California Connected by 25

EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THE PERMANENCY NEEDS OF TRANSITIONING FOSTER YOUTH

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Prepared for:

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The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation
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CONNECTED BY 25

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The California Connected by 25 Initiative is a collaborative effort of five foundations to improve the life prospects of youth transitioning out of foster care in California. Counties participating in CC25I aim to improve policies, programs and outcomes for transition-age foster youth in seven focus areas: K-12 Education; Employment/Job Training/Post-Secondary Education; Financial Competency and Asset Development; Housing; Independent Living Skills Programs; Personal/Social Asset Development; and Permanency. Four counties – Fresno, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus Counties – are early implementers of the Initiative.

This report documents the Initiative's progress made by each of the early implementing counties in the area of Permanency. The philosophy of permanency puts high priority on finding legal permanency through reunification, adoption and guardianships for youth, but encompasses much more than that. The need for this shift is great as legal permanency is not actively pursued for many older youth in the foster care system. In 2005, nearly 70,000 foster youth (13 percent of all youth in care in the country) had a case goal of "long-term foster care" or "emancipation"[1] and in California in 2004, 4,500 youth were still in a foster or group home placement when they emancipated or aged out of the system. Recent changes in federal and California law have prioritized older youths' needs for permanency by increasing subsidies and adding new requirements for county agencies to find permanent placements for older youth. Many of these efforts, such as the KinGAP and Kinship Support Services programs, have sought to remove barriers and increase incentives for family members to adopt or become guardians to older foster youth. The Older Foster Youth Adoption Initiative of 2006 provides funds to four California counties to develop successful strategies for increasing adoptions among older youth (age nine and up) who have been in nonrelative foster homes or group homes for 18 months or longer. Finally, a number of bills have strengthened siblings' rights to be placed together (where possible), and to be informed of their siblings' placements so they can remain in contact.

Even so, these efforts to create legal permanency for older or emancipating foster youth confront a number of ongoing challenges. Despite legislation that encourages or mandates concurrent planning – the policy of identifying possible permanent arrangements for foster youth while simultaneously pursuing family reunification – many agencies do not actively practice it, particularly for older youth. Indeed, welfare workers may consider working towards adoption or guardianship for older youth to be a pointless, or even counterproductive, undertaking. They may fear that if a permanent placement fails, the youth will experience further trauma. They may recognize that transition-age youth can lose eligibility for important resources, such as access to the Independent Living Skills Program and aftercare programs, if they are adopted or placed in legal guardianship.[2] The historical funding policies for federal foster care have also created incentives for states to rely on foster care placements rather than adoption and guardianship.[2]

Recognizing these difficulties, foster care agencies across the country have experimented with alternative models of permanency that do not involve adoption or guardianship. Studies have shown that former foster youth who can rely on an ongoing, committed relationship with a caring, supportive adult are more likely to successfully navigate the challenges of early adulthood, including persisting in education, remaining employed, and participating more fully in their communities as adults. In particular, even if it does not guarantee a place to live or financial support in difficult times, having a connection to *family* is important to youth. The Midwest Study found that former foster youth reported a strong connection to family members; 94 percent of all former foster youth felt somewhat or very close to at least one biological family member, with 77 percent reporting feeling very close to a biological family member. By far, the strongest connection for youth was with their biological siblings to whom 57 percent felt very close. This is important to note because 70 percent of youth in foster care have siblings also in care and as many as 75 percent of foster youth are separated from at least one sibling while in care.[3]

CC25I counties have received technical assistance from the California Permanency for Youth Project and other experts, and are implementing a broad array of permanency best practices that encompass more than adoption or guardianship. These efforts within the child welfare agencies, and together with community partners, are working to ensure that all youth leave the foster care system with at least one lifelong connection to a caring, committed, loving adult, feeling both resilient and empowered to reach their full potential. Key permanency strategies being utilized by CC25I counties include family finding techniques such as Internet search as well as youth, caregiver and cross agency collaborations that identify, develop and support significant relationships. Because permanency work must often address issues of grief and loss common among foster youth, child welfare

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[1] *The AFCARS Report: Preliminary FY 2005 Estimates as of September 2006*. Available at: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cwo05/appendix/appendixe.htm

[2] National Foster Care Awareness Project. (2000). Frequently Asked Questions about the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 and the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program.

[3] The Pew Charitable Trust. (2007). *Time for Reform: Aging Out and On Their Own. More Teens Leaving Foster Care without a Permanency Family*. Available at: http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Foster_care_reform/Kids_are_Waiting_TimeforReform0307.pdf.

agencies are increasingly turning to mental health clinicians, grief and loss experts, and youth advocates to support youth, case workers and permanent connections in sustaining permanency outcomes over time.

County Progress in Reaching CC25I Permanency Objectives

The Permanency outcome for the CC25I initiative is based on the recognition that for transition-age foster youth, relationship permanence can be as important as physical or legal permanence. The priority outcome measure is: the percentage of foster youth whom the child welfare agency assesses as having a "permanent connection," defined as a "stable relationship with a safe adult who has made a commitment to provide lifelong support." Counties are still implementing new data tracking strategies that will allow ongoing assessment of CC25I's permanency outcome. However, the progress made towards the goals of the CC25I Permanency Logic Model provides an early indicator of whether counties are on track to achieve the anticipated outcomes.

All CC25I early implementing counties received a variety of assessment, training and technical assistance from the California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) or other permanency experts. Counties established workgroups to oversee permanency efforts, while also creating new trainings around permanency that were offered to social workers, caregivers, youth, other public agencies and community partners. In addition, the counties undertook new initiatives to expand family finding, recruit adoptive families specifically for older youth, engage in team decision making to support permanency and transition planning, and support sibling relationships and lifelong connections. Much of the counties' initial permanency work focused on small-scale efforts within a limited number of agency units or on specific subpopulations of foster youth, but over time these efforts have expanded to additional units and youth populations.

Examples of counties' innovative strategies to support permanency efforts include:

Fresno County

- The County launched a highly visible recruitment program, "Wednesday's Child" to find adoptive families for teen foster youth showcased on television broadcasts. In addition, the "Heart Gallery," utilizes highly visible public venues (such as malls and libraries) to display photos and narratives of teens and sibling groups in need of permanency. These efforts have resulted in at least four adoptions and nine other permanent placements for featured youth.

San Francisco County

- Supported by Older Youth Adoption funding, the County and Family Builders are engaging in a case review and training project that uses a standardized tool to review the placement history, family connections and other characteristics of 150 individual foster youth, and develops an action plan to advance permanency objectives for each case.
- The County is partnering with the Seneca Center, in a national study conducted by Child Trends, to engage in front-end family finding services for up to 100 children who are new to the child welfare system.

Santa Clara County

- The County developed a new model to advance permanency outcomes among transitional age youth based on several best practices in the field. This model was piloted among 40 foster youth (ages 13 to 18) in need of permanent connections. Among this group, 34 youth were successfully connected with family members on a variety of levels, and all youth who have since aged out of the system did so with at least one permanent connection in place.

Stanislaus County

- CSA placed early emphasis on involving youth in their own permanency planning and their Youth Advisory Council led the way by developing the Connected for Life Meeting concept. Connected for Life Meetings, which identify individuals who are important to the youth and formalize lifelong connections through the creation of "Agreements to Maintain Contact," are as youth-driven as possible.
- The County has implemented front-end family finding for **all** children and youth in foster care, starting with their first entry into care, and its Lifelong Connections database makes accessible to all social workers the results of these searches. Youth can request a list of names contained in their database file and work with their social worker to establish connection with any relative listed. A review of 94 foster youth (age 14 or older, with a case goal of long-term care, and not in guardianship settings) found that 100 percent had a completed family-finding search, with an average of 24 connections identified per youth. Three-fourths (73 percent) of the youth had a formal Connected for Life relationship.

Key Lessons Learned

Stakeholders in a Youth's Case Often Disagree on Permanency Options. CC25I counties report that court representatives sometimes lack a clear understanding of permanency philosophy, that mental health providers may feel a youth is too unstable to pursue permanency and that caseworkers themselves often struggle to make choices in light of the tradeoffs involved in different placement options. One strategy to prevent these challenges from impeding permanency efforts is to engage in regular cross-trainings and inter-agency staff meetings that routinely emphasize the importance of permanency, familiarize all present with its objectives, and jointly discuss the pros and cons of various permanency options. Counties are also documenting permanency activity in court records and case files so this information is available to all stakeholders.

Youth Need Mental Health and Other Support to Facilitate Permanency Efforts. Agency staff, as well as other stakeholders such as foster family agencies, probation departments and mental health agencies, have greatly benefited from professional guidance on how to help youth and families deal with grief and loss and prepare for family finding and other permanency efforts. Child welfare staff in CC25I counties are also working with youth, caregivers and placement agencies to provide mental health and other services to resolve the issues that impede efforts to move them from therapeutic group homes to permanent, lower level of care placements in family settings.

Child Welfare Staff Need Continued Training and Support Resources. Child welfare staff can benefit from ongoing training opportunities and other support in their efforts to implement permanency philosophy and practice. Some social workers would like support on subtle issues such as how best to discuss permanency with youth, how to actively engage youth and other key participants in permanency team meetings, and how to keep permanency goals in sight when facing heavy caseloads or a crisis mentality. Counties are creating specialized trainings for caseworkers and supervisors are working more closely with workers to review cases, discuss case planning and establish clear steps to achieve permanency for each youth.

Sustainability of Permanency Efforts is Impacted by Agency Funding and Staffing Dynamics. Most CC25I counties have already experienced or anticipate experiencing challenges in sustaining their permanency efforts in the future due to staff turnover or reductions in funding and staff levels. In response, some counties are trying to balance the permanency and family-finding needs of youth close to emancipating from foster care against efforts to identify permanent placement options for newly-placed foster youth. Creating a number of "permanency champions" throughout the agency is one strategy to prevent over reliance on a single permanency specialist position or contracted service providers, as well as to keep permanency efforts on track in times of high staff turnover.

Need for Ongoing Support for Youth and Adult Lifelong Connections, and for Emancipated Youth with no Lifelong Connection. CC25I counties have commented that in addition to locating family members, child welfare agencies must do more to facilitate the actual development and maintenance of lifelong connections. Counties are now providing services and social events to support sibling visitation, relationship development between youth and lifelong connections, and creation of a social network for emancipated youth who left care without a lifelong connection.

II. INTRODUCTION

Today, even after decades of emphasizing the need to pursue permanent placements for foster youth, large numbers of youth in care are assigned a case goal of "long-term foster care" or "emancipation"; their likelihood of moving to permanency through reunification, guardianship or adoption is very small. Lacking legal permanency, or even long-term supportive relationships with committed adults, these foster youth find the transition to independent living exceptionally difficult. In contrast, youth who have one or more reliable and caring adults in their life are more likely to make it through challenging times, connect to needed resources, and develop additional healthy relationships.

Counties participating in the California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I) are working to ensure that every foster youth who emancipates from the child welfare system has established a lifelong connection with at least one committed adult. Through partnership with foster youth, caregivers, family members, public agencies (particularly the courts and mental health departments), and community service programs, county child welfare agencies are engaging in family finding strategies and other efforts to establish relationships between youth and significant adults who can provide lifelong connections and support.

2a. Permanency Outcomes among Former Foster Youth

When discussion about "permanency" first gained momentum on the national and local scenes, policy and program reforms focused on moving youth more rapidly out of the foster care system and into appropriate permanent or quasi-permanent placements – reunification, adoption, guardianship or foster care with relatives. While these efforts did contribute to higher rates of permanency for foster youth, a large number, particularly those who entered care while in middle school or as teenagers, still endure lengthy stays in care only to age out of the system with little support from others. To better meet the needs of these youth, advocates have begun to emphasize (in addition to renewed placement efforts) family finding and other strategies to establish relationships for youth with caring adults. These adults, it is hoped, will provide guidance and support to youth while they are still in care, during the period immediately after they age out, and thereafter.

Evidence from the Multistate Foster Care Data Archive indicates that some permanency outcomes increased in the 1990s. In particular, the probability of adoption increased significantly, even for older youth, among cohorts entering care between 1991 and 1997 compared with those who entered in 1990.[4] Even so, adoption remains an elusive goal for many children. According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data, 25 percent of the 510,000 children in foster care in September 2006 were waiting to be adopted.[5] For many more, permanency is not even in the cards; in 2005, nearly 70,000 foster youth (13 percent of all youth in care) had a case goal of "long-term foster care" or "emancipation."[6] These youth are very likely to age out without permanent connections to a caring adult.

In California in 2004, 4,500 youth emancipated or aged out of the system, comprising nearly 11 percent of all youth who exited foster care. (The national fraction is slightly lower, at 8 percent.) Youth who end up emancipating tend to have entered care in middle childhood or adolescence; 80 percent were age 10 or older, and 50 percent over age 14, when they entered foster care.[7] According to a review of available literature, older foster youth are more likely to be youth of color, have impermanent case goal plans (long-term foster care or emancipation), and have special needs.[8] Older foster youth and youth of color are also more likely to reside in group homes[9] (rather than with foster families or

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[4] Wulczyn, F., Hislop, K., & Goerge, R. (2000). *Foster Care Dynamics 1983-1998: A Report from the Multistate Foster Care Data Archive*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, Chapin Hall Center for Children. Available at:http://www.chapinhall.org/sites/default/files/old_reports/75.pdf.
[5] Source: www.hunter/cuny.edu/sociwork/nrcfcpp.
[6] *The AFCARS Report: Preliminary FY 2005 Estimates as of September 2006*. Available at: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/cwo05/appendix/appendixe.htm
[7] *Summary of the 2008 National Convening On Youth Permanence*. Available at: http://www.youthpermanence.org/_pdf/materials/mat_2008/summary_2008.pdf.
[8] The North American Council on Adoptable Children. (2005). *A Family for Every Child: Strategies to Achieve Permanence for Older Foster Children and Youth*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. Available at: http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/ff3622h1188.pdf.
[9] Child Welfare League of America. (2007). *The Nation's Children, 2007: National Factsheet.*

kin) which is associated with increased risks of longer stays in care, running away, being unsafe, and poor permanency outcomes.[10],[11] Additionally, youth who age out have been in care much longer than foster children who exit to permanent placements.[12,13] In California, for example, those who emancipated had been in foster care for an average of six years compared to two years in care for those who exited the system in other ways. Not only are youth who remain in care longer less likely to achieve permanent placements, but they are substantially more likely than other youth to face emotional, behavioral and learning issues,[14] and in adulthood are more likely to encounter homelessness, unemployment and other challenges in transitioning to independent living.[15]

Research shows that the transition to adulthood for any teenager is a gradual process and that many young adults continue to receive financial and emotional support from their parents well past the age of 18.[16] Fifty-five percent of men and 46 percent of women in the general population between age 18 and 24 were living with their parent(s) in 2003.[17] According to the Midwest Study of current and former foster youth, at age 21, former foster youth were much less likely to live with biological or foster parents (13 percent versus 41 percent for general population), but much more likely to be living with other relatives (17 percent versus 3 percent) than young adults in the general population.[18] Nearly two-fifths (37 percent) of former foster youth reported at age 21 that they had received some financial assistance from a family member in the past year.

Even if it does not guarantee a place to live or financial support in difficult times, having a connection to family is important to youth. The Midwest Study found that former foster youth reported a strong connection to family members; 94 percent of all former foster youth felt somewhat or very close to at least one biological family member, with 77 percent reporting feeling very close to a biological family member. Over a third (36 percent) of former foster youth felt very close to their grandparents and 29 percent felt very close to their biological mother. Only 13 percent reporting that they felt very close to their biological father.[19] By far, the strongest connection for youth was with their biological siblings to whom 57 percent felt very close. This is important to note because 70 percent of youth in foster care have siblings also in care and as many as 75 percent of foster youth are separated from at least one of their siblings while in care.[20] The Midwest Study also found that while 60 percent of former foster youth reported that they had maintained a positive relationship with a caring adult since age 14, this was somewhat lower than the rate (77 percent) reported by the general population of young adults.

Thus, even when arranging a permanent placement is not possible, foster youth can still benefit from efforts to find family members and establish permanent connections with caring adults who are willing to provide ongoing support and help with the transition to adulthood. Many foster youth, in fact, feel that relationship permanence is more

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[10] The North American Council on Adoptable Children. (2005). *A Family for Every Child: Strategies to Achieve Permanence for Older Foster Children and Youth*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. Available at: http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/ff3622h1188.pdf.

[11] Freundlich, M. (2003). *Time Running Out: Teens in Foster Care*. New York City: Children's Rights.

[12] Courtney, M,, Dworsky, A., Cusick, G.R., Havlicek, J., Perez, A. & Keller, T. (2007). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 21*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago.

[13] Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2006). *Enhancing Permanency for Older Youth in Out-of-Home Care. Children's Bureau/Administration on Children, Youth and Families*. Available at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/focus/enhancing/index.cfm.

[14] The Pew Charitable Trust. (2007). *Time for Reform: Aging Out and On Their Own. More Teens Leaving Foster Care without a Permanency Family*. Available at: http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Foster_care_reform/Kids_are_Waiting_TimeforReform0307.pdf.

[15] Courtney, M. & Piliavin, I. (1998). *Foster Youth Transitions to Adulthood: Outcomes 12 to 18 Months After Leaving Out-of-Home Care*. Madison, WI: School of Social Work, University of Wisconsin-Madison.

[16] Goldscheider, F. & Goldscheider, C. (1999*). The Changing Transition to Adulthood: Leaving and Returning Home*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications; Settersten, R., Furstenberg, F.F., & Rumbaut, R.G. (2005). *On the Frontier of Adulthood: Theory, Research, and Public Policy*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

[17] Fields, J. (2003). *America's Families and Living Arrangements: 2003*. Current Population Reports, P20-553. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau.

[18] Courtney, M,, Dworsky, A., Cusick, G.R., Havlicek, J., Perez, A. & Keller, T. (2007). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 21*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago.

[19] Courtney, M,, Terao, S. & Bost, N. *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Foster Youth: Conditions of Youth Preparing to Leave State Care*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children, University of Chicago. P24. February 24, 2004.

[20] The Pew Charitable Trust. (2007). *Time for Reform: Aging Out and On Their Own. More Teens Leaving Foster Care without a Permanent Family*. Available at: http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Foster_care_reform/Kids_are_Waiting_TimeforReform0307.pdf.

important than physical or legal permanence.[21] Along with ensuring adequate housing, education, employment and vital resources, permanent connections can contribute to efforts that provide former foster youth with the links to community and support that ensure their overall well-being and economic success.

2b. Challenges to Achieving Permanence for Transitioning Foster Youth

There are a number of challenges facing efforts to establish permanency for older foster youth. Some have to do with attitudes and beliefs among child welfare and probation agency staff, or with agency policy, or with federal funding policy:[22]

- Child welfare workers and probation officers often believe that older youth are not adoptable because they have too many special needs that will cause permanent placements to fail. Workers may believe that few families are interested in adopting older youth.
- Child welfare workers and probation officers, as well as current foster parents and caregivers, often worry that pursuing permanent placements or connections will create new problems for foster youth. In some cases, youth are in an impermanent but fairly stable placement and workers fear a potential permanent placement may fail, or that permanency efforts will revive past trauma and exposure to unhealthy relationships.
- Despite legislation (such as AB 1544 in California and the federal Foster Care Independence Act of 1999) that encourages or mandates concurrent planning – working on an alternative permanent plan such as adoption or guardianship for foster youth while simultaneously pursuing family reunification – many agencies do not actively practice it, particularly among older youth.[23] Quite often, case workers pursue alternative permanency plans for youth only after reunification with biological family has proven unsuccessful, which can take years. Additionally, many agencies lack policies and guidelines that direct case workers on when long-term foster care and emancipation are appropriate, and even when such guidelines exist, workers do not always follow them.
- Agency workers may believe it is contradictory to prepare older foster youth for self-reliance and independent living while at the same time trying to connect or reconnect them to biological family. Often Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP) services are offered as a substitute for permanence planning for older adolescents. Indeed, older foster youth might even be discouraged from adoption and other permanency options in order to qualify for important resources through ILSP and aftercare programs; eligibility for these services and funding is often reserved for youth likely to remain in foster care until age.[24] These financial disincentives sometimes force youth to choose between guardianship or adoption and valuable emancipation resources.
- The historical funding rates for federal foster care have also resulted in states' overreliance on placing or keeping youth in impermanent foster care placements, rather than pushing for adoption and guardianship.[25]
- The courts play a critical role in permanency efforts because they are responsible for terminating parental rights as well as for approving permanency plans and permanent placements. Due to limited resources, information, and effective communication, as well as an absence of shared accountability standards, courts often fail to jointly achieve with child welfare agencies timely permanency outcomes for all youth.[26]

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[21] Sanchez, R. (2004). *Youth Perspectives on Permanency*. Available at: http://www.cpyp.org/Files/YouthPerspectives.pdf.

[22] Barriers to permanency efforts have been summarized in a number of publications. The two primary sources utilized here are The North American Council on Adoptable Children. (2005). *A Family for Every Child: Strategies to Achieve Permanence for Older Foster Children and Youth.* Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation and Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2006). Enhancing Permanency for Older Youth in Out-of-Home Care. Children's Bureau/Administration on Children, Youth and Families. Available online at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/focus/enhancing/index.cfm.

[23] Neuman, C. *Concurrent Permanency Planning, Ohio Casework Guide.* Concurrent Planning Conference, Seattle, WA.

[24] National Foster Care Awareness Project. (2000). *Frequently Asked Questions about the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 and the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program.*

[25] Ibid.

[26] Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. (2004). *Fostering the Future: Safety, Permanency and Well-being for Children*. Available at: http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Foster_care_reform/foster_care_final_051804.pdf.

