



### *A Message for Families...*

Children and families go hand in hand. A nurturing family life offers a child a unique sense of security. All children need families who are consistently and actively engaged in their life, make sure they know they're loved, and make sure they're getting what they need to grow up to be the best they can be.

For a family raising a child with disabilities, however, it's not always easy. The ability to provide the daily care, love and sense of security the child needs requires energy and time, things that can be in short supply when struggling with life's day-to-day demands and caring for a child with special needs.

In an ideal world, the needed supports and services would be readily available. Unfortunately, there are often waiting lists for needed support services and families are not always able to get what they need, when they need it. In times like these, families may feel that placing their child in an institution is their best or only option. A decision like this is not made lightly.

While institutional care may be a temporary solution, it is felt that it can not meet the long-term needs of the child. Hence Texas has had permanency planning laws in place since 2001. The nature of residential care is that staff come and go in the child's life as they change shifts and change jobs. Many aspects of family life are not possible with shift staff, no matter how caring and competent. Recognizing that children are best supported and cared for in families, the State has taken steps to ensure that families are aware of all of the options available to support them in the care of their child. Additionally, Texas law requires that institutional placement

of a child be considered temporary and that families understand their ongoing responsibility when their child is placed in an institution.

The State's system of permanency planning for children in long-term care facilities addresses these issues. Ongoing permanency planning activities are required every six months for all children residing in institutions. The purpose of permanency planning is to find ways to help families to bring their child home or to have their child cared for in a support family. The objective is to keep families, facilities and other support agencies focused on the planning and preparation needed for a child to transition from the institution to a family.

A family's circumstances can change. The type and amount of services and support available can change, as well. Permanency planning is the State's commitment to children with disabilities, and their families, to continuously revisit and review the implications of changing circumstances and changing resource availability.

It is important that families know that there are people to talk to who can help. Local mental retardation authority staff have comprehensive information on services and supports that may be available. These staff are required to provide comprehensive information on all options to all families considering placement of their child in an institution. Another good source of information and support are other families of children with disabilities; people who have had similar experiences. These parents can be found through local support groups, local disability organizations, or through state-wide disability groups.

The State of Texas has recognized the important role that growing up in a family plays in the growth and development of a child. There is an ongoing effort to build a system of supports for children with disabilities, and the families that care for them, so that all children can have the opportunity to grow up in families and meet their potential.

