

The implementation of Family Finding and Kin First systems in child welfare represents a strategic approach to prioritizing family connections and kinship placements, which can serve as a transitional mechanism toward phased abolition of the traditional child welfare system. Family Finding involves structured processes to identify, locate, and engage relatives or fictive kin for children entering care, while Kin First emphasizes placing children with kin as the default option over non-kin foster care. These systems, supported by policies like the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) of 2018, aim to reduce reliance on institutional or stranger foster care, thereby facilitating a gradual shift to community-based alternatives. Below, I outline how they function as a bridge, based on evidence from evaluations like Los Angeles County's Upfront Family Finding (UFF) program and broader child welfare research, structured by the phases of abolition.

Phase 1: Immediate Safety and System Reduction (0–5 Years)

In the initial phase of abolition, Family Finding and Kin First can immediately divert children from traditional foster care by expanding kinship options, reducing the system's footprint while maintaining safety. Evidence from the UFF evaluation (Child Trends, 2021) shows that upfront relative engagement increases kinship placements to 35% of foster cases, with stable outcomes (no significant disruption increase) and timely reunification comparable to non-kin placements. National data (AFCARS 2023) indicates kinship care achieves 3–6% lower disruption rates and better behavioral outcomes than non-kin care, addressing concerns about unknown fatalities (70–80% of 1,990 maltreatment deaths in 2022 occur outside CPS reach). This phase reallocates resources (e.g., \$5B from \$30B+ budget) to kinship subsidies, reducing separations (20–30% with family supports) and distress (82% child rate per RAPID), bridging to abolition by minimizing coercive interventions and empowering families, per Sanders' 2023 testimony on "Kin First" as a permanency strategy.

Phase 2: Community Building and Self-Determination (5–10 Years)

As the system phases out, Family Finding/Kin First evolves into a community-led model, piloting mutual aid and economic supports to foster self-sufficiency, reducing CPS involvement. UFF's Phase 2 findings (Child Trends, 2021) demonstrate office-wide impacts, with 70%+ relative placements in pilots, suggesting broader adoption can shift from state control to family networks. Evidence from Chapin Hall (2023) shows kinship with supports like TANF reduces neglect by 34.4%, cutting placements 8–29%, while mutual aid pilots (20–30% distress reduction) address hardship amid cuts (TANF 60%+ decline since 1996). This phase integrates lived expertise (e.g., parent/youth boards per UN/WHO 2025 blueprint), phasing DSM misuse (20–30% cases pathologize hardship) and coercive removals, bridging to abolition by empowering communities to handle risks (e.g., 50%+ Black investigations as racism, not "need"), preventing outcomes like 192% residential mortality (LACGro).

Phase 3: Full Transformation and Governance (10+ Years)

In the final phase, Family Finding/Kin First becomes the foundation for community governance, fully replacing CPS with voluntary, equity-focused systems. Sanders' testimony (2023) emphasizes "Family Finding" as a strategy to reunite families and achieve permanency, with evidence from UFF showing no reunification drop (stable at 44%) and reduced foster need. Longitudinal data (e.g., LACGro's better kinship outcomes: 23% poor health vs. 37% residential) supports this shift, reallocating \$20B+ to prevention (e.g., universal aids cutting 4.54x adversity mortality per Lancet). This completes the bridge: from reform's stalled EBP (10–15% scale) to abolition's equity, centering harmed voices to end pathologization and harm.

Overall Implications

Family Finding/Kin First bridges to abolition by progressively reducing system dependence: diverting to kin (Phase 1), building community capacity (Phase 2), and enabling self-governance (Phase 3). Evidence from UFF (70%+ relative placements) and Chapin Hall (economic supports reducing neglect 16%) shows feasibility, with kinship lowering disruptions (3–6%) and improving stability, addressing safety in transition while fostering family integrity and equity. This approach aligns with critiques of traditional foster care's harms (82% distress per RAPID) and supports phased reform without risking unknowns (70–80% fatalities outside CPS).