



# PERMANENCY

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## INTRODUCTION

In September 2003 the Commission for Children and Families' Emancipation and Adoption Committees convened a joint meeting to discuss permanency options for youth 14 years and older. The committees met on two occasions and developed an exhaustive list of permanency obstacles and potential solutions for this population. The conversation continued during the following two months at two separate meetings held by the Children's Planning Council. These meetings were organized to respond to the October 29<sup>th</sup>, 2002 Board of Supervisors directive to develop recommendations to address the conditions of children in Los Angeles County. (See Attached)

To focus on recommendation 6 of the Board approved ScoreCard Recommendations, the Department of Children and Family Services and the Commission for Children and Families continued the Permanency Workgroup and included the Department of Probation and a variety of stakeholders to review recommendations and strategies to increase permanency options for youth 14 years and older. In recognition of the complexity of this task, the workgroup focused its efforts in four separate areas. As a consultant to the Department of Children and Family Services, Dr. Sharon Watson issued a report which set forth an overarching permanency plan and set of strategies for all foster youth ages 14 years and older. At the request of Dr. Sanders, the Relative Care Committee chaired by Dr. Harriette Williams, examined the obstacles to permanency with foster youth in relative care and developed a series of solutions to address the identified barriers. A third group, primarily composed of the Emancipation Partnership, focused on developing a plan to meet the legislative demands of AB408. Finally, the Department of Probation, in accordance with the Board motion, analyzed the special needs of the youth in that system and has developed targeted strategies to increase permanency rates. Dr. Watson's report provides an outline of how these four areas should be integrated.

What follows is a compilation of reports which takes into consideration the many unique needs of a complex issue for a very diverse population. Although each of these reports could very well stand on their own merit, they are intended to provide a comprehensive approach to improving permanency outcomes for youth ages 14 and older who are under the County's care and supervision. They will provide maximum impact and effectiveness if they are woven together.

## A PLAN FOR INCREASING

PERMANENCY  
FOR  
LOS ANGELES FOSTER YOUTH  
Ages 14 Years and Older

Prepared by  
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March 18, 2004

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**Charge:**

To develop a plan and a set of strategies to significantly increase the percentage of foster youth, ages 14 and older, who leave the system with legal permanence and strong, enduring ties to one or more nurturing adults.

### **Key Issues:**

What foster youth want and need most and aren't getting often enough is permanency—a lifelong, “for real” family unconditionally committed to them or, at the very least, a family-like relationship with one or more committed adults. Their overwhelmingly first choice is to return to or be reunified with their birth parents and, if that's not possible, other family members. If this is not formally achieved before they age out of the system at 18, it seems that “they go back, in large numbers, regardless.” In 1983, Trudy Festinger reported that “80% of youth were in touch with at least one member of their biological families after leaving foster care” and in 1997, Child Welfare reported that 26% of former foster youth move in with their relatives. And those numbers are even higher today. It is time to recognize this in our work with youth and ensure that reunification happens as soon, safely and as optimally as possible. Relationship-building must, therefore, start earlier and important family connections nurtured while youth are still in out-of-home care, through regular visits, reunions and other such activities.

“Fixing youth should not be the main focus of permanency work;” it is working on relationships that matters, as “youth can only recover in committed, long term parenting relationships.”

Attention to permanency must be paid from the moment that children are referred to the system. Some of those interviewed for this report observed that “it is a failure of the social work mentality to consider permanency early on”—“they want to save kids from families instead.” This has to change.

There are varying attitudes about the importance of permanency, as well as multiple takes on what permanency means and how to go about achieving it across the vantage points of youth, relatives, caregivers, caseworkers, attorneys, advocates and the public. These must be acknowledged and addressed and a consensus carefully built.

And, finally, there are federally mandated timelines, via the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 that are not being routinely met in Los Angeles.

### **Why Now:**

It is particularly timely and appropriate moment to focus on youth permanency. There is now a national awareness of foster care system failures across the U.S., as documented in the recent federal audit and reflected in California's Performance Improvement Plan (PIP), and as reported widely by the Pew Commission and others. It

is clearly understood by the public that too many youth are languishing in expensive out-of-home care with poor outcomes; some youth are even being harmed while in care. Lawmakers and taxpayers recognize that they are getting a very poor return on their substantial investment in the system and an unsatisfactory “bang for their buck.” Locally, uncomfortably high numbers of youth are in foster care for 10 years or longer, with the number of Los Angeles youth exiting dependency through adoption well below the national average.

There is an emerging shift in thinking that emancipation is not the answer for most youth ages 14 years and older, and that a safety net needs to be established for teens **before** they legally come of age.

