



# There's No Place Like Home:

*A Guide to Permanency Options for Foster Youth*

A Publication of the Sacramento County  
Ruby Slippers Project

**The Ruby Slippers Project** is a collaboration between Sacramento County Child Protective Services and the California Permanency for Youth Project, a nonprofit organization dedicated to assuring that no youth will leave the California child welfare system without a permanent, lifelong connection to a caring adult. This guide is one of the initiative's first projects.



# Table of Contents

Introduction . . . . .	5
Definition of Youth Permanency . . . . .	6
Youth Permanence Talking Points . . . . .	7
30 Things A Permanent Connection Can Mean . . . . .	8
Youth Involvement in Planning for Permanency . . . . .	8
Youth Involvement in Case Planning, Court Hearings, and Administrative Reviews. . . . .	9
Reconsidering Reunification . . . . .	10
Considering Adoption . . . . .	11
Top 15 Reasons to Adopt A Teenager . . . . .	12
Considering Legal Guardianship . . . . .	13
Understanding Long Term Foster Care. . . . .	14
Resources for Youth Assistance: Sacramento Independent Living Program (ILP) and Getting Ready for Emancipation <b>Special tear-out page!</b> . . . . .	15-16
Frequently Asked Questions Regarding ILP and Financial Assistance for Higher Education . . . . .	17
Chart 1: A Comparison of Financial Benefits . . . . .	20-23
Funding Sources . . . . .	24
Chart 2: A Comparison of Legal and Psychosocial Factors . . . . .	25-30
Acknowledgements . . . . .	31



## About This Guide

4

The original Alameda County “Guide to Permanency Options for Youth” was supported by a grant from the California Permanency for Youth Project, funded by the Stuart Foundation. Sacramento County foster youth leaders Jonathan Pearson and Tiffany Hagler adapted this publication for use in Sacramento County.

This guide has been designed to serve as a tool for many audiences, including:

**Resource families, foster family agency staff and families, group home providers and other concerned individuals that care about the plight of youth in foster care** to provide information as well as to serve as a tool in considering permanency options;

**Youth in foster care** to provide information as they consider different permanency options;

**Child welfare staff** to assist in their work with youth and families; and

**Community partners and agencies serving youth and families in foster care** to inform them about the needs and options to be considered regarding permanency for youth.

# Introduction

Foster care was designed to be temporary and to provide care and shelter for children living in dangerous situations while their families received services toward the goal of reunification. However, hundreds of thousands of children and youth find themselves growing up in foster care, without permanent families or lifelong connections.

Some children living in foster care change homes multiple times and many remain in the foster care system until they reach age 18 and are no longer eligible for foster care aid, a process known as “aging out.” Many will have attended a variety of schools and received a spotty education. They have no consistent group of people to call friends and family, and have lost contact with those important to them. In short, they lack permanence in their lives.

Every year in California, approximately 4,000 children leave foster care without family to help them transition to adulthood. Lacking the social, emotional, and financial support families typically offer to young adults, many former foster youth find themselves alone during this important period in their lives. Many face serious challenges. Unable to overcome these challenges on their own, these youth are over-represented in the populations of young adults who are homeless. A disproportionate number of former foster youth become incarcerated, face early pregnancy, are poorly educated, or lack skills for employment and self-sufficiency.

**“So long as little children are allowed to suffer, there is no true love in the world.”**

**– Isadora Duncan**

**“Youth permanency to me means someone that won’t just be there for the moment, but is there for the long-term and will stick by my side regardless of what’s going on.”**

**– A Sacramento County Foster Youth**

The fundamental role of foster care is being re-examined to improve outcomes for children and families. All children are entitled to permanency, and the child welfare system is obligated to ensure this. Through our work with the California Permanency for Youth Project, we have expanded our vision of permanency for children and youth.

Sacramento County Department of Health and Human Services has made a commitment toward the following goal:

**No child leaves foster care without a lifelong connection to a caring adult.**

If youth are not able to return to their parent’s care, we must make every effort to identify adults to provide permanent connections that support the youth throughout his or her life.

We must acknowledge that for some youth, their families of origin remain their primary connection, despite their placement in foster care. Family problems that led to foster care may not be as serious as a child gets older and more independent. Circumstances need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, and family reunification needs to be explored regularly for all children placed in out-of-home care.

A permanent connection for a youth may not necessarily be legal or relational. For some youth, a committed relationship with an

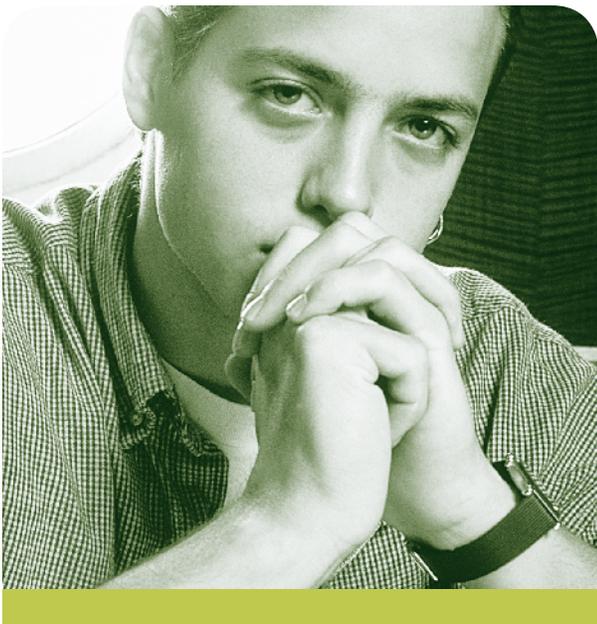
adult may be most important. It may or may not include living in that person's home. A permanent connection may result in a plan of adoption or legal guardianship.

