California Permanency for Youth Project

Project Evaluation
June 1, 2008

I. CHALLENGES FACED BY EMANCIPATING FOSTER YOUTH

Each year approximately 4000 youth emancipate from California's child welfare system.[1] These are youth that did not leave the system through a reunification with their birth family, or through an adoption or guardianship with a *new* family, but are released from the system (usually at the age of 18) to fend for themselves. It's naive to think that the typical emancipating foster youth, usually without a home or a job, can transition successfully to an independent life without any additional support or guidance. In fact, research shows that even children that had all of the advantages of growing up with their birth family did not obtain financial independence until well into their 20's. One study, looking at the cost of raising children, found that nearly one-fourth of the entire cost of raising children is incurred *after* the youth reached the age of 17. Furthermore, most young adults receive financial assistance from their parents into their early 20's and forty percent still receive some assistance in their late 20's.[2]

Of course the emotional support provided by parents to these young adults, though much more difficult to quantify, is more important. In most cases young adults who don't enter out-of-home care know they have a support system and "safety net" if they encounter a problem during their transition to independence. In too many cases, emancipated foster youth have no such support. All foster youth have experienced significant emotional trauma. They typically enter the system because of abuse or neglect and ties to family and extended family are often severed. Those unfortunate enough to remain in out-of-home care for an extended period of time often struggle with the additional emotional trauma associated with moving from placement to placement during their time in the foster care system. When one also considers that foster youth generally lag behind similar-aged youth in their education, it should come as no surprise that these young adults struggle once they leave the system.

Research on emancipated foster youth has shown that between one and four years after exiting foster care:

- Few had entered college and more than a third had not completed high school.
- Approximately one-fourth had lived on the streets or in shelters at some point.
- Approximately half were not employed.
- Nearly half had problems getting medical care most or all of the time.
- Close to a third were receiving some form of public assistance.
- Over 40% had been pregnant or fathered a child.
- Approximately a quarter had spent some time in jail.[3]

It's probably safe to say that most child welfare professionals would agree that a permanent connection to a caring adult (either through reunification, adoption, guardianship, or a less formal relationship) would benefit youth as they leave the foster care system. Why then, don't caseworkers focus on finding permanent connections for older foster youth? There are several reasons:

- Since there is a dearth of data on youth after they leave care, many workers probably don't know the magnitude of the challenges facing emancipated youth.

- Workers have traditionally focused on issues confronting youth while they are still in care (and under the worker's "jurisdiction"). Thinking about what will happen to the youth *after leaving care* requires the worker to broaden their vision of their role in the youth's life.

- When a child is taken from their birth family and the county makes the determination that the home environment is not appropriate, workers often don't reconsider a reunification, even if with the passage of time the original problem may no longer exist, or if the placement might be viable with additional support.

- Some workers view older foster youth as "unadoptable." (Of course, this is a self-fulfilling prophecy: If the worker doesn't think the youth can be adopted, s/he won't put forth much effort to find an adoptive home, and consequently the youth won't be adopted.) In one study 67% of workers either did not believe or were not sure if the longest waiting youth on their caseloads were adoptable.[4]

- Many workers lack the skills necessary to find and develop permanent relationships for older foster youth.

- When an older youth states that they don't want to be adopted, they are often expressing a fear of the unknown and the normal desire teenagers have for independence. Furthermore many of these youth have been disappointed many times (by multiple failed placements) and it is understandable that they want to protect themselves from being hurt again. A properly trained worker will help the youth work through their grief and loss issues and will counsel the youth to be open to new relationships. The caseworker will not stop permanency efforts due to statements made by the youth. One study showed that 41% of emancipated foster youth wished that they would have been adopted, even though they might not have expressed this wish at the time that they were in the system.[5]

- Some county policies and practices discourage permanency for older youth, as do some state laws.

II. THE CALIFORNIA PERMANENCY FOR YOUTH PROJECT (CPYP)

CPYP works with county administrators and staff to both change belief systems (show child welfare professionals that it is possible to find permanence for older foster youth) and to teach them the skills necessary to do the work. CPYP began working with four pilot California counties in January 2003 (Alameda, Monterey, San Mateo and Stanislaus). After refining the project based upon lessons learned in these four counties, in early 2006 CPYP began working with ten new counties: Contra Costa, Fresno, Humboldt, Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, and Sonoma (the "project counties"). The information included in this report pertains to the work with these ten project counties throughout 2006, 2007, and early 2008.

It should be noted that the project counties were selected based upon their organizational readiness for the project and their enthusiasm for confronting this issue. County leadership staff were eager to learn new ways to find permanent connections for older youth. (As mentioned above, resistance to the work usually is due to a perception that the work isn't possible or practical, not that it isn't desirable.) Through technical assistance, training, and support services CPYP educated child welfare professionals about the urgent need for permanency for older foster youth and taught the caseworkers the skills necessary to find and strengthen permanent connections for the youth in their care.

III. DESCRIPTION OF TARGET YOUTH AND STUDY GROUP

The ten project counties were given significant latitude in deciding how to select their target youth and how many youth to include in each county's pilot phase. All of the counties focused on older youth (those at least 11 years old) and most considered criteria such as the length of time in care, the number of placement changes, current placement, etc. In the end, each county identified the youth most in need of the services offered by the project. Fresno County considered "all children for whom there was not a permanent connection." Orange County selected youth who "have little or no connections to important adults in their lives (and were) preparing to emancipate with no known family connection." While Contra Costa focused "on youth who had few connections with adults that could be maintained past their exit from the system."

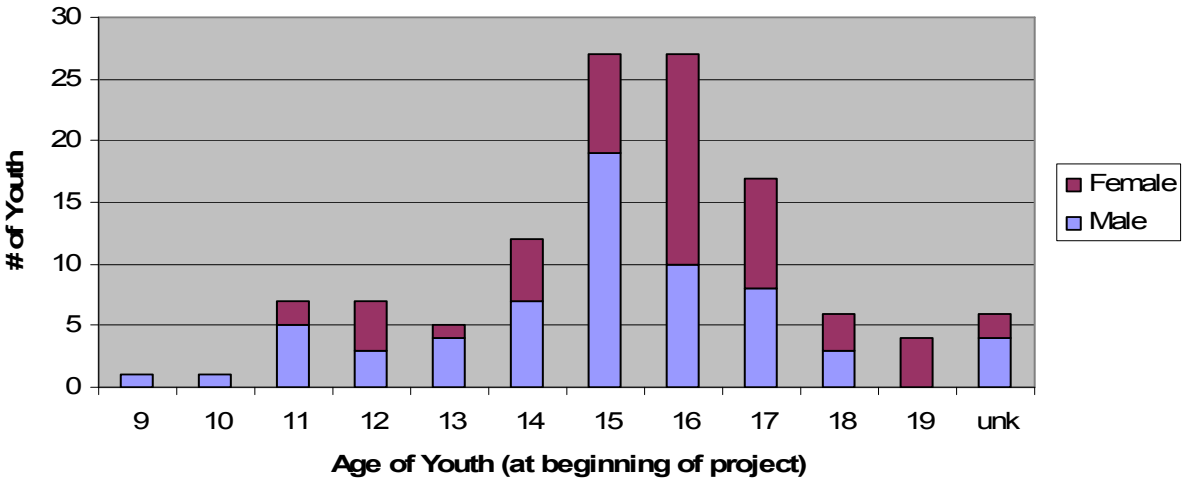
Once they had determined their target youth population, each of the ten counties was asked to identify twelve youth to be tracked in the evaluation. Counties were asked to select youth for the study that were representative of the larger target group population. Information was gathered on these one hundred and twenty youth (the "Study Group") through the collection of Intake forms (see Exhibit "A"), Progress Reports collected every four months (Exhibit "B") and a Final Survey (Exhibit "C"). An Intake form (at the beginning of the project) and a Final Survey (at the end) were collected on all one hundred and twenty youth and Progress Reports were requested on each youth in October 2006, February 2007, June 2007 and October 2007. Response rates on the progress reports remained high throughout the project (averaging 90% over the four reporting periods). Sometimes the caseworkers filled out the data collection forms and in other

instances either a supervisor or support staff person collected and provided the information. Since the original source of the data was typically the youth's assigned caseworker, in this report all responses pertaining to the Study Group youth are said to come from the "caseworker" or the "worker" regardless of who actually gave us the data. It also should be noted that information provided to us and described in this report has been taken at face value. In most cases there was no way to double check on or verify the veracity of the information provided and much of the descriptive and outcome data is based solely upon caseworker responses. Furthermore, due to a high amount of caseworker turnover, in some instances the caseworker who completed the Final Survey was not the same caseworker who received CPYP training and worked with the youth earlier in the project.

