

Permanency Planning in Oklahoma

February 27, 2025



Overview

- What we did
- What we learned and could apply to other jurisdictions
- How to co-design and plan with your partners

Our Team



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Problem



To **avoid disruptions** or **unintended consequences** to permanency planning for kin, Oklahoma must know **what information** is required for legal guardianship or adoption and **when it needs to be collected**.

Goals



To understand permanency planning and decision-making with kin caregivers, including:

- Information needed by **judges and workers** to make permanency decisions
- Information needed from the **home study** for permanency decisions
- The experiences and needs of **kin caregivers**

We spoke with

44

People in 1-on-1
or small group sessions

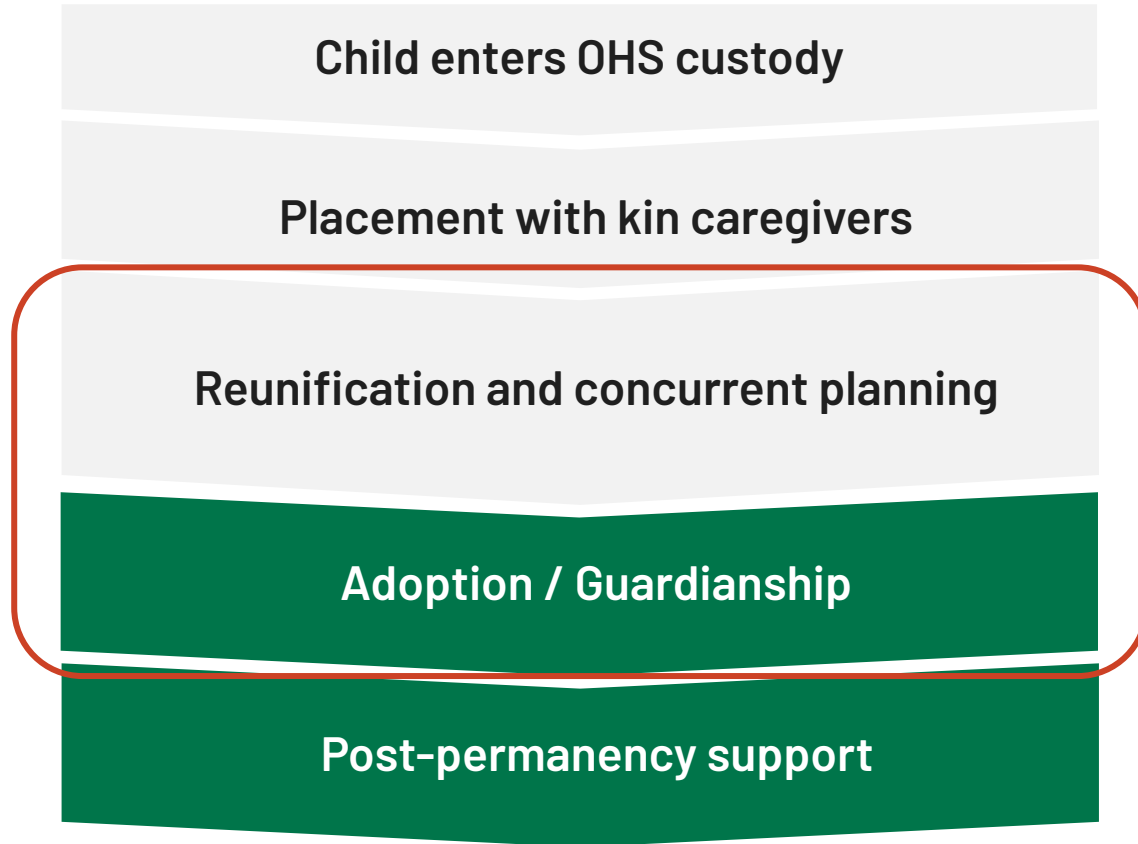
24 Child welfare staff

- 13** OHS staff
- 11** Tribal agency staff

12 Legal professionals

- 5** Judges
- 1** Court referee
- 2** Assistant District Attorneys
- 4** Child welfare attorneys

8 Kin caregivers



What we learned in Oklahoma

Home study changes

Oklahoma's amended home study is unlikely to impact judges' decision-making, but awareness, training, and planning is still needed.