Foster youth themselves, and their caregivers, may also resist steps toward permanency:

- A youth may be hesitant to pursue a permanency because they fear losing connection to their biological parents or siblings if parental rights are terminated. They might worry that a new placement will also fail and disappoint them. A caregiver, if related to the youth, may want to avoid any conflict that could result from termination of parental rights as well as confusion due to changing familial roles (for example when a grandparent becomes more of a "parent").
- Foster youth are not always asked to be an active partner in permanency planning and this can limit the success of efforts to establish relationships with family members and other caring adults. Youth may seem uninterested in finding a permanent connection, even when privately they yearn for connections to family and other caring adults. When they are not an active part of the process, or do not fully understand the advantages of achieving permanency, they are less likely to support these efforts.

III. STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE PERMANENCY OUTCOMES OF TRANSITIONING FOSTER YOUTH

In the past decades a great deal of effort has been directed at improving permanency outcomes for foster youth, ranging from legislative action to innovative program initiatives. In recent years these efforts have focused increasingly on providing older foster youth with legal, physical and relational permanency. This section reviews legislation and program initiatives, both federal and in California, that address many of the challenges discussed in the previous section. These strategies are helping to increase the rate at which foster youth are achieving physical and legal permanence, and where that is not possible, are expanding opportunities for relational permanence by connecting youth with committed and supportive adults.

3a. Federal Responses to Increasing Permanency Outcomes

Although a social movement to uncover the detrimental effects of long stays in foster care emerged in the early 1950's, serious efforts to promote foster-youth permanency through program and policy reform did not gain momentum until the 1980s. The Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (AACWA) refocused the goals of the foster care system from providing long term foster care to, where possible, preventing removal entirely through family preservation programs, reunifying foster youth with their biological families, and, if family preservation/ reunification is not possible, establishing permanency for youth through guardianship or adoption.[27] Stepped-up enforcement of these goals was to emerge from the AACWA-mandated regular case reviews by the courts. The legislation underscored the importance of foster care prevention services, family involvement, and improved permanency practices (through assessment and planning) in part by shifting AFDC Foster Care funding into Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, and by creating an adoption assistance program within Title IV-E that provides payments to families who adopt youth with defined special needs.[28] Follow up legislation in 1993 (the Omnibus Reconciliation Act) and 1994 (Social Security Amendments) provided new funding for abuse and neglect prevention, family preservation and community-based support services, and court improvements.

To further strengthen the movement towards shorter stays in foster care for youth, the passage of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) established the goals of safety, permanence, and well-being for children in foster care, emphasized accountability through measurement of state performance on nationally established goals, and

[27] Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. (2004). *Fostering the Future: Safety, Permanency and Well-being for Children.* Available at http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Foster_care_reform/foster_care_final_051804.pdf.

[28] The Pew Charitable Trust. (2007). *Time for Reform: Aging Out and On Their Own. More Teens Leaving Foster Care without a Permanency Family*. Available at: http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Foster_care_reform/Kids_are_Waiting_TimeforReform0307.pdf.

increased the role of courts in overseeing child welfare cases.[29] ASFA required states to hold permanency hearings for all youth within 12 months (down from the previous 18 month timeframe); expedite the termination of parental rights when a youth has been in care for 15 of the most recent 22 months (unless such action is not in the child's best interest or the state has made insufficient effort at family reunification); and pursue alternative permanent placements more immediately in certain cases, such as when a parent has already lost rights to a youth's sibling or has subjected a youth to chronic abuse.[30] ASFA created the Adoption Incentive Payment Program to reward states that increased the number of adoptions achieved among foster youth.

During the 1980s and 1990s several child welfare demonstration programs provided waivers so that states could test new approaches to improve permanency outcomes for children using Title IV-B and Title IV-E funds. For example, the Assisted Guardianship demonstration provided waivers to several states to use their Title IV-E funding to provide a monthly stipend to caregivers, mostly relatives, who became legal guardians for youth in foster care.[31] States could also receive discretionary federal grants for innovative projects to improve permanency outcomes; an example is the federal Adoption Opportunities program which provides financial support for demonstration projects to improve adoption practices, gather information on adoptions, and provide training and technical assistance to improve adoption services.[32]

Increasingly, federal legislation emphasized support for older foster youth. The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 reauthorized and expanded the federal Independent Living Program, which mandates skills development among youth who are in care at age 16 or older, while still encouraging social workers to pursue permanency efforts on their behalf through adoption or guardianship. One limitation of the federal Independent Living Program is that youth who leave care before age 16 due to reunification, guardianship or adoption lose access to the education and training benefits for which youth who remain in care till emancipation are eligible.[33] In 2001, the Promoting Safe and Stable Families amendments to Title IV-B expanded the federal funding available to support community-based preservation and reunification services, adoption support, and improved court processes. This legislation also provided, for the first time, post-secondary educational stipends for youth who exit the system through emancipation or adoption.[34] The Adoption Promotion Act of 2003, reauthorized the Adoption Incentive Program created through ASFA with an emphasis on increasing the adoption rate for foster youth age nine and older.[35]

The most recent federal legislation in this area, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (FCSIAA) of 2008, substantially expanded resources for older youth, by providing federal funding for foster care payments for youth through age 21. The bill included several components directed at permanency outcomes. It permits states to provide continued foster care payments (with a federal match) to relatives who become legal guardians of foster youth; it broadens the Family Connection Grants program towards strategies (such as family finding and family decision making) that increase the participation of relatives as caregivers; it encourages shared placement for siblings removed from home or, when that is not possible, provides for frequent visitation; and it

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[29] Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. (2004). *Fostering the Future: Safety, Permanency and Well-being for Children.* Available at http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Foster_care_reform/foster_care_final_051804.pdf.

[30] From the *Report to Congress on Adoption and Other Permanency Outcomes for Children in Foster Care: Focus on Older Children*, available at: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/congress_adopt/leadership.htm.

[31] The Pew Charitable Trust. (2007). *Time for Reform: Aging Out and On Their Own. More Teens Leaving Foster Care without a Permanency Family*. Available at: http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Foster_care_reform/Kids_are_Waiting_TimeforReform0307.pdf.

[32] Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2006). *Enhancing Permanency for Older Youth in Out-of-Home Care.* Children's Bureau/Administration on Children, Youth and Families. Available online at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/focus/enhancing/index.cfm.

[33] The Pew Charitable Trust. (2007). *Time for Reform: Aging Out and On Their Own. More Teens Leaving Foster Care without a Permanency Family*. Available at: http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Foster_care_reform/Kids_are_Waiting_TimeforReform0307.pdf.

[34] From the *Report to Congress on Adoption and Other Permanency Outcomes for Children in Foster Care: Focus on Older Children*, available at: http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/congress_adopt/leadership.htm.

[35] The North American Council on Adoptable Children. (2005) *A Family for Every Child: Strategies to Achieve Permanence for Older Foster Children and Youth.* Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation. Available at: http://www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/ff3622h1188.pdf.

enhances the Adoption Incentive Program to increase adoptions among older youth and those with special needs (by, for example, raising the incentive for achieving an adoption for an older youth to $8,000, from $4,000).[36,37]

3b. Legislative Responses to Increasing Permanency Outcomes in California

Over the past decade, the State of California has passed a number of laws that promote, through financial support and other strategies, physical and legal permanency for foster youth. Some bills capitalize on the options provided under the federal legislation just discussed, and others are distinctive California initiatives. They include programs and policies to promote sibling contact, assist kin who care for foster children or children at risk of placement, task agencies with record-keeping regarding the family and other adults important to foster youth, and promote the active participation of youth and caring adults in case planning and court procedures. The following section reviews the legislation that incorporates these efforts towards permanency.[38]

Establishing Physical Permanence – California Assembly Bill (AB) 1544 (1997) increases the likelihood that foster children unable to reunify with their birth parents will achieve permanency by requiring earlier identification of paternity, mandating concurrent planning, establishing a process for kinship adoption, and requiring emergency assessment of adults willing to care for a child removed from a home. AB 2773 (1998) implements the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act in California to include a shortened timeframe during which reunification must occur. California Senate Bill (SB) 940 (2001) requires probation departments to pursue termination of parental rights and adoption for youth adjudicated as delinquent who have been in care for 15 of the most recent 22 months (consistent with federal law regarding foster youth). SB591 (2003), in addition to ensuring that caregivers receive necessary information and documentation on their foster children, requires that social workers assess and document a caregiver's willingness to provide legal permanency for a child if reunification fails. SB 218 (2005) establishes a "prospective adoptive parent" designation by the juvenile court and prohibits the removal of a child from the home of a foster parent so designated unless properly noticed.

More recently, AB 1808 (2006) created the Older Foster Youth Adoption Initiative, a funded project to help participating counties develop successful strategies for increasing adoptions among older youth (age nine and up) who have been in nonrelative foster homes or group homes for 18 months or longer. The program established $6.3 million in state general funds in fiscal year 2007-2008 which was matched by $4.9 million in federal funds. The four counties (San Francisco County is the only CC25 county participating) and one district office participating are encouraged to utilize both pre- and post-adoption services to support the successful establishment and maintenance of adoptive placements. These include specialized recruitment efforts, family finding services, trainings, peer support groups, and youth engagement strategies.

Kinship Placements – AB 1193 (1997) establishes the Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP) and state funding to provide community-based support services (respite care, transportation, mental health, tutoring, food/housing/clothing assistance, etc) to relative (kin) foster-parents, and to relatives caring for children at risk of foster placement or delinquency. The bill originally allocated $1.5 million for grants to counties with 40 percent or more of their youth in relative care, and in 2006 the California State budget included a $4 million augmentation for KSSP. Today 27 counties are actively participating (including three CC25 counties - San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus Counties) or engaged in the planning process to participate in the future (including Fresno County). An independent evaluation of KSSP found high rates of satisfaction with the support services received and positive

[36] From an Action Alert put out by the National Association of Social Workers, available at: https://ssl.capwiz.com/socialworkers/issues/alert/?alertid=11947471.

[37] Partners for Our Children and the Juvenile Law Center. (2008). *Fostering Connections after Age 18: Report of a Convening to Address Housing, Health Care, Education and Other Transition to Adulthood Issues.* Available at: http://www.jlc.org/files/publications/CONVENING_REPORT_0430.pdf

[38] There are numerous sources available detailing California legislation but the following is particularly relevant to youth in foster care: Youth Transition Action Teams Initiative. (2006) California Foster Care Legislation. Available at: http://www.newwaystowork.org/documents/ytatdocuments/HighlightsCAFosterCareLegislation1982-2005.pdf.

results indicating that these services helped relative caregivers to improve their ability to care for youth and maintain the placement.[39]

Additionally, SB1901 (1998) established the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment Program (Kin-GAP) to provide the same basic foster care subsidy for children placed in legal guardianship with a relative. AB 1111 (1999) set the program's start up for January 2000, established the subsidy rate for KinGAP at 100 percent of the basic foster care rate and required some reporting on outcomes after two and five years. The earliest findings indicated that over 6,700 youth from 26 counties left foster care to placements with relative homes under Kin-Gap between January 2000 and June 2001, and 38 percent of them were age 11 or older.[40] Kin-GAP was further clarified and expanded by a series of other bills between 2000 and 2006 (AB 2876, AB 429, AB 2495, and AB 1808), for example, by making eligible youth who exit the probation system to kinship care and ensuring that Kin-GAP youth were both eligible for and aware of ILSP services.

