In April 2005, the organizers of the fourth National Convening on Youth Permanency facilitated a discussion among researchers concerning the state of research about permanency services to promote family relationships and connections and the needs of older youth served by the child welfare system. A general consensus emerged that there is a troubling lack of systematic empirical insight into the dynamics of the child welfare population, the needs of older youth, the impact of policy and the effectiveness of the services provided, and even the definition of “youth permanency.” It also became apparent that, while a variety of investigators might be working to address these shortcomings in the research base, their individual efforts were disparate, too insular, and often unknown to one another.

Planners of the fifth National Convening quickly recognized this need with a sense of urgency, initiating the development of a Research Roundtable to coincide with the meeting in September 2006. With input from Rosemary Avery and Ruth McRoy, Anthony Maluccio and Benjamin Kerman designed a format of presentation and discussion and assembled a diverse group of researchers well positioned to summarize the state of research on the needs and outcomes for older youth involved in child welfare, as well
as research on policy and practice initiatives to address these concerns. The invited panelists responded enthusiastically, eagerly engaging in their respective tasks as reviewers, presenters, respondents, and authors. We deeply appreciate the panelists’ commitment to the children and families served in child welfare, made abundantly manifest in their contributions to this volume.

We also greatly appreciate the generous support provided to the participants in the Research Roundtable by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and its direct services agency, Casey Family Services. At the same time, it should be noted that all opinions expressed in this volume are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions of the funders or our home institutions.

This volume would not have made it to paper without the essential and able logistical and clerical assistance of Sharon Pitman and Pamela Harrison. Ms. Pitman’s ever-present common sense often came in handy in the face of momentary shortages. Other Casey Family Services colleagues contributed in myriad ways to make the Roundtable and editing enterprise a success: Raymond Torres, Joy Duva, Sarah Greenblatt, Lee Mullane, and Lauren Frey, as well as Gretta Cushing, Ellen Ross, and Karen Jointer. Likewise, Columbia University Press’s Lauren Dockett has been steadfast and patient in her support, enabling this work to make it to the done section of our to-do list.

While the volume would be literally empty without the contributions of our professional colleagues, our understanding of the true meaning and impact of family connections would be hollow had we not benefited so deeply from two groups of families. We are humbled before the collective commitment, guidance, wisdom, perseverance, and example personified by the families with whom we have had the honor of working and learning over the years. Finally, we are each most permanently indebted to the abiding and sustaining connections with our own families—our parents, spouses, children, and grandchildren. Their day-to-day patience, and weekly willingness to share our burdens and joys, juxtaposed alongside our life-long connections, provides permanence’s greatest tribute and most compelling evidence.
ACHIEVING PERMANENCE
FOR OLDER CHILDREN
AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE