

**Institute for Family Development and the National Family Preservation Network
40th Anniversary Celebration**

**Submitted by Douglas W. Nelson
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It is an honor to join you in celebrating the Institute for Family Development's 40th Anniversary. For many years, I had the privilege of working with the leaders that developed, supported and conducted the valuable and important work of family preservation. Due to the dedication of so many committed child welfare experts, child welfare systems now go far beyond the provision of protective investigations, foster care placements and adoption services to provide a much wider array of programming that incorporates multiple supports to both ensure children's safety and strengthen families. This shift to better integrated service delivery – with the family at the heart of these services - would not be possible without the development of family preservation services.

As we come together to celebrate the successes of HOMEBUILDERS and many other family preservation program models, it is clear family preservation has fundamentally changed child welfare. The impact of family preservation programs is immeasurable. The countless number of children and their families that avoided the additional trauma associated with separation is not only felt in the present, but has had significant and positive impact on the life histories of thousands of our nation's most underserved and disadvantaged families.

Twenty-five years ago when I wrote the chapter "Recognizing and Realizing the Potential of 'Family Preservation'" in Reaching High Risk Families, family preservation was still a fledgling movement. Since then, the implementation of family preservation programs has been a transformative force, one that has affirmed the fundamental importance of family connections in the life of every child. Family preservation's influence and impact can be seen across many facets of our child welfare work, from the importance of family and child voice in team decision making, to the advancement of differential response, to a resurgence of the importance of kin in a child's life.

And now twenty-five years later, when child welfare has seen significant swings in practice models, when the volume of open cases has peaked and declined, when federal support has waned, family preservation's vision and mission have endured. It is no longer a trendy new practice idea – it is embedded in our social justice and in our everyday practice. An accomplishment few others can boast.

I am convinced that the lessons learned from the development and implementation of family preservation program models will continue to inform child welfare practice and system reform efforts in the next twenty five years. It is a timeless model that encourages and supports the fundamental belief that all children need and deserve a family.

Congratulations on a job well done. I am proud to have been a foot soldier in this historic movement.