Whole Family Placement – Both SB1178 (2004) and SB 500 (2005) require child welfare agencies to support joint placement of foster youth with their dependent children and receipt of appropriate supportive services. This legislation specifies responsibilities for the courts and case workers for "whole family placements" and informs teen parents of their legal rights. SB 720 (2007) clarifies terminology in SB 500 and removes unintended incentives to place parenting youth and their dependent children in group homes rather than in relative and nonrelative foster homes.

Sibling Relationships – AB 2196 (1997) mandates social workers to include information on siblings, and plans for ensuring sibling contact, in the case plan for youth who are in the process of being adopted. AB 1987 (2000) also requires social workers to address sibling relationships and plans for visitation in court reports and to notify youth in their caseload of significant events involving their siblings. AB 705 (2001) requires efforts be made to place siblings together when possible; AB579 (2003) requires that youth who are 10 years or older receive notification of a sibling's court hearings; and AB 2488 (2006) facilitates the locating of and reestablishing of contact between siblings after one or more of them have been adopted.

Establishing Relational Permanence – AB 408 (2003) targets foster youth age 10 and above who have lived in group care for at least six months and states that social service workers are to utilize new methods to help youth maintain relationships with individuals important to them. It also assures that youth are to be central in the permanency process and heard during court hearings. While in care, foster youth are to have the opportunity to engage in age-appropriate activities such as sports, social outings and enrichment opportunities. AB1412 (2005) is an expansion of AB408, requiring social workers to collect information on people important to youth age 10 and above that have been in *any* type of placement for six months or longer.

3c. Program Responses to Increasing Permanency Outcomes

Since 2002, private foundations have been sponsoring national convenings of experts and practitioners to discuss and develop policies on the issue of permanency among foster youth.[41] These National Convenings on Youth Permanence have grown from two dozen attendees in 2002 to 600 attendees at the sixth convening in 2008.[42] The

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[39] Shlonsky, A., Dawson, W., Choi, Y., Piccus, W., Cardona, P. and Needell, B. (2004). *Kinship Support Services in California: An Evaluation of California's Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP)*. University of California, Berkeley: Center for Social Services Research. Available at: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/pdfs/kssp_March03_v21.pdf.

[40] Needell, B., Shlonsky, A., Webster, D., Lee, S., Armijo, M., and Cuccaro-Alamin, S. *Report to the Legislature on the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment* (Kin-GAP). Available at: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/pdfs/KinGAPRpt.pdf.

[41] The six convenings held thus far have been hosted by a variety of organizations and foundations including the California Permanency for Youth Project, the Stuart Foundation, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, Marguerite Casey, and the Zellerbach Family Fund.

[42] Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services and Casey Family Programs. *From Inspiration to Action: The 2008 National Convening on Youth Permanence*," available at: http://www.youthpermanence.org/_pdf/materials/mat_2008/summary_2008.pdf.

strategies to improve permanency outcomes that have been explored at these convenings, and in other meetings and programs across the country, include:[43],[44]

- Fostering specific agency practices that promote permanency, such as:
  - Engaging youth directly in permanency planning,
  - Using teaming models (such as the Family to Family Team Decision Making, Family Group Conferencing or Team Decision Making models) to bring together youth, caregivers, family members, mentors, other caring adults, and child welfare staff to discuss placement changes, transition planning and permanency efforts.[45]
  - Adopting clinical strategies to help foster youth deal with grief, loss, and uncertainty. Foster youth may initially refuse to consider permanence as an option so as not to be once again abandoned and hurt. One tested approach, which has been implemented statewide in Pennsylvania and New Hampshire, is the 3-5-7 Model developed by Darla Henry. This approach has case workers, caregivers, family and foster youth working through three tasks, five questions and seven skills to overcome loss, establish trust and prepare for new relationships and attachments.[46]
  - Improving the recruitment efforts and the incentives for families willing to adopt older youth, promoted through mass media where possible.
  - Practicing concurrent planning so that family finding and development of permanent connections are not delayed by the usual sequential case planning that occurs.
  - Allowing youth to still have contact with birth family and siblings, where appropriate, by encouraging placements such as kinship care, guardianship or open adoptions that can foster such contact
  - Pursuing formal connections to supportive and caring adults (e.g. relatives, teachers, former foster parents, employers), if it becomes clear that a permanent living placement (through reunification, adoption, kinship care or legal guardianship) is unlikely. Establishing defined permanent relationships can help clarify for youth what they can expect from these caring adults in future years.
- Realigning agency structure and increasing collaboration, by:
  - Changing agency culture to more fully embrace permanency concepts and practices;
  - Involving birth families more in agency decision making and promote collaboration between birth, foster, guardianship and adoptive families;
  - Increasing collaboration between public agencies and other community stakeholders
  - Ensuring that post-placement support services are available to maintain successful placements.
- Addressing racial disproportionality and disparate permanency outcomes for foster youth of color, by:
  - Examining child welfare decision making to ensure racial equity and eliminate disparities in permanency outcomes;
  - Expanding efforts such as differential response to reduce unnecessary placements and disparate permanency outcomes;
  - Increasing kinship care placements.
- Strengthening the role of the courts to support youth permanence, by:
  - Facilitating cross trainings, closer collaboration and data sharing between the child welfare agency and courts, ensure youth participation in court hearings, cultivate a richer understanding of permanency among court staff and improve the cultural sensitivity of court proceedings.[47]

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[43] Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2006). *Enhancing Permanency for Older Youth in Out-of-Home Care. Children's Bureau/Administration on Children, Youth and Families.* Available at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/focus/enhancing/index.cfm.

[44] Strategies to improve permanency are summarized in Annie E. Casey Foundation/Casey Family Services and Casey Family Programs. (2008). *From Inspiration to Action: The 2008 National Convening on Youth Permanence*," available at: http://www.youthpermanence.org/_pdf/materials/mat_2008/summary_2008.pdf.

[45] Such approaches have been found to help improve reunification outcomes, increase relative placements, and support placement stability . Merkel-Holguin, L., Nixon, P. & Burford, G. (2003). Learning with Families: A Synopsis of FGDM Research and Evaluation in Child Welfare. *Protecting Children*, 18(1&2), 2-11.

[46] For more information on the 3-5-7 model, please see: http://www.cpyp.org/Files/3-5-7ModelAbstract.pdf.

[47] For additional recommendations on how to strengthen the role of courts to advance permanency, see Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. (2004). *Fostering the Future: Safety, Permanency and Well-being for Children*, available at: http://www.pewtrusts.org/uploadedFiles/wwwpewtrustsorg/Reports/Foster_care_reform/foster_care_final_051804.pdf and Louisell, M. (2006) *Recommendations for*

- Building public will and promoting policy change through youth advocacy, public education and outreach, and improved child welfare policy.

A number of projects and programs are using such strategies to improve permanency outcomes among foster youth. We have listed California projects first, followed by a selection of innovative strategies from other states.

The California Permanency for Youth Project – In January 2003, the Public Health Institute initiated the California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) with a five-year grant from the Stuart Foundation. The goal of CPYP is to assure that no youth in California leaves the foster care system without a permanent lifelong connection to a caring adult.[48] Funding for CPYP has since been extended through 2009 with the assistance of other funders including the Walter S. Johnson, Zellerbach Family Foundations, the Henry S. Cowell Foundation, Casey Family Programs and the Child Welfare Improvement Fund.

CPYP has been engaged in several activities since its initiation:

- The Permanency for Youth Task Force is comprised of statewide stakeholders who share the goals of facilitating public and private agency collaboration, developing local models of practice to overcome the barriers that prevent foster youth from achieving permanent lifelong connections, and promoting legislation and policies that address the permanency needs of youth statewide. Jointly with their partners, the Task Force created and distributed a Declaration of Commitment to Permanent Lifelong Connections for Foster Youth which acknowledges the benefits of permanency for current and former foster youth and asks signatories to initiate changes in their own organizations to promote permanency and support related projects locally and statewide. As of August 2007, all 58 counties in California, and over 100 other organizations had signed the Declaration.[49]
- CPYP has provided technical assistance and training to counties to help them improve permanency outcomes among foster youth through practice and staff development, increased community partnership and agency collaboration, youth engagement in permanency planning processes, and integration with other child welfare initiatives. Each participating county completed a local self-assessment and developed a plan on how to achieve the permanency outcomes for which they are striving. The trainings provided by CPYP include family search and engagement as well as Darla Henry's 3-5-7 model. After the initial two and a half years of technical assistance, counties were encouraged to develop additional plans for how they would take their accomplishments to scale within the child welfare agencies. All together, CPYP has provided technical assistance to 20 California counties. Among CC25I early implementing counties, Stanislaus County was among CPYP's original four counties receiving technical assistance, and Fresno and San Francisco Counties joined in 2005 with the second cohort of 10 counties. Another six counties joined CPYP in early 2008.
- CPYP developed the Emancipated Youth Connections Project (EYCP) to assist young adults already emancipated from the system in establishing permanent lifelong connections to caring adults. (This project is discussed further below).
- In addition, CPYP organized the first National Convenings on Youth Permanence and has published various resource documents on youth permanency.

In order to evaluate the impact of the Project's activities, CPYP collected time-series data on youth served by permanency efforts in the second cohort of 10 CPYP counties between 2006 and 2008. The initial study group consisted of 120 youth, 12 from each county, and nearly all were age 11 or older. Case workers completed a series of surveys on the youth throughout the study's duration. Among these 120 youth, 76 percent had achieved at least a permanent connection to a caring adult by the project's end: 15 achieved legal permanency, 14 were pursuing legal

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Effective Partnerships on Youth Permanence between the Juvenile Courts and Child Welfare. California Permanency for Youth Project, Juvenile Courts and Child Welfare Partnership Work Group, available at: http://www.cpyp.org/Files/WSJCourts.pdf.

[48] For more information on CPYP, see http://www.cpyp.org/description.html.

[49] For more information, see http://www.cpyp.org/commitment.html.

permanency, and 62 formed permanent connections (but not legal permanency).[50] On average, youth increased their number of "connections" (adults interested in having contact with the youth) from 3.2 to 9.2.

Among the challenges and lessons learned:

- Efforts to achieve permanency for youth must start as early as possible and family connections must be documented in a youth's case record to avoid setbacks when a new worker is assigned.
- Youth must be at the center of permanency efforts as their resistance to establishing permanent connections can be a powerful barrier. Often youth seem uninterested in finding a permanent connection, fearing another failed relationship, though they do yearn for connections to family and other caring adults. Trainings on youth and family engagement and how to prepare youth for permanency efforts are critical in overcoming these barriers.
- Success at finding relatives and establishing permanent connections depends on having a team of partners. Case workers often have time and caseload constraints and need help with family finding and the provision of support services as permanent connections are established. However, key team members/stakeholders may disagree on what is in the best interest of a youth and this can also slow down permanency efforts.
- Case workers must keep an open mind when pursuing permanent connections. Often it was with adults previously deemed inappropriate for a number of reasons that youth were able to establish permanent connections and even permanent placements.
- Case workers had greater challenges establishing permanent connections among Latino youth, sometimes because of language barriers or because family members were undocumented or lived out of the country.