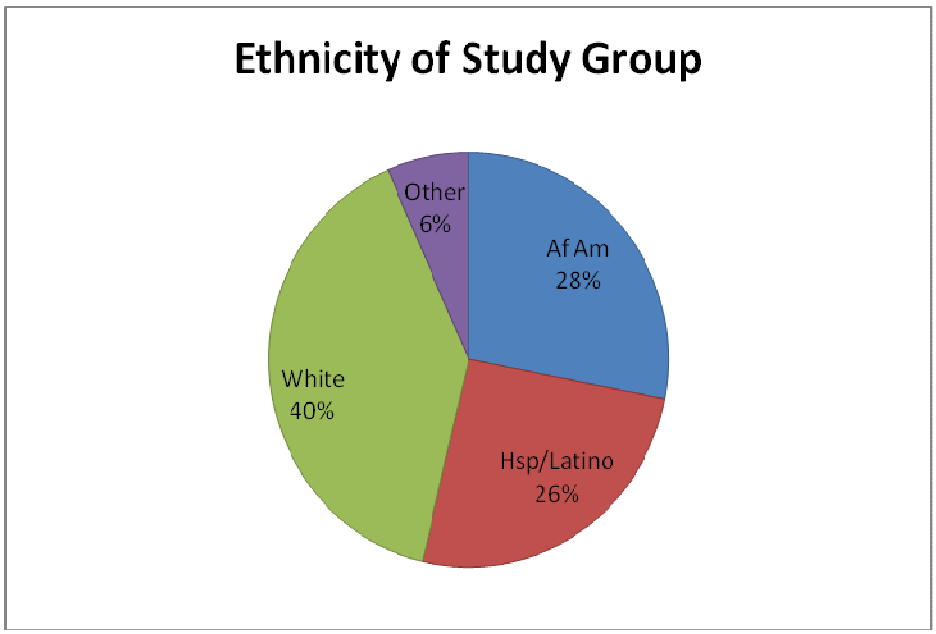
An effort was made in the evaluation to achieve a higher level of validity for the answer to whether or not a permanent connection had been achieved for each of the Study Group youth by using an "Intent to Maintain Contact" form, however this effort had to be abandoned mid-project. This document, which had successfully been used by a CPYP consultant in another project, was intended to be filled out by the "connecting" adult. On the form the adult would describe their relationship with the youth and sign the form to acknowledge that a permanent connection exists. Though the very brief form was non-binding, and the caseworkers were trained on how to use it, many caseworkers were reluctant to ask the adult to complete it (even when the permanent connection was obvious to all parties). The requirement for the form was eventually dropped due to a lack of usage and this report therefore relies on the supervisors and caseworkers to indicate whether or not a permanent connection exists for each project youth.

Demographics of Study Group Youth

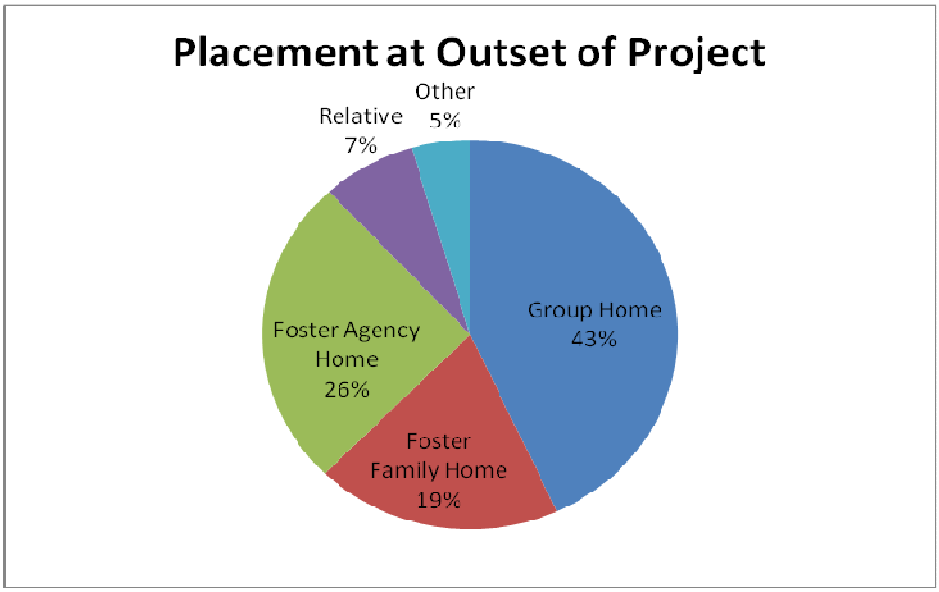
The chart below shows the age (at the beginning of the project) and gender breakdown of the sixty-five males and fifty-five females in the Study Group.



The following chart indicates the ethnic breakdown of the Study Group youth. Some of the youth have mixed ethnicities and fall under more than one category.



The chart below shows the placement type for the Study Group at the beginning of the project.



Placement History & Data: The Study Group youth entered out-of-home care for the first time at an average age of eight years old and experienced, on average, approximately eight different placements. Both of these statistics varied considerably among the ten project counties. Fresno's youth entered care at the earliest average age (three) versus Orange County's youth who entered care on average as eleven year olds. Contra Costa's youth averaged less than five placement changes, while Fresno's youth moved from placement to placement, on average, more than thirteen times.

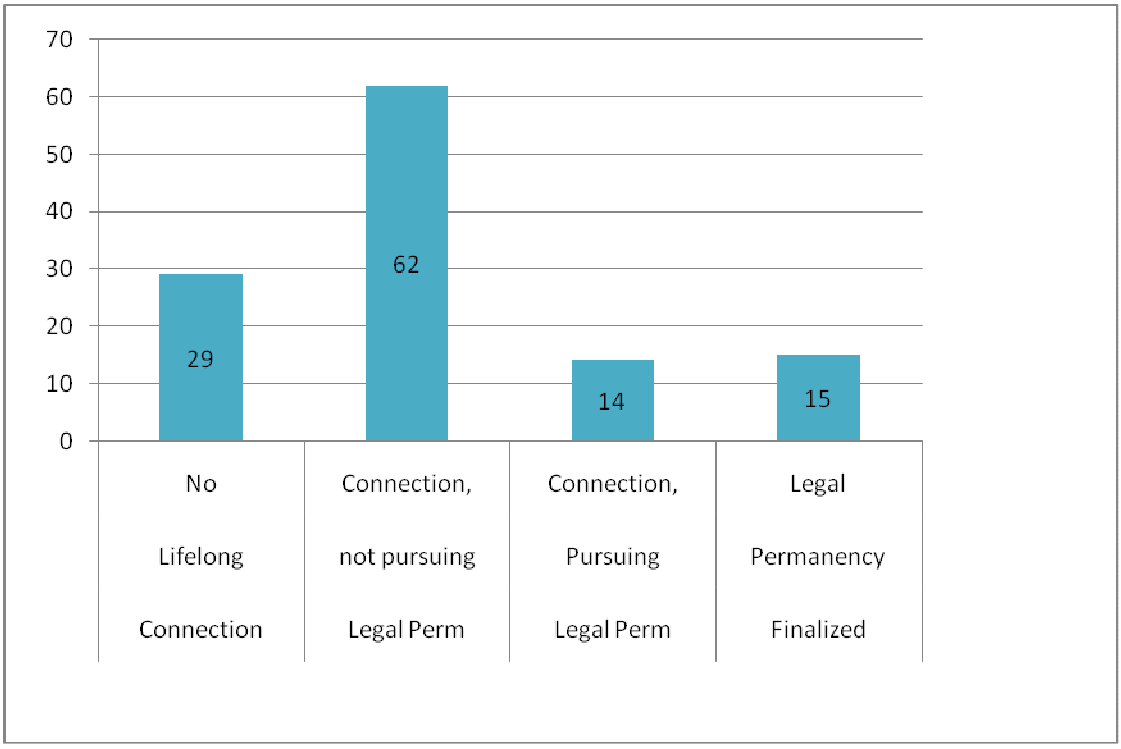
IV. OUTCOMES FOR STUDY GROUP YOUTH

On the Final Survey caseworkers described the outcome for each of the Study Group youth by selecting the choice below that best represented the status of the youth (at the end of the project) with regards to forming a lifelong connection to a caring adult:

- This youth has not yet formed a permanent connection to a caring adult or left the project (emancipated, transferred, moved from the county, etc.) prior to a connection being formed – this selection is appropriate when the youth either *does* or *does not* have a *potential* permanent connection
- This youth did form a permanent connection to a caring adult however reunification/ adoption/ guardianship is not being (or was not) sought
- This youth did form a permanent connection to a caring adult and is pursuing reunification, adoption or a guardianship
- Reunification/adoption/guardianship has been finalized

Caseworkers that indicate that a permanent connection had been established are then asked to describe the relationship and to provide any statements made (and/or actions taken) by the youth and/or adult that confirms that the connection exists.

Success Rate and Project Impact



As shown above, out of the one hundred and twenty youth in the Study Group, caseworkers reported that fifteen achieved legal permanency (including two adoptions, ten reunifications, and three guardianships), fourteen were pursuing some form of legal permanency at the end of the project, and sixty-two had formed a permanent connection but were not pursuing legal permanency. Therefore, by the end of the project, ninety-one youth (76%) had formed a permanent connection to a caring adult and lifelong connections had not yet been established for twenty-nine (24%) of the youth.

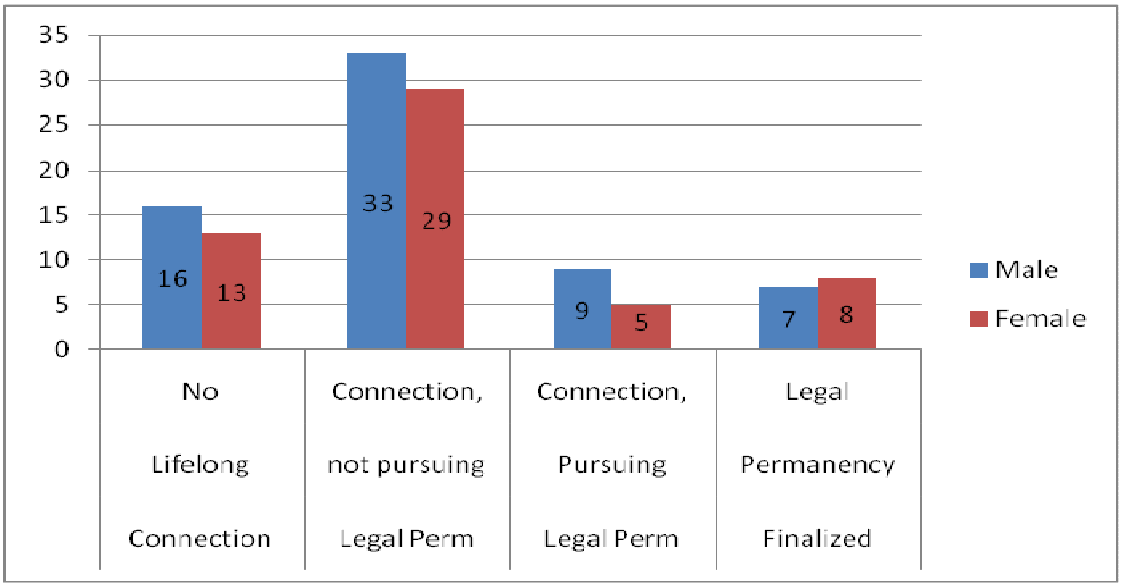
Since, within the scope of this evaluation, we were unable to use an experimental design (with a control group) and statistically "prove" the project's impact, we asked the caseworkers for the ninety-one youth who successfully formed a permanent connection if the connection occurred *because of* their work with CPYP. The caseworkers on fifty-eight of the cases (64%) responded that "yes, it probably occurred because of our work with CPYP," and workers on the remaining thirty-three cases (36%) indicated that the connection "probably would have occurred anyway." (It should be noted that some of the responding caseworkers were assigned to the project youth in the final months of the project and might have been unaware of the extent that CPYP contributed to establishing permanent connections for their youth.) Twenty-four of the thirty-three instances (73%) of the caseworker responding that the permanent connection "probably would have occurred anyway" were from cases in just three counties: Contra Costa (7 cases), Sacramento (10), and San Francisco (7). No other county had more than two such cases.

Caseworkers that indicated that a permanent connection had been achieved, but that they were not pursuing legal permanency (the most prevalent response) were asked to "explain why a reunification/adoption/guardianship is not being sought in this case?" The most common response was that the youth wasn't interested or that since the youth would be eighteen and emancipating soon, it wasn't "necessary" or it was "too late." In many cases the "too late" explanation appeared to be the

A seventeen year old girl entered the system when she was twelve. She experienced nine placements. Her mother died in 2005 and according to her worker her relationship with her father (prior to the project) was "non-existent." By following up on an old phone number in the case file, the caseworker was able to locate the father and all of his family. The caseworker noted that "CPYP training helped to open my mind to the possibilities of contacting dad and helped me to view it as a positive instead of looking at it as opening a can of worms." The father/daughter relationship blossomed.
Through the project the youth established permanent connections with her father as well as with an aunt and uncle, though decided against pursuing legal permanency.
According to the caseworker "the child is 18 and has no interest in moving out of state (to live) with dad . . . though she chooses not to live with them, she has voiced that she now has people that she can count on and turn to in the event of an emergency . . . she knows that they are her safety net once she emancipates. The father has voiced that he wished his daughter would live with him, but also that he will support her in any way that she needs. The aunt and uncle have voiced to me that they care for the child and will provide whatever support she needs, including getting her a job with her uncle."

attitude of both the caseworker and the youth. Some of the caseworkers indicated that the youth wasn't interested in a change in legal permanence because of their strong emotional ties to their birth parents. In one case, according to the caseworker, the youth felt a change of legal permanence would be disloyal to her deceased mother. One typical caseworker response on this question was "the child will be eighteen soon and has stated that she is not interested in reunification, adoption, or guardianship with anyone. She has said that she wants to be "free" but will keep in contact with her . . . identified permanent connections."

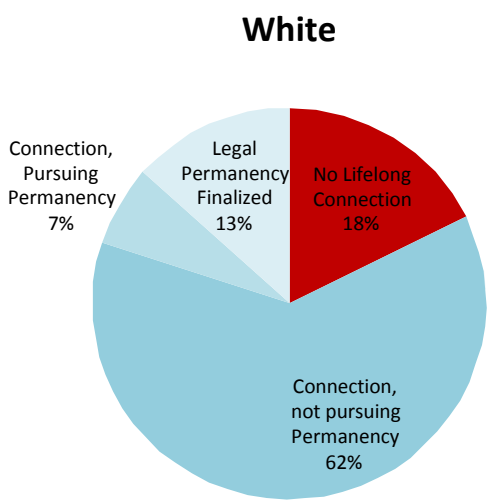
Success Rate by Gender

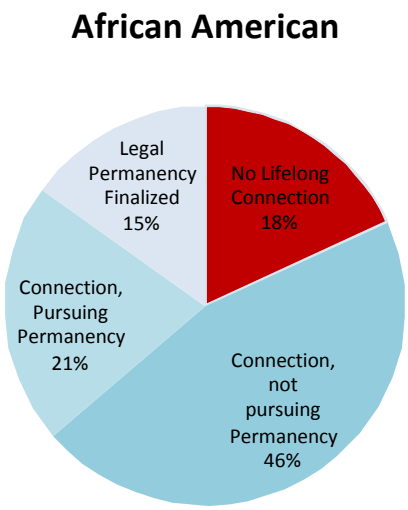


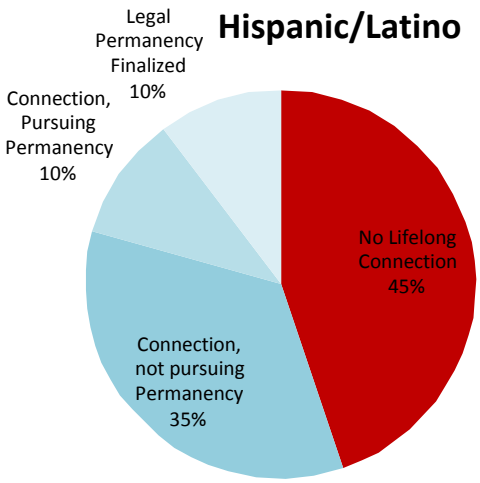
The project was equally successful with males and females. As shown above, forty-nine of the sixty-five males in the project (75%) and forty-two of the fifty-five females (76%) ended the project with a permanent connection. Furthermore, thirteen females (24%) either have finalized or are pursuing legal permanency compared to sixteen of the males (25%), while twenty-nine females (53%) and thirty-three males (51%) have a permanent connection but are not pursuing legal permanency.

Success Rate by Ethnicity

In the charts below the blue shaded areas represent youth that have formed a permanent connection and the red area is for youth that ended the project without a permanent connection. Project caseworkers had equal levels of success working with the forty-five White and thirty-three African American youth, finding and establishing connections for 82% of the youth. The project had a much lower level of success attempting to establish connections for the twenty-nine Hispanic/Latino youth in the Study Group, with a success rate of 55%. (The difference in success rate for the caseworkers working with Hispanic/Latino youth is statistically significant at $p < .01$.)







As there was no way to anticipate this finding, data was not collected specifically to address the question of why the project might be more or less successful with a particular ethnicity, however andectodal comments made by the caseworkers who were unsuccessful in finding permanent connections for Hispanic/Latino youth might shed some light on this issue. One caseworker stated "youth would like to meet her father, however, he is undocumented and searching for him has been a challenge," while another said "mother is estranged from her family in Mexico" and a third worker mentioned that permanency efforts might have been hindered by a "language barrier" and that the youth was from a small community that didn't provide any family history information and was "reluctant to get involved."

Strengthening Sibling Connections

When youth enter the foster care system they often lose contact with their brothers and sisters, who might or might not enter care simultaneously, and may or may not end up in the same placement. Connecting (or reconnecting) a youth to a sibling not only provides the youth with a supportive person for the future, but also with a connection to the youth's past. For a youth transitioning to adulthood and independence while possibly struggling with identity issues, a relationship with a brother or sister can be extremely important. Though the focus of the project was to either establish legal permanency for the youth or to at least locate a "parent-like" figure with whom the youth could have a life-long relationship, strengthening the youth's sibling connections was also an area of emphasis. In an attempt to assess the project's impact on sibling connections, caseworkers were asked if the Study Group youth "strengthened his/her relationship with one or more sibling(s) *because of the youth's involvement in the project?"* The caseworkers indicated that sibling connections were strengthened because of the project for fifty-six (47%) of the Study Group youth. It should be noted that many of these sibling connections were situations in which the project youth was meeting his/her siblings for the first time. In one case, a youth who first entered foster care when she was an infant located her twin brother through the project and the twin informed her about other siblings that she didn't even know existed.

A sixteen year old boy entered care when he was eleven and had spent the last three years in group homes. His mother was not a viable placement option and his father had passed away ten years ago. In mid-2007 the youth identified the caretaker of a friend as a potential permanent connection. After several visits the youth moved into this placement supported by WRAP services. According to the caseworker, the youth feels "he has been able to establish the mother/child relationship that he has desired for a long time." The youth will be eighteen later this year and is not interested in pursuing legal permanency. By contacting the funeral home listed on the youth's father's death certificate the caseworker was able to locate the youth's father's companion's ex-daughter-in-law, who eventually led the worker to the father's companion. It turns out that his father's companion lives only an hour away and the youth has a half brother and half sister he never knew about. He now visits with his half siblings regularly.

People Supporting Study Group Youth

We asked the workers how many connections each youth had when s/he entered the CPYP project and how many the youth had at the conclusion of the project. "Connections" in this context are people who have indicated an interest in having contact with the youth or have indicated they will somehow assist the youth achieve permanence; in most cases these would not be considered *permanent* connections. The responses indicate that the number of connections has increased for each youth in the project (on

average) from just over three people (3.2) to over nine people (9.2). The data broken down by-county is as follows:

	CCC	Fresno	Hmbl	Kern	LA	Orange	Sac	SF	SLO	Sonoma
Beginning	2.4	3.2	2.9	3.9	3.5	3.0	1.8	1.9	4.4	4.8
End	3.5	8.4	12.9	13.9	13.3	8.3	3.4	3.3	8.8	14.3

Analysis of Unconnected Study Group Youth

As mentioned above, twenty-nine of the Study Group youth ended the project without a permanent connection to a caring adult. Caseworkers indicated that twenty of these youth (69%), at the conclusion of the project, had a *potential* permanent connection, while nine of the youth (31%) did not have a potential connection. It should be noted that sibling connections were strengthened for eleven youth (38%) that didn't form a permanent connection.

For the twenty-nine youth that didn't form a permanent connection, caseworkers were asked to identify factors that contributed to their lack of success on behalf of these youth. Caseworkers identified the following reasons to explain their lack of success from the choices offered on the Final Survey form. Some of these issues will be discussed in the "Challenges" and "Lessons Learned" sections below. (Caseworkers were free to choose multiple factors and the total number of responses therefore exceeds the number of youth that didn't form a permanent connection.)

Why Connections Were Not Formed for Study Group Youth — No. of Responses

The youth was/is unwilling to pursue a permanent connection 8

There were a lack of resources to support a permanent connection 0

I encountered other barriers to the permanency efforts I was pursuing 13

I was not able to spend sufficient time on permanency work due to my high workload and other responsibilities 10

The youth left the project (transferred to probation, moved from the county, etc.) before a connection was formed 10

The youth was willing, and I did the work, however we were not able to find a connection for this youth 4

County Breakdown of Study Group Connection Data & Sibling Connection Data

The chart below shows the outcomes as reported by the caseworkers for the twelve Study Group youth in each county. The two columns on the right show whether or not the worker indicated if the permanent connection or strengthening of a sibling connection occurred *because of* the project.