There is a steadily increasing reliance on relatives as the optimal placement choice when reunification is not possible, and increasing understanding that relatives should be fairly compensated for the service they provide. Last month’s decision by a U.S. District judge ordering back payments (to 1997) to kin caring for foster youth is evidence of this trend.

The State Child Welfare Services Redesign Plan, finalized last year and that implements the PIP requirements, strongly values youth permanency, calling for “a renewed commitment to permanence for every child entering out-of-home care.” It provides strategies, guidelines and incentives for achieving county-developed outcomes in this area.

State AB 408 (Steinberg) legislation, which became effective on January 1, 2004, seeks to “ensure that no child leaves foster care without a lifelong connection to a committed adult” and mandates reasonable efforts to maintain relationships with individuals important to youth, 10 years of age and older, who are residing in group homes. It is already transforming beliefs about what is possible and right and generating important practice improvements in Los Angeles County that will, as can be seen in this report, have a profound impact on the well-being of older foster youth.

Finally, Los Angeles County’s recent application to the state for a federal Title IV-E waiver provides a rare and promising opportunity to shift funds from out-of-home care to alternative, preventive programs. The waiver is being looked to as the long sought after answer to, as put by the LA Daily News in December, the “perverse incentive factor” that rewards the county for “swelling the system” and as a “way to care for an ailing foster system.” If granted permission to use foster care funds differently, thousands more youth will be helped to remain in or return to their own homes. The Title IV-E waiver possibility is pointed to several times in this report as an excellent means to solve some of the barriers to attaining faster permanency for Los Angeles foster youth.

**SECTION A: Data (as of January 2004)**  
**Number of Youth:**

There are 10,666 youth, ages 14 years and older, in out-of-home care in Los Angeles County. 8426 are under the supervision of DCFS and 2240 are Probation youth. Another 224 are in the DCFS Adoptions Division caseload and 450 youth are runaways whose whereabouts are unknown.

DCFS youth in OHC:	8426	
DCFS youth in Adoption:	224	
Probation foster youth:	2240	(22% were previously in the DCFS system)
Runaway youth:	450	

Total: 11,340

**Type of Placement:**

Among DCFS teen-aged youth, the vast majority (71%) are living in Foster Family Agency (FFA) certified homes or foster homes (3093) or with relatives (2892).

FFA Certified Home:	1652
Foster Family Home:	1441
Relative Home:	2892
Group Home:	1405
Small Family Home:	84
Guardian Home:	867
Court Specified Home:	4
Placement Unknown:	81

Total: 8426

In contrast, 69% of Probation foster youth (1550) reside in a Group Home, 490 (22%) in foster homes while the remaining 200 (9%) live with relatives.

**Placement Location:**

Almost 2/3 of DCFS youth are residing in SPA 6 (26%), SPA 3 (21%) or SPA 8 (16%).

SPA 1	861	10%
2	819	9%
3	1731	21%
4	444	5%
5	179	2%
6	2178	26%
7	930	11%
8	1269	16%
Unknown	15	



Total: 8426 100%

**Type of Placement by SPA:\***

Total	SPA								Unk
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
FFA Certified Home 1652	188	151	351	59	26	400	263	210	4
Foster Family Home 1441	221	125	285	32	19	350	186	221	2
Relative Home 2892	298	208	420	144	71	943	322	485	1
Group Home 1405	27	254	434	171	47	230	42	200	0
Small Family Home 84	1	13	26	6	0	5	19	10	4
Guardian Home 867	122	66	184	28	14	222	95	132	4
Court Specified Home 4	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Unknown 81									

Total:  
8426

\*Because of the unknown whereabouts of some youth, these numbers are only approximate ones and column totals do not exactly match those reported above under Placement Location.

**Length of Stay in Placement:**

Data wasn't available for all youth, but for those youth living with relatives, the length of stay in placement was:

Less than 1 year	11%
1 to 2 years	9%
2 to 3 years	7%
3 to 5 years	10%
5 to 8 years	16%
8 to 10 years	10%

10 years or more	37%
Total:	100%

Of these youth living with relatives, over 77% were also living with at least one sibling.

**Age of Youth:**

14	1887
15	1807
16	1721
17	1691
18	953
19	301
20	61
21	5
Total:	8426

Most Probation youth are 16-18 years of age.

**Number of Youth with Finalized Adoptions over the past 3 Calendar Years:**

2000:	245
2001:	158
2002:	168

The number of youth who went to live with legal guardians over this same time period was unavailable.