Sacramento County Wrap-Around Program – In conjunction with the Sacramento County Department of Health and Human Services, EMQ Children and Family Services created this program to enable youth who are in or at risk of entering high level group home care to be placed in permanent family settings instead.[51] Serving primarily adolescent foster youth with serious emotional or behavioral issues, the program provides comprehensive and community-based support services to address these issues and train foster families to successfully deal with high-need youth, allowing these youth to step down to a family setting placement. The program also engages in family finding efforts to promote reunification with biological family and identify alternative families within their community willing to provide permanent placements. The original goal for Sacramento County, which was to transition 30 youth from high level group homes to family settings in the first half of 2003, was achieved. Two-thirds of these youth went to live with biological family or relatives, and the remainder was placed with foster families while additional family finding continued. By the end of 2003, a total of 49 foster youth had stepped down from high level group homes to family placements.[52] Since that time, the Wrap-Around program model has been adopted in other California counties (Fresno, Nevada, Riverside, Santa Clara, Sacramento, Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Tulare, and Yolo).

Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) - MTFC is a cost-effective therapeutic approach that enables foster youth to succeed in less restrictive placements, including family reunification, and avoid group homes or residential treatment. The MTFC model was established by Patricia Chamberlain and colleagues in 1983 to treat serious and chronic juvenile offenders in Oregon, but has evolved to serve a broader population of youth.[53] Since 2004, five counties in California (Fresno, Kern, Orange, San Diego and Shasta) have utilized this model as a strategy for promoting permanency. Youth are placed in a family-like setting in which they can continue to reside if reunification with family or another permanent placement does not occur. While randomized evaluations are under way, the model appears to result in high rates of reunification or other types of permanent outcome.[54]

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[50] A full report on these findings is available at: http://www.cpyp.org/Files/2008CPYP-EvaluationReportPublic.pdf.
[51] For additional information, see http://www.emqff.org/services/wraparound.shtml.
[52] Louisell, M. (2004). *Model Programs for Youth Permanency. The California Permanency for Youth Project.* Available at: http://www.cpyp.org/Files/ModelPrograms.pdf.
[53] For more information on the Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care model, please see: http://www.mtfc.com/index.html.
[54] For more information please see the California Evidence Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare's website: www.cachildwelfareclearinghouse.org.

Group Home Step-Up Project, Alameda County, California – The Step-Up Project provided case mining and web-based family finding services to 72 group-home youth over a six-month period in 2005. Though the program's focus was on establishing family connections and relational permanence, half of the youth served left group home care for permanent placements or were slated for family placements within three months; nearly all placements were with kin, including placement with fathers and other relatives previously unknown).[55] Even those who remained in group home care, were supported in their ongoing treatment by relatives with whom they were connected or reconnected. The County's investment in this program had a positive net fiscal impact by reducing use of costly group home care. Other lessons learned included the critical role of providing mental health and other support services, the need to work more closely with group home providers, and the need to address system issues that contribute to lengthy stays of foster youth in group homes.

Emancipated Youth Connections Project (EYCP) – This California project, initiated by CPYP and funded by the Stuart Foundation and the Zellerbach Family Foundation, targeted youth who had already left the foster care system, and sought to establish for them relational permanence with a caring and supportive adult. The twenty young adults participating in the project received family finding and other support services for 18 months, through June 2007. The project adapted successful permanence models to meet the needs and circumstances of older, foster youth alumni and in doing so created an effective program that can be utilized among young adults in the after-care, transitional period.[56] The project proceeded by identifying possible connections, to creating relationships that had the potential to be long-term, to culminating in a committed relationship that is very likely to be lifelong. Through this work, 139 new permanent connections were made with biological family members and 42 new connections with non-biological family, for an average of nine and a half new permanent connections for each of the 19 participants for whom data was available.[57] The study results emphasize the step-by-step nature of connection-building for youth, whether still in care or (as in this case) already emancipated.

Intensive Family Reunification (IFR) program, Marion County, Indianapolis – A court-based program achieving improved permanency outcomes, IFR provides the support services needed (over a fifteen month period) to address the barriers that prevent child welfare and probation youth in group care from returning to their biological families. Through close collaboration between the juvenile court and child welfare agency, the county has reduced the average stay in care from approximately three years (in 1994) to eight months in 2003.[58] Working with approximately three dozen youth a year, IFR manages to return 70 percent of youth home within the first 42 days and nearly 75 percent of youth remain in their home for a year following reunification. These positive outcomes motivated the state to expand the program throughout the state.[59]

You Gotta Believe, Brooklyn, New York – You Gotta Believe finds permanent placements for teen and preteen youth in foster care in order to reduce the likelihood that homelessness will result in the post-emancipation period.[60] The program strongly encourages and facilitates the adoption of youth regardless of their age. Strategies utilized include recruitment of families willing to adopt and provide permanent placements for older youth, family and general public trainings, crisis intervention, social activities, and assignment of a post-placement worker to provide weekly follow up with youth and their family and post-adoption services. You Gotta Believe has received local funding from

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[55] Alameda County Children & Family Services. (2005). *Group Home Step-Up Project: Moving Up & Out of Congregate Care. Final Report.* Available at: http://www.cpyp.org/Files/StepUpProjectFinalReport.doc.

[56] For a detailed description of the EYCP and its impact, please see: The California Permanency for Youth Project. (2009). *Emancipated Youth Connections Project: Final Report/Toolkit*. Available at: http://www.cpyp.org/Files/EYCP-ReportToolkit.pdf.

[57] Six participants transitioned from no existing or potential permanent connection to having connections to a potential lifelong connection (four youth) or having clearly established a committed lifelong connection (two youth); four participants transitioned from having a potential lifelong connection to developing a committed lifelong connection; eight individuals already had committed lifelong connections at the start of the project and not only maintained those connections but increased the number of adults to whom they have connections established; only one participant had no existing or potential lifelong connection in the pre- and post-periods.

[58] Louisell, M. (2004). *Model Programs for Youth Permanency. The California Permanency for Youth Project.* Available at: http://www.cpyp.org/Files/ModelPrograms.pdf.

[59] Louisell, M. (2006) *Recommendations for Effective Partnerships on Youth Permanence Between the Juvenile Courts and Child Welfare*. California Permanency for Youth Project, Juvenile Courts and Child Welfare Partnership Work Group, available at: http://www.cpyp.org/Files/WSJCourts.pdf.

[60] For additional information, see http://yougottabelieve.org/index.htm.

the City of New York as well as federal funding through the Adoption Opportunity Grant program. The program placed 22 older foster youth in permanent placements in its first two years of federal funding (2001 and 2002) and an additional 18 youth in 2003, with a goal to increase placements by 25 percent each year.[61]

Project UPLIFT, Colorado – Project UPLIFT worked with adolescent foster youth for a nine month period to establish supportive and permanent relationships with adults who had been important in their lives.[62] The 56 youth involved in the project were dealing with a number of mental health and developmental challenges as well as juvenile delinquency issues. Among the 55 youth with data, 122 connections were established (47 youth had at least one connection; 8 had none). Fourteen youth achieved higher levels of permanency; four were reunified or had adoptions in progress and 10 youth had identified families willing to adopt them. This work found that 75 percent of the problem with failure to find permanent placements for foster youth is with adult attitudes regarding older youth and permanency.[63] Successful results were associated with more time spent by workers/service providers with youth and their connections. Permanent placement through adoption, even when subsidized, leads to significant costs savings – an average of over $20,000 a year per youth in their sample of participants who achieved higher level permanency results.

IV. CC25I EFFORTS IN THE AREA OF PERMANENCY

Counties participating in CC25I aim to improve policies, programs, and outcomes for transition-age foster youth in seven focus areas: K-12 Education; Employment/Job Training/Post-Secondary Education; Financial Competency and Asset Development; Housing; Independent Living Skills Programs; Personal/Social Asset Development; and Permanency. The goal of *Permanency* is to ensure that all youth leave the foster care system with at least one lifelong connection to a caring, committed, loving adult, feeling both resilient and empowered to reach their full potential. Permanency strategies include family finding techniques such as Internet search as well as youth, caregiver and cross agency collaborations that identify, develop and support significant relationships. Permanency efforts will result in more youth leaving care with committed relationships and on-going support from safe and caring adults and family members.

This section reviews the progress made towards Permanency goals by the four early implementing CC25I Counties – Fresno, San Francisco, Santa Clara and Stanislaus – in advancing the CC25I logic model in the area of Permanency. This section begins with a summary of the anticipated outcomes, the targeted goals and activities, and the inputs of the CC25I Permanency logic model. This is followed by a summary of the main accomplishments of each county, as detailed in their interim reports, and the key lessons learned in each. The section concludes with the Permanency activities and benchmarks planned by the counties in the near future.

4a. The CC25I Logic Model for Permanency

Each county participating in CC25I has flexibility to develop programs and services that best respond to the permanency needs of their local foster youth population. The CC25I Permanency Logic Model presented here lends their efforts some unifying guidelines in terms of the overarching philosophy, desired impact and possible strategies.

Permanency: Anticipated Outcomes – The priority outcome that all CC25I counties are required to track in the area of Permanency is the percentage of foster youth whom the child welfare agency assesses as having a "permanent connection", defined as a "stable relationship with a safe adult who has made a commitment to provide

[61] Louisell, M. (2004). *Model Programs for Youth Permanency. The California Permanency for Youth Project.* Available at: http://www.cpyp.org/Files/ModelPrograms.pdf.
[62] Louisell, M. (2004). *Model Programs for Youth Permanency. The California Permanency for Youth Project.* Available at: http://www.cpyp.org/Files/ModelPrograms.pdf.
[63] For a detailed description of the EYCP and its impact, please see: The California Permanency for Youth Project. (2009). *Emancipated Youth Connections Project: Final Report/Toolkit*. Available at: http://www.cpyp.org/Files/EYCP-ReportToolkit.pdf.

lifelong support." Counties also have the option to track 1) the percentage of youth who self-report that they have a permanent connection, (2) the percentage of youth who have written commitments from their permanent connection, and 3) the percentage of youth who are living with family or a non-relative lifelong connection.

Permanency: Goals and Activities – As part of CC25I, child welfare agencies are partnering with community service programs and court representatives, while also drawing on the knowledge and resources of foster youth, caregivers and kin, to establish relationships between youth and significant adults who can provide lifelong connections and support. Permanency strategies include family finding techniques such as Internet search as well as youth, caregiver and cross agency collaborations that identify, develop and support significant relationships. Because permanency work must often address issues of grief and loss common among foster youth, child welfare agencies are increasingly turning to mental health clinicians, grief and loss experts, and youth advocates to support youth, case workers and permanent connections in sustaining permanency outcomes over time.