While legal arrangements represent a higher level of commitment, not all youth feel this is necessary. Some have a negative or limited understanding of adoption or guardianship, which may have not been discussed. In some cases, a connection and a relationship may be identified, built and supported while the youth remains with a foster family or relative.

All options must be understood and explored. Families and youth need tools to begin this exploration.

Different situations require different solutions. Creativity and flexibility are important when thinking about the needs of the children and youth we serve. Youth need to understand permanency, and be supported to identify what a permanent lifelong connection means to them. Youth need to be actively involved in planning for their futures. They need to be engaged in the permanency planning process to help ensure that they do not leave foster care without a lifelong permanent connection.

6



## Definition of Youth Permanency

The California Permanency for Youth Task Force has defined Youth Permanency as follows:

“Family permanency is both a process and a result that includes involvement of the youth as a participant or leader in finding a permanent connection with at least one committed adult, who provides:

- A safe, stable and secure parenting relationship
- Love
- Unconditional commitment
- Lifelong support in the context of reunification, a legal adoption, or guardianship, where possible; and,
- The youth has the opportunity to maintain contact with important persons, including brothers and sisters.”

Youth have an array of individualized permanency options from which to choose. Reunification and adoption are important but they are two among many that may be appropriate.

As society recognizes the urgent need for youth in foster care to have permanent, lifelong connections to caring adults, the need for training and education has become crucial. Traditionally, permanency was only considered an option for young children. Sacramento County is challenging this belief. This guide was developed as a tool toward helping all youth achieve permanency.

Every child has a right to have a permanent lifelong connection!

# Youth Permanence Talking Points

The Youth Permanence Talking Points below can be used for any training or discussion about youth and permanency. We offer these to you in the hope that someday these points will be common knowledge.

- Every youth must have life-long permanent connections.
- Permanency is a state of mind, not a placement.
- Permanency, especially for youth nearing adulthood, needs to include a range of options. All connections that serve to anchor a youth are important and need to be strengthened.
- For youth unable to reunify, adoption remains the preferred option, but not the only option.
- A youth must be actively engaged in developing his or her permanency, and we must base plans on the youth's best interest.
- The permanency process recognizes, respects, and values the strengths and goals of the youth while acknowledging those who have been significant in the youth's life.
- Being connected with a family or significant adult(s) is important in emancipation and healthy functioning in the community.
- Connections solidify the youth's identity and clarify personal history.
- Concurrent planning for youth maximizes the potential for permanence and successful transition into adulthood.
- Legally terminating parental rights does not sever the emotional bond that a youth has with his/her family.
- Cooperative partnerships between youth, social workers, families, agencies, and the larger community optimize the best outcomes.
- All partners must identify and take action to eliminate system barriers within their sphere of influence that prevent permanency for youth.

**“The system can better engage youth by making us more involved in our case planning and court hearings. They should connect us with people who want to be involved in our lives from the past so we can help find our own permanence.”**

**– A Former Sacramento County Foster Youth**

## 30 Things a Permanent Connection Can Mean

1. Lifelong Relationship
2. Family
3. Friendship
4. Unconditional Love
5. Ongoing Support
6. Extended Family-Like Relationship
7. Knowing That Someone Cares
8. Continuity
9. Someone To Go Home To
10. Sharing Life's Ups and Downs
11. Someone To Call On In Times Of Crisis
12. Someone To Call "Just Because"
13. Being There
14. Defining Family Together
15. Sharing Holidays
16. Celebrating Special Times Together
17. Someone To Check In With Regularly
18. Shared History
19. Assistance Around Major Decisions
20. Growing And Changing Together
21. Being Accepted No Matter What
22. Someone To Trust
23. Having Someone To Stand By You
24. Knowing Someone Is Proud Of Your Accomplishments
25. Knowing That You Are Not Alone
26. Feeling Complete
27. Having A Safe Haven
28. Being A Part Of Something
29. Feeling Free To Be Yourself
30. Having Positive Role Models

## Youth Involvement in Planning For Permanence

Youth in foster care must be actively involved in planning for their future and engaged in the permanency planning process. By being involved, youth can help ensure that they do not leave foster care without a permanent lifelong connection.

By talking with social workers and caregivers, youth must be allowed to define what permanency means to them. Youth should be active participants, and may even lead the planning process so that they establish a permanent, lifelong connection with at least one committed adult before they exit foster care.

Exploring options for permanence must include an in-depth discussion with the youth. Working towards permanence may focus on the youth's current caregivers or it may lead to reassessing family reunification. The exploration may lead to the youth establishing relationships with extended family members.

Efforts may also lead to building relationships with adults in the youth's community. Youth may identify important adults from their past or adults who are now part of their life.

Active recruitment begins when current or past connections don't yield results and the youth agrees to recruitment efforts. Recruitment efforts may include outreach to the general public, be targeted to a specific community, or be "child specific" based on the specific needs, desires, and interests of the youth.