	Permanent Connection Achieved				Permanent Connection due to CPYP?	Strengthened Sibling Connection
	No Permanent Connection	not pursuing legal change	Pursuing legal change	Legal Change Finalized		
Contra Costa	0	9	3	0	5	3
Fresno	7	5	0	0	5	8
Humboldt	0	6	3	3	10	10
Kern	4	8	0	0	8	9
Los Angeles	5	2	2	3	6	5
Orange	1	3	1	7	9	8
Sacramento	1	7	2	2	1	2
San Francisco	3	8	1	0	2	2
San Luis Obispo	2	9	1	0	8	2
Sonoma	6	5	1	0	4	7
Totals	**29**	**62**	**14**	**15**	**58**	**56**

County Breakdown of All Youth Served January 2006 – December 2007

All of the above analysis pertains exclusively to the Study Group youth. Each county was free to implement the project with as many pilot youth as they deemed appropriate and then were encouraged to add additional youth in 2007. In the chart below, the "CPYP Pilot Youth" column includes both the Study Group youth and "additional" pilot youth. Most of these youth began receiving CPYP-related services in early-to-mid 2006. Most of the "2007 CPYP Youth" were added to the project in mid-2007 when counties implemented their Year Two plans (though some youth were added throughout 2007).

It should be noted that the "additional pilot group youth" (i.e. those not in the Study Group) as well as the 2007 CPYP youth were not tracked by the evaluation (with progress reports, etc.). Lists of these two groups were collected from the counties (at the outset of the project and in mid-2007, respectively) and then at the conclusion of the project counties were asked to indicate which of the youth had formed a permanent connection. During the project, CPYP staff held a number of meetings and conference

calls with county staff to discuss a variety of issues, one of which was to reach consensus on the definition of the term "permanent connection." Counties were asked to use the agreed-upon definition* to make their determination about whether or not each of the project youth had indeed formed a permanent connection.

COUNTY	CPYP Pilot Youth	Permanent Connections #	Permanent Connections %	2007 CPYP Youth	Permanent Connections #	Permanent Connections %	Total CPYP Youth	Permanent Connections #	Permanent Connections %
Contra Costa	13	13	100%	0	0	n/a	13	13	100%
Fresno	12	5	42%	12	3	25%	24	8	33%
Humboldt	16	16	100%	12	6	50%	28	22	79%
Kern	18	11	61%	6	4	67%	24	15	63%
Los Angeles	80	57	71%	140	77	55%	220	134	61%
Orange	51	33	65%	61	22	36%	112	55	49%
Sacramento	52	45	87%	0	0	n/a	52	45	87%
San Francisco	21	17	81%	5	2	40%	26	19	73%
San Luis Obispo	12	10	83%	12	5	42%	24	15	63%
Sonoma	18	10	56%	16	4	25%	34	14	41%
Totals:	293	217	74%	264	123	47%	557	340	61%

It's interesting to note that the overall success rate of the pilot group (74%) matches closely to that of the Study Group (76%), providing some support to the contention made by the counties that the Study Group was representative of the larger pilot group. It's not surprising that the success rate for the 2007 CPYP Youth (47%) falls short of the Pilot Group rate since many of the 2007 CPYP Youth had only been in the project for six to nine months at the time this data was collected.

Though all counties targeted older youth who they determined could benefit from the project, one should not consider these populations to be homogeneous. In fact, the Study Group populations (and one can assume the larger target populations) for each county

* **Permanent Connection:** ***An adult who consistently states and demonstrates that s/he has entered an unconditional life-long parent-like relationship with the youth. The youth agrees that the adult will play this role in his/her life.***

differ considerably in terms of gender, ethnicity, placement histories, etc. Furthermore the particular environmental factors within each county (i.e. staffing, implementation plans, funding, external factors, etc.) can significantly contribute to, or detract from, project success. Therefore, cross-county comparisons pertaining to success rates are extremely difficult to make. Some of the differences in the demographics of each county's Study Group and in each county's environmental factors are discussed below, in an effort to shed some light on the settings in which the different projects operated and to thereby contextualize the results somewhat.

V. CASEWORKER & SUPERVISOR INSIGHTS

The caseworkers and supervisors that were responsible for the family finding and engagement work for the Study Group youth are of course an important source for information about permanency work. They know better than anyone how permanent connections were formed for the Study Group youth, what challenges were encountered, and what lessons can be learned from working on this project. The information below is taken directly from the progress reports and final surveys completed by the caseworkers and supervisors. In the first section "Contributing Factors to Successful Outcomes" common themes have been developed from a review of the case histories of the ninety-one youth who successfully established a permanent connection. In the subsequent two sections, "Challenges," and "Lessons Learned," the information (on all Study Group youth) is presented as quotes from the caseworkers and supervisors who completed the reports.

Contributing Factors to Successful Outcomes

Youth-Driven: Probably the most common element among these ninety-one cases was that the youth is almost always at the center of successful permanency efforts. Caseworkers seem to indicate that the youth is the first and best source for leads, is the one who decides which potential connections are worth pursuing, sets the pace for the permanency efforts, and more-or-less is the one who determines when the work is done. One caseworker declared "getting the youth involved in achieving permanency is the key to making it work" and another suggests "ask youth questions – they know the most." Another pointed out that patience and persistence is sometimes needed. "Working with this youth was challenging in that she was very resistant at first, but through continued efforts and locating family and encouraging phone calls, she began to drop some of her resistance and helped with identifying the one permanent connection she has." When one youth was asked who he wanted to connect with, he said, "No one ever asked me what I wanted before," and he found it hard to believe that the permanency worker was really going to search for him.

Team Effort: Though there might be instances where the caseworker single-handedly found and established a permanent connection for a youth, the much more common (and practical) scenario involved a team of people included in the permanency effort. Each

county determined how best to divide up the permanency tasks and responsibilities (and the process often would change during the course of the project). The caseworker was often *not* the person who searched for and made initial contact with, potential connections. The caseworker often (though not always) was involved with engagement efforts and of course might arrange for, but did not provide, mental health, WRAP and/or support services that often accompanied successful outcomes. One worker commented:

> *It was very important to formulate a "permanency team" around this youth. This has helped the youth know who she can turn to for support and also helped those involved communicate better . . . . Family Decision Making staff, Permanency Placement staff, Court Appointed Special Advocates, group home staff, the therapist and other family helped in the permanency efforts for this youth. Everyone played an essential role in this youth's permanency journey.*

Keep an Open Mind/Think Outside the Box: Several caseworkers indicated that the turning point in finding a permanent connection was to consider (or reconsider) someone that they might have in the past ignored. One caseworker said the project "gave me a fresh outlook on who surrounds a child and may be willing to be the connection," while another stated "CPYP training helped me to consider and contact people that I never would have thought much about in the past." Likewise, a third caseworker declared "the training helped broaden my perspective in terms of exploring all possible connections no matter how farfetched they may seem." A number of caseworkers reconsidered people who had dropped out of the youth's life, like the caseworker who said "CPYP made me take a second look at mom and flesh out whether the circumstances that brought the child to the attention of the court had changed."