Permanency: Inputs – In addition to the flexible CC25I grant dollars, which counties can use to support strategies in any of the seven focus areas, participating counties have had access to several opportunities for technical assistance provided through CC25I support. CC25I general convenings – offered once or twice a year – provide CC25I counties an ongoing opportunity to share with one another their latest challenges and accomplishments. A presentation by the Casey Center for Effective Child Welfare Practice on establishing permanency, transition and caregiver support was included in the spring 2007 General Convening, while the Fall 2007 General Convening, led by experts Lorraine Fox and Darla Henry, focused entirely on loss, grief and strategies for supporting foster youth, social workers, and community partners in their efforts to establish permanency for foster youth and prepare them for adulthood.

All CC25I early implementing counties but Santa Clara County were part of the California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) (described in **Section 3c,** above) and therefore receiving a variety of training and technical assistance from experts such as Cheryl Jacobson, Mardi Louisell and Kevin Campbell. CPYP also sponsored a number of conferences and regional meetings over the years at which participating counties could discuss challenging issues and share best practices. Local Child Welfare Training Academies have also provided counties with trainings on topics related to permanency. For example, the Bay Area Academy developed with CPYP a one-day training to promote both the philosophical understanding of permanence and practical strategies for talking to youth about advancing this work in practice.[64]

In some cases, CC25I counties also accessed funding for family finding and other permanency activities from the various legislative initiatives (discussed in **Section 3b**, above), including the Older Foster Youth Adoption Initiative (funded by AB 1808) and the Kinship Support Services Program (funded by AB 1193).

4b. CC25I Permanency Accomplishments

Among the four CC25I early implementing counties, Fresno, San Francisco, and Stanislaus Counties joined the Initiative in July 2005, and Santa Clara County six months later, in December 2005. To date, all four counties have completed interim reports through the end of their third years of CC25I funding and work. This section presents the accomplishments of these four early implementing counties in the area of permanency as reported in their annual interim reports. Counties are still implementing the new data tracking strategies that will allow ongoing assessment of foster youth outcomes, designed to track the number of youth with at least one permanent connection established. However, the progress made towards the goals of the CC25I Permanency Logic Model provide an early indicator of whether counties are on track to achieve the anticipated outcomes.

[64] Louisell, M. (2006) *Recommendations for Effective Partnerships on Youth Permanence Between the Juvenile Courts and Child Welfare*. California Permanency for Youth Project, Juvenile Courts and Child Welfare Partnership Work Group. Available at: http://www.cpyp.org/Files/WSJCourts.pdf.

Table 4.1 shows that the four counties vary considerably in terms overall caseload size and age distribution. Fresno County, for example, has the largest number of foster children aged five and under, while San Francisco County has the largest number of youth in the transitional age range (ages 16 to 17 and 18 plus). For families with two or more children in care, Fresno and Stanislaus Counties are able to place at least some of the siblings together three-fourths of the time and San Francisco and Santa Clara Counties two-thirds of the time. Looking at youth who were in child welfare supervised foster care for two years or longer at the start of the year, the counties varied considerably in what share of those youth exited to permanency (reunification with parents or primary caretaker, discharge to guardianship, or discharge to adoption) by year's end. San Francisco County succeeded in achieving exits to permanency in about one tenth of these cases and Stanislaus County in nearly a quarter of these cases. The difficulties of terminating parental rights in order to free youth up for legal adoption pose a significant challenge to achieving permanency outcomes in a timely fashion. Among youth who were free to be legally adopted, all four counties were successful at achieving exits to permanency in over 90 percent of the cases over the course of a year.

Youth who exited to adoption spent two to three years in foster care before that outcome was achieved. And a large share of youth who did not achieve permanency but instead emancipated from the foster care system spent three or more years in the system before doing so – ranging from nearly 40 percent in Stanislaus County to 70 percent in Fresno County.

Table 4.1: CC25I County Profile[65]

		Fresno	San Francisco	Santa Clara	Stanislaus
Child Welfare(CW)-Supervised Foster Care Caseload, by Age & Out-of-County Placement (January 2008)					
	TOTAL	**2,541**	**1,645**	**1,870**	**587**
Age Breakdown of Children In Foster Care	0-5	735 (29%)	330 (20%)	619 (33%)	200 (34%)
	6-15	1,366 (54%)	855 (52%)	874 (47%)	281 (48%)
	16-17	379 (15%)	321 (20%)	316 (17%)	97 (17%)
	18+	61 (2%)	139 (8%)	61 (3%)	9 (2%)
County-supervised Youth Placed out of County		440 (17%)	460 (28%)	377 (20%)	106 (18%)
Sibling Placements: % of Youth Placed with at Least Some Siblings, among CW-Supervised Families with Two+ Children (1/1/2009)		73%	66%	68%	74%
Exits to Permanency: % of Youth in CW-Supervised Foster Care Two Years+ on 1/1/2008 that Exited to Legal Permanency (reunification, guardianship, adoption) by 12/31/2008		17%	11%	22%	24%
Exits to Permanency among Adoptable Youth: % of Youth Exiting CW-Supervised Foster Care to Permanency, among those Who were Legally Free for Adoption (Jan-Dec 2008)		96%	94%	92%	99%
Months of Waiting until Adoption: Median # of Months in CW-Supervised Foster Care among Youth Who Exited to Adoption (Jan-Dec 2008)		35	29	31	24
Extended Foster-care Stays among Emancipating Youth: % of Youth Exiting CW-Supervised Foster Care to Emancipation Who Were in Care Three Years+ (Jan-Dec 2008)		70%	68%	58%	39%

[65] Table sources include: Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Glasser, T., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Ataie, Y., Winn, A., Blumberg, R., & Cuccaro-Alamin, S. (2008). Child Welfare Services Reports for California. Retrieved [September 24, 2008], from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/; Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Glasser, T., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Winn, A., Lou, C., Peng, C. & Holmes, A. (2009). Child Welfare Services Reports for California. Retrieved September 10, 2009, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/; and Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Glasser, T., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Lou, C., Peng, C. & Holmes, A. (2009). Child Welfare Services Reports for California. Retrieved September 11, 2009, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare.

The remainder of this section reviews the accomplishments of each CC25I early implementing county in the area of Permanency, including an account of how counties utilized California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) technical assistance to develop and implement strategies that improve permanency outcomes for foster youth.

Fresno County

Working with CPYP between October 2005 and October 2008, Fresno County's Permanency Taskforce focused its initial permanency efforts on foster youth residing in group homes. The Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) designated a Permanency Specialist to oversee the intensive family finding efforts made on behalf of the pilot cohort of 12 youth that were part of CPYP's evaluation efforts.[66] The County held its first Long Life Connections Conference which brought together siblings, relatives and other supportive adult connections with youth who had been in care for a long time.

In an effort to educate and collaborate more closely with community partners, DCFS sponsored numerous permanency-related trainings and developed a Finding Permanency for Youth Resource Handbook for youth, caregivers (including foster family agencies and group homes), family members, child welfare and probation staff, and other service agencies that serve foster youth. The Handbook educates community stakeholders on the importance of permanency for foster and probation youth and provides information on the various tools and permanency options that should be considered. DCFS also offers a four-hour training on family-finding, has teamed up with Emergency Response to develop ways to include permanency at the front end, and provides special half-day trainings for other community partners and members.

In January 2006 Fresno County launched a highly visible recruitment program – Wednesday's Child – designed to find adoptive families for teen foster youth. Youth in need of adoptive families are showcased on television broadcasts to both raise public awareness of the needs of youth living in foster care as well as to connect prospective adoptive families with youth in need of permanent placements. To date, 21 foster youth eligible for adoption have been highlighted through Wednesday's Child and four have been successfully adopted. Other recruitment efforts included the creation of a poster listing the "Top Ten Reasons to Adopt an Adolescent."

In years two and three of their CPYP work, DCFS worked to integrate permanency practice within the larger agency. It further expanded family finding efforts beyond the pilot group of 12 and as of March 2008, they had found 100 new connections among 24 foster youth residing in group homes. Family finding was also offered to youth who had already aged out of the system. Social workers would meet with the Permanency Specialist to learn about the family finding process and then incorporate that knowledge within their own case management of youth and families.

Although Fresno County is no longer receiving technical assistance and support from CPYP, DCFS has remained committed to finding and maintaining lifelong connections through the Family Connections Taskforce. In 2009, DCFS expanded its efforts to include an additional family finding consultant through the Independent Living Skills Program. DCFS is also working more closely with foster family agencies, engaging them in trainings and asking their assistance in family finding efforts on behalf of all youth served. Families First, a foster family agency contracted by the County to provide the wraparound support services funded through SB 163, has been particularly engaged in these efforts, piloting expert Darla Henry's training on grief and loss with their youth. Golden State Foster Family Services also came on board in early 2009, participating in family finding trainings offered by the County and joining the Family Connections Taskforce. Additional foster family agencies and other community partners have also helped the County to coordinate and sponsor frequent events that support sibling relationships such as the Sibling Summer Carnival, Sibling Movie Night and Sibling Spring Fling.

[66] A full report on these findings is available at: http://www.cpyp.org/Files/2008CPYP-EvaluationReportPublic.pdf.

DCFS is also collaborating more closely with other public agencies such as probation and mental health. The probation department is now providing permanency training for its staff, judges and attorneys and is more actively pursuing permanency outcomes among their youth through the juvenile dependency court. The mental heath department has collaborated with the child welfare agency to provide a Loss and Grief Support Group for transition-age youth and to develop a referral process to link youth to that group.

The Wednesday's Child program evolved to include the "Heart Gallery," a series of family recruitment events held in public places. The first Heart Gallery was held at a local mall in October 2008 and a county-wide library tour began in January 2009, with each new month and library venue featuring different teens and sibling groups in need of permanent placements. At each library open house, members of the Heart Gallery Committee answer questions about permanency and the featured youth. Between October 2008 and May 2009, nine of 11 youth featured were matched with a permanent placement or connection. There are currently 16 youth featured in the Heart Gallery, two of whom are on their way to being adopted. The Heart Gallery is slated to participate in the 2009 Women's Conference, the 2009 Reel Pride: Gay and Lesbian Film Festival and the 2009 Big Fresno Fair. Youth who are a part of the Heart Gallery program are invited to quarterly peer support events at which they engage in social and recreational activities such as creating a personal scrapbook.

DCFS continues to work on efforts to more fully engage youth and caregivers in key decision-making meetings. In the first year of the CPYP work, DCFS held 373 team decision meetings regarding placement changes, with foster youth attending 53 percent of the time and caregivers (kinship and nonrelative foster parents) attending 72 percent of the time. Plans are in effect to train youth to participate in Team Decision Meetings as community representatives and youth advocates. Fresno County social workers are currently receiving six months of technical assistance from the Annie E. Casey Foundation on engaging youth and caregivers in discussions on permanency. The technical assistant joins both the social worker and the social work supervisor during monthly contact visits in the field.