I'm putting my reliance in OHS, they've assessed that home. I don't see them [home studies] because placement is a OHS issue. It's not a me issue."

- Judge describing their reliance on OHS for home studies and placement decisions

Takeaways

- Communicate the changes you are making with agency partners, and include court partners and Tribes.
- Train staff to advocate for these changes.
- Gather information for permanency when it is needed for guardianships or adoptions.

Guardianships

Guardianships are an important option for kin. Ensure they are funded and navigated equitably.

“ Guardianship is a great option because it keeps those parental rights intact and that child’s feeling of connection with them, and connection to their culture, community and identity, while maintaining their safety in that placement.

Giving them safety and stability, and exiting OHS custody, while that family still can get all the **support and benefits that you would through an adoption.”**

- OHS worker, program staff explaining the value of guardianships

Takeaways

- Kin-licensing enables maintaining FCMP levels for both guardians and adoptive parents.
- Provide state funding if non-relatives are not be eligible for TANF or Title IV-E guardianship funds.
- Create staff roles dedicated to navigating guardianship requirements and funding.
- Be transparent about funding decision processes.

Kin caregivers

**Kin caregivers need help to
navigate permanency.**



The hardest thing for me in this whole thing has been being a great-grandparent. But also being a parent because the two roles are very different.

And it's difficult. **You wanna spoil them to death and send them home, but this is home."**

- Relative kin caregiver on the challenges they faced

Takeaways

- Ensure equitable access to community and legal resources for relative caregivers that don't have the connections of traditional foster parents.
- Ensure caregivers understand how to participate in court and permanency planning, and have accessibility support.
- Explain early that case goals can change.
- Create transition plans and a point of contact for post-permanency.

Staff turnover

Staff burnout and retention are consistently cited as a barrier to permanency for kin.

Siloed teams can cause delays and sometimes loss of information.

Takeaways

- Continue to prioritize staff retention and reduce burn out.
- Explore other ways to mitigate staff turnover: hand-off practices to minimize information loss
- Break-down silos between teams to streamline case transfers

ICWA

Misunderstanding ICWA causes case delays, and adds a burden on Tribes and Native American children and families.



A good chunk of our job is **educating other professionals** on what we are, **what ICWA is**, what we do, and what our role is, and sometimes re-educating.”

