In Parts I and II of this volume, we described the problems related to achieving permanence and preparing youth for adulthood, and we examined some of the policy levers that have shaped and will continue to shape the practice landscape. In this section, we highlight some of the evolving practice responses to the permanency needs of youth in foster care, including their needs for family support into adulthood and beyond. Practitioners provide a critically needed understanding of the needs of the children and families they serve from an “on the ground” perspective. As they strive to meet the permanency needs of youth in foster care, practitioners often must flex and adjust as they work to respond to the immediate needs of youth while, simultaneously, creating new strategies that may more effectively meet the longer-term needs of youth in foster care.

In the first two chapters of this section, the authors consider the practice issues surrounding efforts to promote permanence through reunification and adoption. Taking practice as the starting point, they point to policy supports and additional research that are needed to ensure that youth in foster care have enduring family connections that support them into adulthood and beyond.
In chapter 13, Barbara A. Pine and Robin Spath describe and build on the results of an evaluation of an intensive family reunification program. They identify the features of the program that research has suggested are associated with effective family reunification efforts, and they describe the promising results related to achieving permanence for children, shortening children’s foster care stays, and increasing children’s chances of remaining at home after reunification. Applying the learning from this evaluation, they suggest a number of ways that family reunification services can be adapted to meet the permanency needs of adolescents, given their unique development needs.

In chapter 14, Ruth G. McRoy and Elissa Madden examine agency practices, programs, and federal policies that affect the likelihood of adoption for youth who are in foster care. They identify a range of continuing practice challenges to adoption for youth despite the many legislative initiatives designed to promote adoption. In addition to providing suggestions regarding future research and policy development to promote adoption for youth in foster care, they discuss a variety of ways to address practice issues, including the recruitment of nonrelated adoptive families for youth in foster care, the provision of adequate postadoption services, and challenging the beliefs of some caseworkers that older youth are “unadoptable.”

Practitioners also have sought to expand the effect of their programming through specific strategies that have the potential to improve permanency outcomes for youth in foster care. In the next two chapters of this section, the authors describe two promising strategies. First, they describe family involvement meetings that bring together youth, their birth families, and other important individuals in the youth’s life to jointly plan for and with the youth. Second, they describe community involvement strategies that mobilize local resources to prevent the need for youth to enter foster care, support youth and families as they plan for the youth’s return to family, and support the youth and family after the youth exits foster care.

In chapter 15, David Crampton and Joan Pennell describe strategies for involving families that embody a number of intuitively and empirically promising practices. They review the common elements of different family involvement practice models and describe research that is beginning to shed light on the effect of family involvement meetings on outcomes for youth and families, family satisfaction, and emotional healing. The authors apply what has been learned about family involvement meetings to work with older youth in foster care, and they make the case for the vital importance of actively engaging youth in family involvement meetings.
In chapter 16, Sandra Stukes Chipungu, Laura G. Daughtery, and Benjamin Kerman discuss community involvement within the context of the need for multilevel solutions for the multilevel problems that youth in foster care and their families face. Considering youth as both vulnerable members of a community, as well as potential resources to the community, they note a variety of opportunities for expanding the ways communities prevent the weakening of family bonds to avert formal involvement with the child welfare system.

In chapter 17, Hewitt B. Clark and Kimberly A. Crosland review the literature on the effectiveness of independent living programs with an eye toward understanding the effect of life skills services and experiences and their relationships to outcomes. They describe innovative strategies at the community and state levels to prepare youth to transition to adulthood, and they present evolving evidence-informed practices and assessment tools that can assist in developing youth’s social capital through a network of informal key players who provide supports for youth as they transition to adulthood. Their chapter suggests that youth benefit from extended stays in foster care with continuing services and ongoing efforts to ensure that youth leave care with lifelong family connections.

In chapter 18, the authors present case vignettes illustrating how practice staff in one agency integrate a variety of the practices discussed in the preceding chapters. To help bridge the research-to-practice gap, Madelyn Freundlich, Lauren Frey, Benjamin Kerman, and Sarah B. Greenblatt describe examples from the field at Casey Family Services. Work with the evidence-informed Casey teaming model and community-based family resource centers highlights opportunities for addressing the needs of youth in placement, as well as for supporting fragile families and averting more-intensive, intrusive services.