One seventeen year old young man entered the project after having experienced twenty-eight different placements. According to the worker he had "complex mental health needs" and "was being considered for conservatorship due to the numerous psychiatric hospitalizations in a two year period." An internet search located the youth's grandfather, who had been relocated because of the Katrina disaster. He had not seen his grandson since the child was a toddler. The worker stated "the wraparound team supported visits and ultimately brought the grandfather into the team . . . A psychologist assisted with connecting the child to mental health (at the grandfather's location) . . . the child's therapist worked with the child to prepare him for the transition . . . the psychologist along with the child's therapist and psychiatrist assisted in helping the youth qualify for SSI . . . the best part of the SSI is that it was transferable (to the new state) . . . (the child) was also taken to the state mental health clinic (in the new location) for his initial assessment so that he could continue to have mental health, psychiatric, and crisis intervention if needed." The worker stated that "slowly giving this child a somewhat normal existence is what brought him to where he is today. The reintegration into society and family turned his life around. The child did emancipate . . . and lives with his grandfather . . . he now understands the importance of taking his medication and even got himself a full time job."

Family Engagement and Grief and Loss Training: Many of the caseworkers indicated that guidance received in the project on how to engage family and potential connections as well as the 3-5-7 Model Training on how to prepare the youth for permanence were critical factors in their success. One worker stated "(the 3-5-7) training has given new hope that we can help this youth deal with her grief and loss to the point that she will be able to accept that she deserves permanency and a lifelong connection." Another caseworker, after pointing out that the youth's therapist had attended the 3-5-7 Model Training stated "the therapist has played a key role in helping the youth understand her role in family, sibling, and peer relationships." Other typical comments included: "CPYP provided techniques to engage the family;" "CPYP provided techniques to locate and contact relatives that were not previously involved;" "CPYP assisted me with this youth by giving me tools to discuss permanency with the youth . . ."

Support for Connections: A large number of caseworkers pointed out that the permanent connections they had established needed nurturing and support. A caseworker stated "WRAP services were the key to reunifying this family. The intensive support received helped the youth identify his own needs as well as assisted them in working as a healthy family unit." In response to the question if any "unique methods were employed" by the caseworker, he answered "the only method that was unique was the department not using the family history against them, but (using) it as a guide to provide services." The vast majority of permanent connections involved some form of financial, medical or therapeutic support.

Other Contributing Factors to Successful Outcomes: Caseworkers stressed the need for persistence. One worker said one should "never stop looking for relatives," and another suggested "keep working on a case even if youth is on the run or in 602 custody." Many caseworkers

indicated that the technical assistance on how to perform internet searches to locate family and extended family was helpful. Permanent connection were located by following up on leads provided by the youth, mining the case files, communicating with the youth's relatives and past relationships, and through internet searches.

In the "Challenges" and "Lessons Learned" sections below, verbatim quotes were taken directly from progress reports written by a caseworker, a supervisor, or the person the county designated to collect the progress report information. In a few instances clarifying comments have been added *in italics*.

Challenges

- What has been a hindrance (*to permanency efforts*) is trying to get everyone on board for a meeting of support people for this youth. Lack of commitment and follow through on the part of some of these people has proved frustrating.

- What has hindered my efforts is that I have a caseload and my time is consumed with deadlines I have to meet and reports, court reports, contacts, and unstable placements. This makes it very hard for me to make time for achieving and seeking permanency for the youth.

- *Youth's family is monolingual (only speaks Spanish).* I would have liked to hold a family meeting re: this youth, but the language barrier has significantly hindered my efforts.

- Resistance from the current group home administrator. She did not want the youth visiting with one of her previous staff members *(a person they were considering for a permanent placement).*

- (The) youth's reluctance to participate and his lack of motivation, including sabotaging behavior towards the people who did express affection towards him, made the process very difficult. In this case it would have been ideal to have worked with this young man earlier.

- A difficulty is that some family members are undocumented non-citizens and are hard to track down.

- Time has been limited and I am unable to pursue as many leads as I would like.

- The distance between the youth and the caseworker has hindered (*permanency efforts*) because face to face contact is rare and rapport building is difficult. The distance also hinders her frequency of visits with siblings.

- The family has limited knowledge of their family because they were in foster care themselves as children and they did not have any attachments to other families.

- Those seen as youth's support system have a different opinion than the caseworker when it comes to the best interest of the child.

- Youth's substance abuse and refusal of treatment.

- (Lack of) funding for the search engine has hindered searching for family members.

- The lack of commitment displayed by the youth's family, including not contacting him for months, is having a huge impact on the youth and his ability to control his acting out behaviors.

- The minor's family is not always cooperative about providing information about the family.

- Youth's trust and mental health and abandonment issues

- AWOL is a major obstacle to permanency.

- Once child entered juvenile justice system, the permanency efforts ended abruptly.

Lessons Learned

- I learned that youth are really interested in connecting with family, even those that seem hard around the edges and non-interested. Youth want to feel like they belong, even when they say no.

- Sometimes the most important task is convincing the youth that they are entitled and deserve a permanent and lifelong family connection.

- Allow the youth to advocate for themselves in their decisions about connections and permanency goals.

- I have learned that documentation of family connections is critical to keeping the search process moving even after a transition in social workers. I have spent many hours digging up information about this youth and am still unclear about the efforts that were taken before I began working on the case.

- I have learned that it is better to build boys and girls than to repair men and women. Permanence must be woven into our work in the same intuitive manner as safety. We must be judged as an agency in the manner in which we make sure that each minor has a permanent connection.

- I have learned that listening and including youths in their case plan is vital to achieving permanency. The youth knows with whom they have made a connection and they are the historians of their own lives.

- Circumstances change and just because a parent is unable to care for their child at the outset of the case it is good practice to check with them periodically to see if their circumstances have changed. Identify clearly what the challenges/barriers are.

- It is crucial to establish a relationship with a youth regardless of their feelings about dependency. A youth will reach out to a social worker requesting help/services even when he/she is absent from placement when a relationship has been established.

- A youth who has mental health issues and has lived in group homes for many years needs support in developing interpersonal relationships with adults and peers. The youth needs more socialization that helps teach him/her boundaries and how to build healthy relationships.

- Often the hard copy file contains information regarding perspective permanent connections that may have been overlooked.

- It's important to be working on (*permanency & family finding*) behind the scenes even if a youth is adamant that it is not important because eventually the youth gets it.

- Being able to culturally and linguistically communicate with the parent seemed to work well in getting the mother to "buy in" to the importance of being a life long connection for her daughter.

- Revisit relatives who were deemed inappropriate in the past.

- I have found that any type of group placement is a dangerous and potentially troublesome breeding ground for young and impressionable youth. It is necessary, I realize, but grouping individuals together is not the most therapeutic setting for most teenagers. It is important to move them out of that environment as quickly as possible.

- Take any tiny bit of positive attitude, behavior, and accountability as a message that the youth is reaching out to you for help. Just remember that if we truly believe in their potential and their right to be cared for, they will too.

- Always have a backup plan.

- Therapy is a huge factor in the success of moving toward a higher level of permanency.

- Don't give up . . . it sometimes takes the youth a long time to accept that they deserve permanency and can benefit from it.

- Better support services to help support the relationships could lead to legal permanency.

- Permanency needs to be aggressively addressed at the front end instead of in long term placement.

- Building relationships with the family as the caseworker is important. This family liked it when I took the time to come to their homes and personally visit with them.

- Interpreters are needed in cases where a language, other than English, is a factor.

- I have learned it is important to help the youth understand his role in a family and what he can and cannot expect from relationships.

- Achieving permanency for older youths is much more difficult . . . Often older youth have significant attachment/trust issues, and may push away attempts to introduce permanency into their lives out of fear of future loss and subsequent disappointment. The youth's relationships tend to be relatively superficial; and the ability to verbalize deeper truths about the self and the deep anguish felt over their many losses are often quite difficult. Group and peer psychotherapeutic processes are important to older youth.

