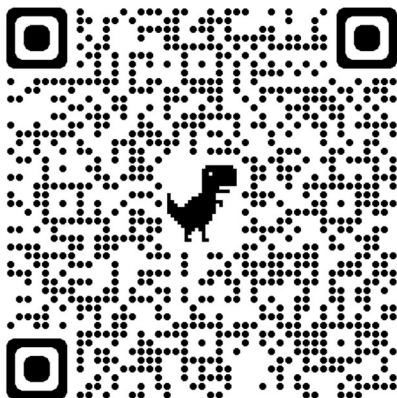
To help inform and educate state policymakers and legislators in adopting the SOUL Family permanency option, the Casey Foundation is investing in several strategies.

- **Supporting a network of young adults with foster care experience** who designed SOUL Family. These leaders are advocating with decision makers and child welfare systems to make it an available legal option.
- **Raising the need for an array of community-based services** that support young people's well-being and success beyond foster care. Young people who leave foster care continue to need help to heal from trauma, thrive in a new family and prepare for adulthood. Many need help securing jobs, completing college and finding safe housing. Public systems should continue to support them during this key developmental window.
- **Developing informational resources and sharing lessons** to create a youth-led movement to do better by young people and help states and jurisdictions offer the type of lifelong family connections that support their needs and well-being.



SOUL FAMILY RESOURCES

These SOUL Family resources and infographics are available at www.aecf.org/soulfamily.



SOUL Family Overview describes how this new model could support a young person — and how to support the adoption of this option in your state.

The SOUL Family Pathway infographic outlines what young people need to succeed and how SOUL Family helps connect youth with supportive relationships, tools and resources.

The SOUL Family Relationship Wheel infographic explains how a network of adults — including primary caregivers, birth parents and others — can help young people in foster care thrive.

Frequently Asked Questions answer common questions about SOUL Family, as well as about the importance of lifelong families for young people in foster care.

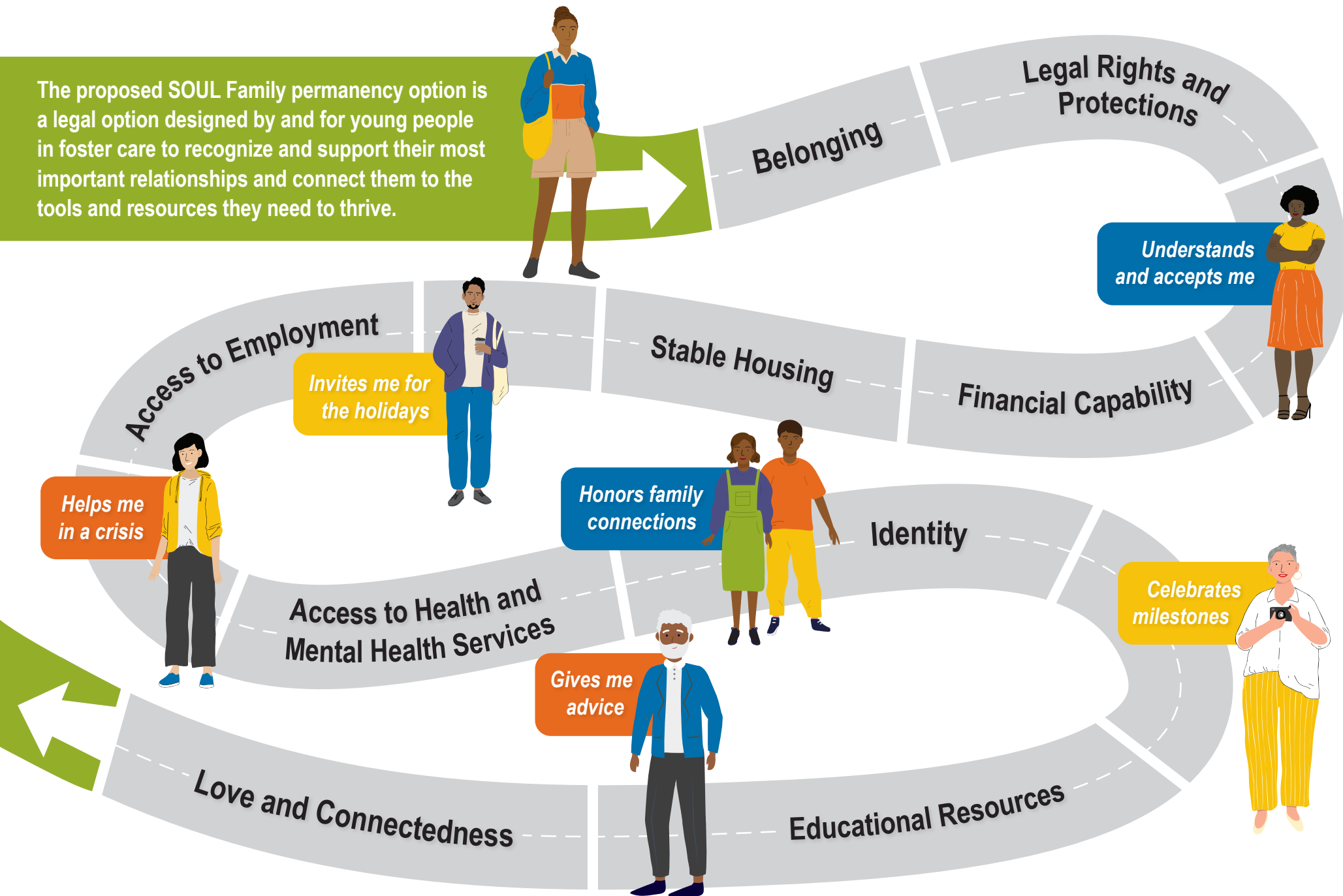
For additional details, please send an email to soulfamily@aecf.org.

Navigating the Pathway to Permanent, Supportive Relationships

SOUL Family Permanency Option

SUPPORT • OPPORTUNITY • UNITY • LEGAL RELATIONSHIPS

The proposed SOUL Family permanency option is a legal option designed by and for young people in foster care to recognize and support their most important relationships and connect them to the tools and resources they need to thrive.



SOUL Family Permanency Option

SUPPORT • OPPORTUNITY • UNITY • LEGAL RELATIONSHIPS

A proposed new youth-centered legal permanency option for young people ages 16 and older designed to support strong, lifelong relationships with a network of caring adults.