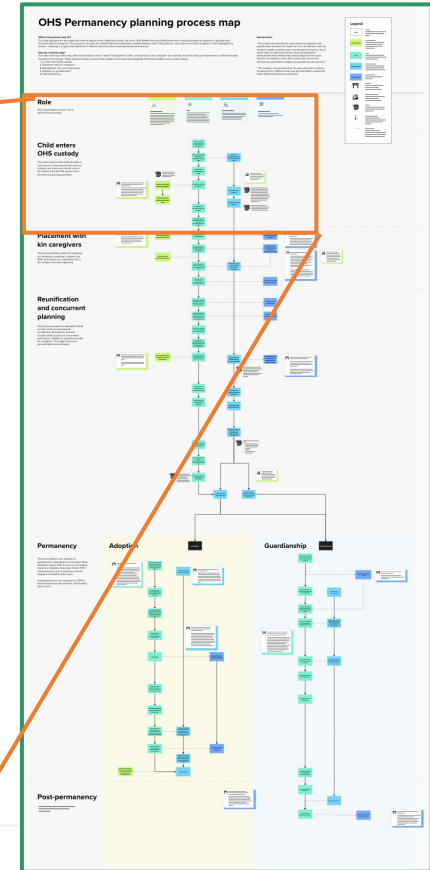
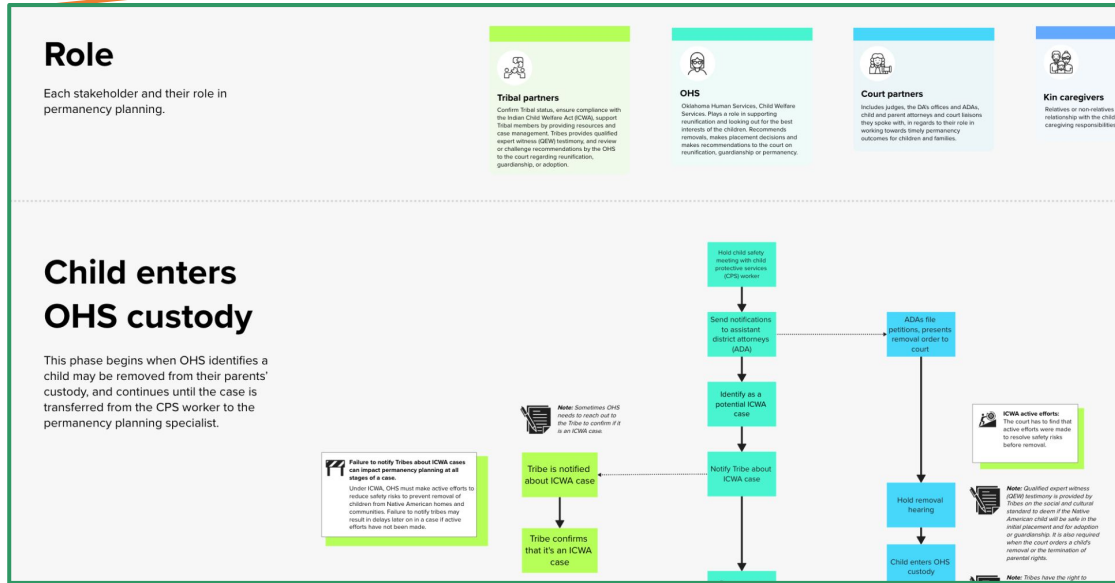
- Tribal child welfare agency worker describing the burden of educating agency staff and court partners on ICWA

Takeaways

- Prepare staff that state definitions of kin may not qualify as a kin in ICWA cases.
- Learn from court partners that collaborate well with Tribal partners and uphold ICWA.
- Employ Tribal child welfare experts to train on the history and purpose of ICWA.

Tips for exploring permanency planning

1. Map your process



2. Identify who is involved with permanency planning

3 Stakeholder mapping

🕒 30 minutes

Who has a stake in this project?
Who would be affected directly? Indirectly?
Within the agency? Outside?

Steps:

- 1 Who has a stake in this project? Think about departments, teams, organizations, roles, or individual people within those groups.
- 2 Let's verbally share (or write in chat) the key individuals/title that have a stake.
- 3 Let's figure out where they are positioned within the group's organizational structure.
- 4 Let's determine **relationships** between different roles, groups, regions, etc.

Example:

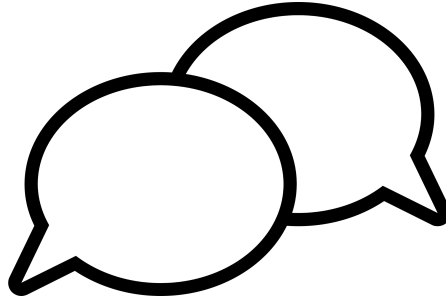
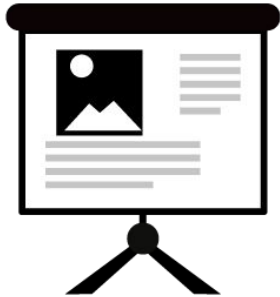