- It's never too late to search for connections. This youth was going through the foster care system while there were people who loved him that did not know where he was.

- I have learned that we need to do more prep work with the youth and the families. We must also make sure that youth have addressed grief and loss issues before moving forward and connect youth to the proper resources.

- Start at a younger age.

Conclusion

In early 2006 ten counties in California implemented CPYP working with two hundred and ninety-three (293) older foster youth who were selected for the project based largely upon their need for a permanent connection to a caring adult. At the time of this report county workers indicate that two hundred and seventeen (217) of these youth have made lifelong connections to adults who will provide valuable support to the youth as they leave California's foster care system. Caseworkers determined that for the one hundred and twenty (120) youth who made up this evaluation's Study Group (a subset of the larger group above) sixty-four percent (64%) of the permanent connections that were formed "probably occurred because of (their) work with CPYP." Based upon reports from the caseworkers, a little less than half of the Study Group youth also strengthened their relationship with their siblings because of their involvement with the project. In 2007 an additional two hundred and sixty-four (264) youth were added to the project and, to date, one hundred and twenty-three (123) of these youth have established lifelong connections. Since the inception of the project five hundred and fifty-seven (557) youth have received CPYP-related services and three hundred and forty (340) of them have established a permanent connection to a caring adult.

Implementation of the project was challenging. It was hampered by varying degrees in the ten project counties by budget shortfalls, staff turnover, and in some instances competing projects and initiatives. Though these "external influences" are largely out of the control of the line staff who implemented the project, the extent to which these factors impacted a particular county was partially determined by the priorities of county leadership.

Challenges at the caseworker level included the apparent desire of many older teens for "freedom" and "independence," which conflicted with project goals for some older teens (especially in terms of pursuing legal permanence). There was a near consensus among the caseworkers that the permanency work should "start earlier." Some workers appear to mean that starting the work with youth at a younger age would be beneficial, while others are recommending starting the work at the "front-end" of the foster care system. Many workers also stated that permanency efforts were hampered by some youth's negative behavior, acting out, and/or frequent AWOL's. Though these behaviors undoubtedly present challenges, one could easily argue that they are *the effect* of a lack of permanency, as much as they are *the cause.* Establishing permanent connections for Hispanic/Latino youth was more challenging than for either the African-American or the Caucasian youth. This area may deserve extra attention and warrant additional study.

The evaluation revealed and confirmed that permanent connections can be found for youth in foster care even at an older age. The project had a significant impact on a large number of older foster youth. The number of permanency "champions" in the project counties appears to be growing and each of the counties confirmed CPYP's impact on improved permanency practice. While this initiative has done much to change the environment, attitudes, practice, procedure and policy within partnering county systems to promote the possibility of finding permanence for older foster youth, other key steps

are required to fully integrate and maximize these efforts in the project counties and beyond. State leadership needs to signify the urgent necessity of permanency work and fully support its practice through creating standards and providing training and technical assistance. Changes are needed to the allocation of state and federal funds that currently provide few resources to youth in need of permanency so that those asked to perform the work have the necessary resources and time to complete it. Without these and other key supports in place, youth permanency efforts will remain tenuous and episodic, and thousands of California foster youth will, upon emancipation from foster care, continue to live in isolation and many will end up homeless and/or incarcerated. They will join the tens of thousands of former foster youth who suffer from loneliness and are confounded regularly by the ordeals that most young people face with the guidance of their enduring connections.

Exhibit A

California Permanency for Youth Project

"Dedicated to assuring that no youth will leave the California child welfare system without a permanent lifelong connection to a caring adult"

Youth Intake Form

Today's Date: Social Worker:

County: __ Contra Costa __ Fresno __ Humboldt __ Kern __ Los Angeles
__ Orange __ Sacramento __ SanFran __ SLO __ Sonoma

Section A – Background Information

Youth's CWS/CMS Case ID# (19-digits):

Youth's Date of Birth: Gender: ____ M ____ F

Ethnicity: __ African-American __ American Indian/Alaskan Native
__ Asian/Pacific Islander __ Hispanic/Latino __ White
__ Other: _____ __ Unknown

Current out-of-home placement:
__ Group Home __ Foster Family Home __ Foster Family Agency
__ Relative __ Near Kin/Fictive Kin
__ Other Placement (specify):_____
Residential Treatment Level ____ (please specify, if applicable)

Date when first placed in out-of-home care:

Date at beginning of this episode in out-of-home care:

Number of placements this episode: ____

Total number of placements, all episodes: _____

Level on Permanency Scale (check one):
__ 1 (Youth has no existing or potential lifelong connections)
__ 2 (Youth has a potential lifelong connection but no commitment has been made)
__ 3 (Youth has a lifelong connection to a caring adult AND caseworker has obtained a signed agreement acknowledging this relationship)*
__ 4 (A change in legal status: adoption, guardianship, reunification, is in process)
__ 5 (Adoption, guardianship, reunification has occurred)

*please fax agreement to Craig Evans at (650) 858-0633 (this is a private line)

Section B – Challenges to Achieving a Permanent Placement/Connection

Behavioral: Does this youth have behavioral issues that you think will make finding a permanent connection more challenging? __Yes __ No
If yes, please explain:

Developmental: Does this youth have developmental challenges? __ Yes __ No
If yes, please explain:

Educational:
Is this youth performing at or below grade level (gl)? __ At gl __ Below gl __Unknown
Is this youth receiving special education services? __ Yes __ No __ Unknown
Please describe any other educational challenges for this youth:

Medical Health: Please describe any medical issues faced by this youth:

Mental Health: Please describe any mental health issues faced by this youth:

Physical/Appearance: Please describe any physical/appearance issues for this youth that could make finding a permanent connection more challenging:

Sibling Connections: Please indicate whether or not the youth has siblings and whether or not the siblings are in out-of-home care:

Section C – Youth Strenghts and Permanency Information

Youth's Strengths: Please describe this youth's strengths (abilities, skills, behavior, maturity, appearance, etc.):

Youth's Attitude: How would you characterize this youth's current attitude about forming a permanent connection with a caring adult? (choose one)

__ Wants a perm connection __ Is ambivalent __ Does not want a perm connection

__ Do not yet know the youth's attitude about forming a permanent connection

Please elaborate:

Existing Connections: Please list existing permanent connections for this youth and briefly describe the type and quality of the connection (if none, please put "none"):

Potential Connections: Please list potential permanent connections for this youth and briefly describe the type and quality of the connection (if none, please put "none"):

Other Information: Please provide any other information, factors or issues that you think will either help or hinder permanency efforts for this youth:

Exhibit B

California Permanency for Youth Project

"Dedicated to assuring that no youth will leave the California child welfare system without a permanent lifelong connection to a caring adult"

Casework Youth Progress Report Form

Date: Social Worker Assigned to Youth:

Person Providing Progress Report Information (if different):

County: __ Contra Costa __ Fresno __ Humboldt __ Kern __ Los Angeles
__ Orange __ Sacramento __ SanFran __ SLO __ Sonoma

From whom would you like to receive a $10 gift certificate?

Macy.com ____ Amazon.com _____

Please provide the name of the person who should receive the certificate:
_____

Youth's CWS/CMS Case ID#:

Level on Permanency Scale:
__ 1 (Youth has no existing or potential lifelong connections)
__ 2 (Youth has a potential lifelong connection but no commitment has been made)
__ 3 (Youth has a lifelong connection to a caring adult AND caseworker has obtained a signed agreement acknowledging this relationship)*
__ 4 (A change in legal status: adoption, guardianship, reunification, is in process)
__ 5 (Adoption, guardianship, reunification has occurred)

*please fax agreement to Craig Evans at (650) 858-0633 (this is a private line)

General Information

Please describe any significant change in this youth's life or case since the date of your last report (i.e. change of case worker, change in placement or in level of care, change of one or more of the "challenges" negatively affecting adoptability)?