> "Jake entered foster care at age five and had been in 10 placements, most of which were group homes. He knew nothing about his family but the CPYP team was able to piece together Jake's family tree and managed to contact a few family members as well. He had six siblings and a number of aunts and uncles on both sides of his family. Initially Jake was not ready to make contact with them for several months. But eventually he visited twice with his maternal family and now maintains weekly contact with them. Recently, Jake's sister contacted the agency wanting visits and the team has set a date for this to occur."
>
> **- Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services**

Written procedures for family engagement and finding life-long permanent connections were developed and shared with trained staff. This procedural guide clarifies the roles and responsibilities of those involved in permanency efforts, establishes criteria for youth in need of family finding, and identifies available support resources to assist in family finding and engagement. Written procedures will also be developed for ILP-eligible, emancipated youth in need of family finding and life-long connections. Lastly, the County will continue to explore existing policies and procedures regarding the placement of youth with case carrying social workers in order to develop and implement such policies. DCFS is pursuing a modified memorandum of understanding with all foster family agencies that formalizes their engagement in family finding efforts on behalf of all youth served.

In August of 2009, the County implemented the Anti-harassment, Anti-discrimination Policy to protect Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth and families and to assist in permanency efforts for all youth regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. All staff was trained in this policy, and DCFS has made tremendous strides in reaching out to the LGBTQ community by actively recruiting foster and adoptive parents at LGBTQ community events. The LGBTQ Taskforce was created to ensure safety and equality for youth in all systems of care. The Taskforce, comprised of trained child welfare staff and community members, is a resource for social workers in need of consultation and support regarding LGBTQ youth and families.

San Francisco County

The San Francisco County Human Services Agency (HSA) began its permanency work with CPYP in April 2005 and received technical assistance from the initiative for three years. This support focused on initial assessment and planning efforts to increase permanency among foster youth, provision of relevant trainings, and implementation of small-scale changes to integrate permanency philosophy and practice within the child welfare agency. HSA's early permanency efforts focused on a single teen unit within the child welfare agency. An All Staff memo was sent out mid 2006 detailing the plan of action developed with CPYP, which included updating forms and procedures to support permanency efforts, providing family finding searches and other searches for connections among foster youth with a case plan of long-term placement, and defining more clearly the roles of collaborating partners such as mental health, court appointed special advocates (CASAs), youth and contracted service providers.

With Family Builders as partners in a program funded by AB 1808, the Older Foster Youth Adoption Initiative (described in **Section 3b**, above), HSA worked with a pilot group of 20 youth to find family and other permanent connections. These 20 youth – ages nine and above, with a case plan of long-term placement, and placed with non-relative caregivers – were part of the overall CPYP evaluation effort and their outcomes are part of the aggregate results available in the 2008 CPYP Evaluation Report.[67] Through this program, permanency workers engage in intensive, onsite family finding efforts and coordinate a host of other support services, ongoing meetings, trainings and retreats that build understanding and partnership between Family Builders and the child welfare agency.

HSA conducted a number of training sessions on permanency philosophy, practices such as family finding and engagement, grief and loss, and concurrent planning for child welfare workers, supervisors, foster family agencies, group homes, caregivers and youth. These trainings reached well beyond staff in the teen unit, involving a number of supervisors in other units as well. Though these trainings began during the CPYP initiative, they continue today. HSA's work with CPYP accomplished several other outcomes in terms of systems change within the child welfare agency: the Long Term Placement Unit was renamed the Transitions to Permanency Unit; the interview for new hires to the Adoption Unit or Transitions to Permanency Unit now includes questions about knowledge of and experience with permanency practices; permanency philosophy and practice are included in the new case worker training; and the full-time staff person that conducts GOALS meetings (or emancipation conferences) with youth at age 16 and older now includes a discussion of permanency in the course of emancipation planning.

The Permanency Workgroup, also established during early CPYP efforts, continues to meet monthly to continue this work. The workgroup includes partners such as Family Builders, Seneca Center and the Japanese Community Youth Council. One of the ongoing activities of the group is to update agency contracts and other forms used in the provision of adoption and kinship services (such as the Joint Adoptability Assessment form and the court report template) to encourage the pursuit of permanency options at every stage of a youth's involvement with the foster care system. The workgroup is also promoting the use of concurrent planning so that if reunification fails, possibilities for other permanency options can be explored before a youth is classified as long term placement.

Also supported by the Older Youth Adoption funding received by Family Builders, HSA is engaging in a case review and consultation training project that uses a standardized tool to review the placement history, family connections and other characteristics of 150 individual foster youth, and develops an action plan to advance permanency objectives for each case. The project, led by permanency experts Mardi Louisell and Bob Lewis, provides caseworkers and supervisors with one-on-one training in the daily application of permanency philosophy and practice. This work will benefit youth, caseworkers and supervisors in all HSA Teen Transitions to Permanency Units, and in some other units as well.

[67] A full report on these findings is available at: http://www.cpyp.org/Files/2008CPYP-EvaluationReportPublic.pdf.

Another of the County's partners, Seneca Center, operates the San Francisco Connections program, which is a wrap-around program that can serve up to 120 families. The program addresses problem behaviors to prevent youth from being placed in a higher level group home or to help them to step down from such a facility, and provides a variety of permanency support services including family finding. Also through the Seneca Center, San Francisco County is participating in a national study conducted by Child Trends[68] that is engaging in front-end family finding services for up to 100 children who are early in their involvement with the child welfare system. Children and families without a previous out-of-home placement are randomly assigned to treatment or control status, and if in the treatment group, they receive more intense family finding and permanency support services. This initiative started in San Francisco in September 2008 and should last for approximately two years.

More recently, the County has been engaging in efforts to integrate permanency practices within their ILSP, which has always been a strong program but one whose staff had limited knowledge of or experience with permanency philosophy and practice. Today there is a full-time permanency staff position within ILSP and permanency outcomes are acknowledged to be as important as education, employment and housing outcomes. Increasingly, permanency is addressed as part of ILSP case management, and caregivers, group home staff and other caring adults are included in case reviews, emancipation conferences and other ILSP activity. San Francisco County is also participating in the California Breakthrough Series Collaboration (BSC) on Independent Living Program Transformation, and the Permanency Workgroup has found that the BSC method of achieving reform through a series of small, quick changes is an effective way to implement and evaluate the impact of permanency efforts. ILSP staff will continue to engage in training opportunities and retreats to deepen their understanding of permanency and further integrate permanency strategies within ILSP activity.

In August, 2009, HSA provided training on permanency to the city and panel attorneys who represent agencies, children and families. This is part of a larger effort to work with various partners around permanency, and work more collaboratively to achieve permanency outcomes for foster youth. A follow up meeting with panel attorneys is scheduled in Fall 2009, which will focus specifically on work with Family Builders, the primary permanency work and adoption provider in the County.

Santa Clara County

Though not a CPYP participant, Santa Clara County Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) has developed and implemented several strategies related to permanency during the three years of its involvement with CC25I. The agency's policy is to preserve family connections, and DFCS tries to place youth with relatives when reunification is not possible, as indicated by the fact that a majority of children in foster care in September 2005 (56 percent) were placed with relatives. The Family Finding Workgroup, created to oversee permanency efforts within the County, emphasized a focus on youth living in group homes (about seven percent of all foster youth in September 2005) as well as on youth that were soon to be emancipating from the child welfare system.

DFCS developed a new model to advance permanency outcomes among transitional age youth in Santa Clara County based on several best practices in child welfare. This model was piloted among a group of 40 foster youth in need of permanent connections, aged 13 to 18 years, who were provided family finding services by DFCS and other community-based organizations (e.g., EMQ Children and Family Services). Among this pilot group, 34 youth were successfully connected with family members on a variety of levels, and all youth who since aged out of the system did so with at least one permanent connection in place. System changes within the agency included the establishment of a Family Finding Unit and the creation of four social work positions to assist with permanency efforts through strategies such as documenting the names of relatives and other supportive adults at initial court hearings.

[68] This national study being conducted by Child Trends involves 12 sites throughout the United States; nine sites in North Carolina, one site in Oregon, Los Angeles County and San Francisco County. Of these 12 sites, only San Francisco County and the Oregon site are focusing on front-end permanency efforts while the others are focusing on youth who have been in care for a long time.

Workers within the Family Finding Unit have received extensive training on the philosophy and practice of permanency and, in turn, have trained other social workers on how to integrate these practices within their child welfare practice. In response to the perceived lack of mental health services available to foster youth, DFCS explored the possibility of having mental health clinicians participate in emancipation conferences. Through an informal agreement, mental health clinicians now attend emancipation conferences for older foster youth on a case-by-case basis.

Based on the results of the initial cohort, most of whom were aged 16 or older, DFCS determined that family finding should be done as early as possible. DFCS has taken steps to integrate family finding staff in to each bureau's activities, who oversee family finding efforts and establish connections with relatives and other caring adults at an earlier stage in the child's foster-care or emancipation experiences.

Stanislaus County

Working with CPYP between June 2003 and June 2006, the Stanislaus County Community Services Agency (CSA) focused its initial permanency efforts – which began two years prior to CC25I – on foster youth age 14 and older in long-term foster care. Early in the initiative, CSA created a new Permanency Specialist position, a non-caseload-carrying social worker who works closely with youth and family members, mines case files, searches for connections and does outreach. CSA's Permanency Project – officially titled "Connected for Life" – kicked off in August 2003 with a retreat for 15 youth, social workers and mental health staff. These youth also formed the County's first Youth Advisory Council to provide feedback on the policies and services related to permanency and transitional planning.

The social workers of the Permanent Placement Unit within CSA implemented permanency practices among the target population of foster youth as well as regular tracking of indicators to document the progress made in achieving permanency outcomes. The coordinator for the mental health agency (known as the Children's System of Care) became an active lead in CSA's permanency efforts and her team of clinicians now regularly provides support services to youth and caregivers, thereby helping prevent the disruption of permanent placements and connections. Permanency trainings for youth, caregivers, family members, child welfare staff and other professionals also began in late 2003 and led to increased knowledge and skill with permanency philosophy and practice.

> "Lifelong Connection has been integrated into our permanency values. We have accomplished 100% searches for connections. The Permanent Placement Unit and After Care social workers have participated in many Team Decision Meetings and Connected for Life Meetings. They have indicated that these meetings have been very useful in assisting the youth in their transition."
>
> **- Stanislaus County Community Services Agency**

CSA placed early emphasis on involving youth in their own permanency planning and the Youth Advisory Council led the way by developing the Connected for Life Meeting concept. Connected for Life Meetings identify individuals who are important to the youth and establish lifelong connections through the creation of "Agreements to Maintain Contact" in which significant relationships are formalized. "Emergency Connected for Life" team meetings are held prior to the recommendation of long-term foster care as a youth's case goal. "Connected for Life Permanency and Transition Planning" meetings are also used as a forum to discuss the future goals of the youth regarding education, ILP services, emancipation, etc., and to identify the resources most needed by the youth in a timely fashion to help with the transition to adulthood. Connected for Life and Transition Planning meetings are as youth-driven as possible.