3. Understand and ask decision makers what information they need to make permanency decisions

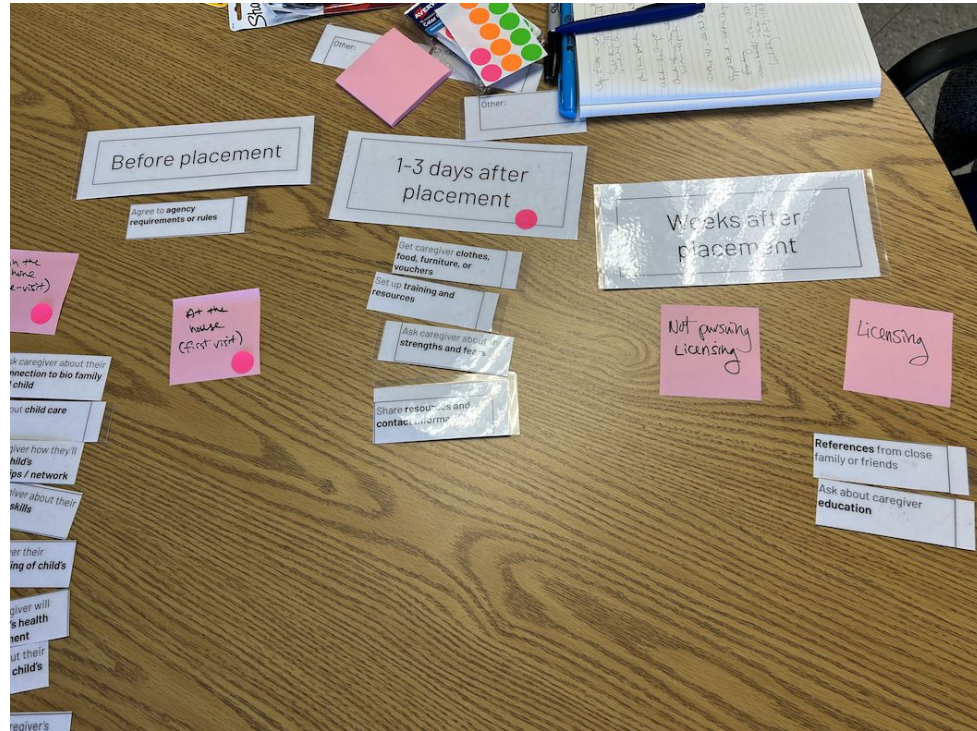
We'd like to start with questions around final permanency outcomes, such as adoption or guardianship, since the research project is primarily focused on planning and decision making when reunification is not possible.

1. When do you get involved in a case with a kin caregiver?
 - a. How long do you follow a case?

4. Plan and communicate changes to all stakeholders



5. Test, gather feedback, and iterate changes



Tips for exploring permanency planning

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2. Identify who is involved with permanency planning
3. Understand and ask decision makers what information they need to make permanency decisions
4. Plan and communicate changes to all stakeholders
5. Test, gather feedback, and iterate changes

Permanency Planning with Kin Caregivers in Oklahoma

Posted on 23 Jan 2025

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Overview

From August to December 2024, we partnered with Oklahoma Human Services (OHS) to research if Oklahoma's amended licensure requirements, based on updated kin-specific foster home approval model standards, would have unintended impacts on adoption or guardianship outcomes with kin caregivers. Research confirmed that the amended kin-specific home study would not negatively impact permanency planning in Oklahoma and the judges' decision-making on permanency outcomes.

For this study, we spoke with OHS child welfare staff, Tribal child welfare agency staff, judges, Assistant District Attorneys (ADAs), kin caregivers, and parent, child and adoption attorneys. In Oklahoma, court teams—which include judges, ADAs, and parent or child representation—are largely consistently assigned to one family throughout the life of their case unless the family moves to another county. As judges often follow cases from the start, they said they weren't looking for additional information about kin caregivers by the time they are finalizing an adoption or guardianship.

Thanks!

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