Permanency Efforts

Youth's attitude about permanency: How would you characterize this youth's current attitude about forming a permanent connection with a caring adult? (choose one)

__ Wants a perm connection __ Is ambivalent __ Does not want a perm connection

__ Do not yet know the youth's attitude about forming a permanent connection

Please elaborate:

Success of Permanency Efforts: Has this youth either achieved formal permanency (adoption, guardianship) or strengthened a relationship with a caring adult which has the potential to be a lifelong permanent connection? If yes, please describe.

Method of Seeking Connections: How were potential permanency connections sought and found? Who did this? Were there any unusual, special or unique methods employed? Were there any especially difficult or surprising barriers?

Success in Seeking Connections: How many connections does this youth have at this time? ("Connections" are people who have indicated an interest in having contact with the youth or have indicated they will somehow assist this youth achieve permanence.)

Number of Connections at this time: _____

Decision Making: How and by whom were decisions made regarding specific permanency options (adoption, guardianship, etc.)? From among potential permanency resources/families how and by whom were choices made?

Support Resources: Other than the caseworker, has any other staff person or external agency or community resource helped with the permanency effort? What did they contribute?

Other Comments: Please describe anything else that has either helped or hindered your efforts to achieve permanency for this youth.

Successful Permanency Outcomes (completed only after permanency achieved)

Please describe any financial, medical, educational, therapeutic, social or other resources that have been or are important for the support of this relationship.

What have you learned in this case that you wish to contribute toward practice in the future pertaining to achieving permanency for older youth?

Exhibit C

Final Survey

Caseworkers are reminded NOT to include identifying information in their response, such as a youth's name, date of birth, or any parts of phone numbers or social security numbers, etc. Please also only use FIRST names for other people included in your report (foster parents, relatives, potential connections, etc.).

Youth's CWS/CMS Case ID# (19-digits):

Caseworker Name:

From whom would you like to receive a $10 gift certificate?

Macy.com ____ Amazon.com _____

Please provide the name of the person who should receive the certificate:

Name: _____

SECTION ONE

Current placement or placement immediately prior to leaving out-of-home care:

__ Group Home
__ Foster Family Home
__ Foster Family Agency
__ Relative Placement
__ Near Kin/Fictive Kin Placement
__ Other Placement (specify):_____

Residential Treatment Level ____ (please specify, if applicable)

Success in Seeking Connections: How many connections does this youth have at this time (or at the time of leaving the project)? ("Connections" are people who have indicated an interest in having contact with the youth or have indicated they will somehow assist this youth achieve permanence.)

Number of Connections: _____

Success with Sibling Connections: Did this youth strengthen his/her relationship with one or more sibling(s) *because of the youth's involvement in the project?*

__ Yes, sibling relationships were strengthened because of the project.

__ No, sibling relationships were not strengthened because of the project.

If "Yes," please elaborate (How did the relationship change? Were the siblings known to each other prior to the project? Were the siblings also in out-of-home care?):

Please select the choice below that best represents the status of this youth with regards to forming a lifelong connection to a caring adult (and then proceed to the section indicated):

____ This youth has not yet formed a permanent connection to a caring adult or left the project (emancipated, transferred, moved from the county, etc.) prior to a connection being formed – this selection is appropriate when the youth either *does* or *does not* have a *potential* permanent connection – ***please go to section two***

____ This youth did form a permanent connection to a caring adult however reunification/adoption/ guardianship is not being (or was not) sought – ***please go to section three***

____ This youth did form a permanent connection to a caring adult and is pursuing reunification, adoption or a guardianship – ***please go to section four***

____ Reunification/adoption/guardianship has been finalized – ***please go to section five***

SECTION TWO
Youth Did Not Form a Permanent Connection

Does this youth have a potential permanent connection? (Or, for youth that have left the project, did this youth have a potential permanent connection before leaving the project?)

___ Yes, this youth has/had a potential permanent connection
___ No, this youth does not (did not) have a potential permanent connection

Please choose the responses below that best describe why a permanent connection was not (or has not yet) been formed for this youth: (choose all that apply)

___ The youth was/is unwilling to pursue a permanent connection

___ There was a lack of resources to support a permanent connection (please describe what resources could help permanency efforts for this youth in the "Final Comments" section below)

___ I encountered other barriers to the permanency efforts I was pursuing. (please describe these barriers to permanency efforts in the "Final Comments" section below)

___ I was not able to spend sufficient time on permanency work due to my high workload and other responsibilities

___ The youth left the project (transferred to probation, moved from the county, etc.) before a connection was formed (please explain in the "Final Comments" section below)

___ The youth was willing, and I did the work, however we were not able to find a connection for this youth.

please go to section six

SECTION THREE
Permanent connection formed, though no reunification/adoption/guardianship sought

Did this connection occur *because of* your work with CPYP?
__ Yes, it probably occurred because of our work with CPYP
__ No, it probably would have occurred anyway

Since a connection can range from "living with the caring adult as part of the family" to a much less formal relationship, it would help us to understand what a "permanent connection" means for this youth. Please describe and define what this connection means:

Please provide any statements made (and/or actions taken) by the youth and/or adult that confirms to you that this connection exists:

Please describe how the connection was found for this youth. Were there any unusual, special or unique methods employed?

Please describe if and how CPYP training and/or assistance helped you with your permanency efforts for this youth:

Who else assisted with the permanency efforts for this youth (both within and outside of the agency) and what did they contribute?

Please describe any financial, medical, educational, therapeutic, social or other resources that have been or are important for the support of this relationship.

Please explain why a reunification/adoption/guardianship is not being sought in this case?

please go to section six

SECTION FOUR
Permanent connection formed, reunification/adoption/guardianship is being pursued

Did this connection occur *because of* your work with CPYP?

__ Yes, it occurred because of our work with CPYP
__ No, it probably would have occurred anyway

Please identify the outcome being pursued and describe the current status in the process:

Outcome being pursued:
__ Reunification
__ Adoption
__ Guardianship
Please describe the current status of this case:

Please describe how the connection was found for this youth. Were there any unusual, special or unique methods employed?

Please describe if and how CPYP training and/or assistance helped you with your permanency efforts for this youth:

Who else assisted with the permanency efforts for this youth (both within and outside of the agency) and what did they contribute?

Please describe any financial, medical, educational, therapeutic, social or other resources that have been or are important for the support of this relationship.

please go to section six

SECTION FIVE
Permanent connection formed, reunification/adoption/guardianship has occurred

Did this connection occur *because of* your work with CPYP?

__ Yes, it probably occurred because of our work with CPYP
__ No, it probably would have occurred anyway

Please identify the outcome achieved and the date it was finalized:

Outcome:
__ Reunification, finalized on _____ (date)
__ Adoption, finalized on _____ (date)
__ Guardianship, finalized on _____ (date)

Please describe how the connection was found for this youth. Were there any unusual, special or unique methods employed?

Please describe if and how CPYP training and/or assistance helped you with your permanency efforts for this youth:

Who else assisted with the permanency efforts for this youth (both within and outside of the agency) and what did they contribute?

Please describe any financial, medical, educational, therapeutic, social or other resources that have been or are important for the support of this relationship.

please complete section six below

SECTION SIX

Final Comments

Please describe anything else that has either helped or hindered your efforts to achieve permanency for this youth (or elaborate on or explain any prior response):

What have you learned in this case that you wish to contribute toward practice in the future pertaining to achieving permanency for older youth?

Thank You!

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