Due to the demand for permanency and search services, CSA expanded its current target population in 2004 to include all entering, existing, and emancipating foster youth, ensuring that permanency support can be received as early in the process as possible. Site visits to foster family agencies allowed the permanency team to share new visions and expectations with care providers and review the permanency outcomes for youth placed with them. The Permanency Specialist began working with Emergency Response staff to bring family finding and permanency work

to the front-end as part of Team Decision Meetings, and incorporates permanency objectives into her review of all adoptability assessments of youth. An existing county worker specializing in Internet technology offered the permanency project team her expertise in conducting web-based family finding for every youth that enters the system. CSA also received a great deal of technical assistance through CPYP from Kevin Campbell.

Although their work with CPYP was winding down as Stanislaus County joined CC25I, CSA continued to build on its earlier permanency work in a number of ways. Within the ILSP, two former foster youth were hired as ILSP Interviewers to increase utilization of transitional services among youth and provide youth-friendly, direct services including administration of the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment, completion of the Transition to Independent Living Plan, and planning for other emancipation needs. Permanency concepts and the establishing of lifelong connections are integrated within the ILSP curriculum and lifelong connections are invited to ILSP activities.

CSA's mental health clinicians are now invited to participate in all Team Decision Meetings and Connected for Life Meetings for the foster youth on their caseloads. When the youth's clinician is unavailable, the coordinator for the Children's System of Care attends in his/her absence. Mental health advocacy was provided in a third of such meetings held during the 2005-2006 fiscal year, and this work continues today. The Children's System of Care has also designated a clinician to provide ongoing clinical assessment and treatment services to transitioning and emancipated foster youth, as well as to any youth that cannot identify a lifelong connection. At last count, 67 current and former foster youth were receiving these services.

The search for family connections continues to be a priority for all foster youth in Stanislaus County. When family finding searches are made, information on connections is stored in the Lifelong Connections database (accessible to all social workers within CSA, though it is separate from the CWS/CMS data system). While youth cannot directly access the database, they can request a list of names contained in their file and can work with their social worker to establish connection with any relative listed. A July 2007 review of the 94 CSA foster youth age 14 or older who had case goals of long-term care (excluding those in guardianship settings) found that every single youth had a completed family-finding search, an average of 24 connections had been identified per youth, and three-fourths (73 percent) had a formal Connected for Life relationship. This strikingly successful process has been identified as an innovative and best practice to be shared with other counties, who can contact CSA to request a copy of the database.

Other aspects of Stanislaus County's CC25I work also support permanency efforts. The permanency philosophy is now firmly embedded in the practice of all social workers, and Permanency Placement social workers and After Care social workers continue to participate in Team Decision Meetings and Connected for Life Meetings. On-going relationships with family members and relatives are encouraged in the Permanent Placement Unit by allowing visits, telephone calls and letter writing. Several youth in long term foster care have been moved to relative placements from foster home, foster family agency and group home placements. Post-emancipation, the County's My Home transitional housing program can subsidize a youth to remain housed with a host family who has signed a "Connected for Life Agreement" that attests to the family's lasting commitment to the youth.

4c. Observations & Lessons Learned

This section reviews some of the key observations and lessons learned in the area of Permanency over the first three years of the Initiative.

Stakeholders in a Youth's Case Often Disagree on Permanency Options. Conflict often arises between social workers and other parties such as group home staff, mental health providers and court representatives that can impede permanency efforts. Disagreement on permanency options and what serves the best interest of a youth often results from varying familiarity with permanency practice as well as the failure of stakeholders to regularly

attend update meetings, communicate effectively, or understand one another's perspective. Counties report that court representatives sometimes lack a clear understanding of permanency philosophy, that mental health providers may feel a youth is too unstable to pursue permanency and that caseworkers themselves often struggle to make choices in light of the tradeoffs involved in different placement options. One strategy to overcome these challenges is to engage in regular cross-trainings and inter-agency staff meetings to routinely emphasize the importance of permanency, familiarize all present with its objectives, and jointly discuss the pros and cons of various permanency options. In San Francisco County, there is an effort to build into the mandated court report template a section on permanency efforts so that the caseworkers' activity in this area become part of the court record, with the information made available to all stakeholders.

Youth Need Mental Health and Other Support to Facilitate Permanency Efforts. Fearing disappointment and further loss, youth themselves may resist permanency steps proposed by child welfare staff. Agency staff, as well as other stakeholders such as foster family agencies, probation departments and mental health agencies, have greatly benefited from professional guidance on how to help youth and families deal with grief and loss, whether through trainings by CPYP, regular support from mental health clinicians, or other technical assistance. In addition, some youth are dealing with multiple behavioral or mental health issues that impede efforts to move them from therapeutic group home settings to permanent placements. Stanislaus County has long addressed this challenge by co-locating mental health clinicians within the child welfare agency and working collaboratively with these clinicians on cases in which youth reside in a group home. This close partnership between agencies ensures that support services are in place to resolve mental health issues and pursue lower level of care in family-like settings when possible.

Child Welfare Staff Need Continued Training and Support Resources. Child welfare staff can benefit from ongoing training opportunities and other support in their efforts to implement permanency philosophy and practice. Some counties mentioned that while staff members buy in to permanency as a concept, they need training and resources to guide them in their daily practice. Additionally, staff turnover requires that the skills of an agency in this arena remain fresh. For example, some social workers would like further exploration of subtle issues such as how best to discuss permanency with youth, how to actively engage youth and other key participants in permanency team meetings, and how to keep permanency goals in sight when facing heavy caseloads or a crisis mentality. Counties are creating specialized trainings, on their own or in conjunction with local training academies, which respond to the particular needs and concerns of their caseworkers. Supervisors are also working more closely with workers to review cases, discuss case planning and establish clear steps to achieve permanency for each youth.

Sustainability of Permanency Efforts is Impacted by Funding and Staffing Dynamics. Most CC25I Counties noted that their efforts to maintain or expand permanency strategies have been affected by staff changes and funding levels, and that this could be a challenge to sustaining permanency work in the future. San Francisco County already foresees that continuing activities such as family finding will be difficult once state funding expires because there is limited staffing capacity within the child welfare agency to take on the work currently done by contracted community partners. Because permanency resources such as family finding are limited, some counties find it difficult to balance the permanency and family-finding needs of youth close to emancipating from foster care against efforts to identify permanent placement options for newly-placed foster youth. One strategy being utilized by Fresno County to prevent the slowdown that can result from staff turnover or over reliance on a single permanency specialist is to create a number of "permanency champions" by recruiting all department managers and supervisors into trainings that focus on permanency, family finding and engagement.

Need for Ongoing Support for Youth and Adult Lifelong Connections, and for Emancipated Youth with no Lifelong Connection. CC25I counties have commented that in addition to locating family members, child welfare agencies must provide follow up support to facilitate the development of lifelong connections, including assessment and engagement of those family members, as well as support for the youth involved. Furthermore, once

relationships are established between youth and their connections, agencies must make a greater effort to support and maintain them. Stanislaus County is emphasizing better communication with caregivers and permanent connections and linking permanency efforts to other programs being offered to transitioning youth – such as the My Home Transitional Housing program that provides subsidies for foster youth to reside with permanent connections post emancipation. The Stanislaus County Aftercare program also provides a weekly social event (Pizza Night) which provides a family-like gathering for many emancipated youth, particularly those who left care without having established any lifelong connections. Santa Clara County is tying efforts to support all aspects of permanency and concurrent planning, for all children in care as well as those close to emancipation, into their System Improvement Plan for 2009-2012.

4d. Future CC25I Permanency Objectives

In their fourth year of CC25I funding, the counties will continue to implement strategies that work toward permanent outcomes for foster youth. Their efforts to sustain or take to scale throughout their agencies the various permanency strategies will certainly be impacted by the current economic climate, which is driving cuts in staffing and program budgets. Planned activities reflect an increasing reliance on close collaboration with other public agencies, community partners, youth, caregivers and families to keep these efforts moving forward. This section provides a brief summary of each county's permanency benchmarks for year four of CC25I implementation.

Fresno County

While formal technical assistance through CPYP has concluded, Fresno County DCFS will continue with many of its permanency efforts including monthly Permanency Taskforce meetings (Family Connections Taskforce), the Heart Gallery, the LGBTQ Taskforce, and interagency collaboration on events and efforts that advance permanency outcomes for foster youth. The Independent Living Skills Program will continue contributing to the family finding process; two ILSP program staff will actively search for family members on behalf of all youth referred to ILSP as part of their weekly assignment.

San Francisco County

San Francisco County HSA will continue its important case review and family finding initiatives with Family Builders and Seneca Center. To further advance the County's permanency work, a San Francisco County Permanency Guide (based on the Alameda County Guide) has been created; it remains to be finalized, printed (in both English and Spanish) and distributed by Family Builders. The Guide will offer information on permanency options and practices for a variety of audiences including child welfare staff, care providers (including group homes and foster family agencies), other community and public agencies serving youth (including the courts and mental health staff), and foster youth themselves. The Permanency Workgroup will continue to work on priority issues such as working more with practices that address grief and loss among youth (and pave the way for permanency efforts); increasing emphasis on front-end (and middle) efforts at permanency and concurrent planning; and further collaboration with the courts to strengthen inter-agency understanding and reduce barriers to achieving permanency for foster youth.

HSA is in the process of creating a Permanency Review Committee to support permanency planning during family reunification. HSA will also continue its work with the San Francisco County ILSP to further integrate permanency practice within efforts to prepare older youth for the transition to independent living. Finally, the recently formed Youth Advisory Board will provide current and former foster youth an opportunity to provide feedback on the County's permanency efforts.

Santa Clara County

Santa Clara County DFCS will engage in family finding efforts on behalf of a second cohort of 40 youth once a more thorough evaluation has been completed for the first cohort. Already recognized is the need to develop better tracking of family finding efforts and results, as well as the need for policies and procedures to guide the family

finding efforts of social workers. Emphasis is now placed on front-end family finding efforts – both to aid in relative placements and to establish lifelong connections for youth. This work is being integrated with the 2009-2010 Systems Improvement Plan for Santa Clara County, which includes efforts to establish permanency and concurrent planning processes throughout the child welfare agency. The County also plans to provide permanency and youth resiliency training for all child welfare staff. It will hire two young adults that emancipated from foster care to assist the Family Finding Unit with its efforts to establish permanency and lifelong connections for foster youth.

Stanislaus County

In the coming year, Stanislaus County CSA will further strengthen their existing permanency practices throughout the child welfare agency. Mental health clinicians will continue to participate in all Team Decision Meetings and Connected for Life Meetings, providing advocacy and support for youth 14 to 19 years of age. Within the ILSP, work will continue to integrate permanency and lifelong connections efforts into ILSP classes and the home-based ILSP curriculum that is being developed. To increase the engagement of youth in program and policy development, members of the Youth Advisory Council will engage in leadership trainings.