**SECTION B: Method**

At the suggestion of Dr. Sanders, a DCFS Youth Permanency Initiative Team was chosen to work with me throughout this study to provide direction, counsel and support and to serve as a key sounding board regarding the information gathered. The team members were:

- Gene Gilden, Chief, Emancipation Services Division
- Teri Gillams, Children's Services Administrator, Compton Project
- Trish Ploehn, Director, Services Bureau 4 and former Adoptions Division Chief

Ed Sosa, Chief, Out-of-Home Care Programs Division  
Amaryllis Watkins, Chief, Alternative and Specialized Programs Division

58 people were interviewed, including all five Board of Supervisors Children's Deputies, Children and Families Commissioners and staff, DCFS, Probation and Superior Court staff, current and former foster youth, adoptive parents, foster parents, relative caregivers, service providers--including some from other counties and states, representatives from various Los Angeles community and faith-based organizations, and youth advocates. A complete list is included in Appendix A.

In addition, I attended a host of meetings that focused on some aspect of youth permanency, including the Children's Planning Council meetings that developed the recommendations for Safe, Stable, Nurturing Homes that were subsequently approved unanimously by the Board of Supervisors, various meetings of the Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families and its Permanency, Relative Care, AB 408 and KinGAP Committees/Subcommittees/Workgroups, and a California Permanency for Youth Project's Permanency for Youth Partnership Workgroup meeting.

These meetings are listed in Appendix B.

Finally, I reviewed dozens of materials, including research studies, articles, reports, newsletters, legislation and several videos, which are listed in Appendix C.

## **SECTION C: Findings**

### **Definition of Permanency:**

There is no clear, universally accepted definition of permanency, especially for this age group. Legal permanency is generally meant to include reunification with birth parents, adoption, or legal guardianship by relatives. Some, including DCFS, would include legal guardianship by non-relatives in that category; others vigorously and passionately oppose this inclusion, including some department staff, arguing that since this type of legal arrangement ends at age 18, it does not constitute "real permanency."

Others are more concerned with "emotional permanency" or a lifelong relationship or connection for youth with a caring and responsible adult, whether or not this relationship is considered "legal" in the eyes of the law. To them, "permanency is a state of mind" and commitment is more important than documentation.

DCFS leadership, in compliance with federal mandates, has established legal permanency (including legal guardianship with non-relatives) as the goal for foster youth under its jurisdiction, although it recognizes that "there may be compelling reasons why legal permanency is not the best plan for a particular child at a given point in time. For these children, emotional permanence must be sought." Youth care

most about the primacy of lifelong emotional ties. Thus, many advocates and caregivers urge that we “start where the youth is, not where the department is” on this issue and make emotional permanence the primary goal. Recent AB 408 legislation is frequently cited as a key justification for this approach.

Ideally, foster youth can achieve both forms of permanency by living, physically, with a biological or adoptive parent or a legal guardian who loves and cherishes them. However, if youth are living within a legal relationship that doesn’t include a strong emotional bond, they can still achieve emotional permanence by having a second, simultaneous relationship with another adult or relative (e.g., AB 408) who can fulfill this need.

Still others say that the definition doesn’t really matter. What matters is that every foster youth achieve a lifelong relationship with a caring and committed adult (Los Angeles County’s Social/Emotional Well-Being outcome area). These advocates argue that adoption and legal guardianship do not, by themselves, constitute actual permanency but are, in fact, positive mechanisms that often lead to permanency.

One comprehensive and widely accepted definition, created by the California Permanency for Youth Project in January 2004, covers most—if not all--of the bases. It suggests that youth permanency consists of:

- at least one adult
- a safe, stable, secure parenting-like relationship
- love
- unconditional commitment
- lifelong support
- involvement of youth as a participant or leader in the process
- a legal connection where possible
- opportunity to make firm connections with important people, including siblings

**Permanency continuum:**

Most people agree that Reunification is the most desirable form of permanency, with prevention of family breakups through Family Support and Preservation programs the best solution of all. The following options are listing in order of ascending preference:

- Positive relationship with unrelated adult
- Mentor
- “Mentor+” or Lifelong Connection
- Kinship care
- Legal Guardianship with a non-relative
- Adoption by a non-relative
- Legal Guardianship with a relative or Kin-GAP (Kinship Guardian Assistance Payment Program)
- Adoption by a relative

Reunification with birth parents  
Family preservation/maintenance

It should be emphasized that, especially for older foster youth, multiple relationships are key. Youth should be encouraged by their caretakers to acquire and maintain as many healthy connections to responsible, caring adults as possible. As some say, "it's not either/or but both/and." This is, of course, the spirit behind the concept of concurrent planning.

### **Barriers to Youth Permanency:**

The Iowa Permanency for Teens Project found that the overall barriers to youth permanency included the following:

- Permanency for older youth is not prioritized
- Sequential, rather than concurrent, case planning
- Lack of exploration of viable permanent family resources for this age group
- Limited involvement of youth's "significant others" as participants in planning
- Limited pre and post-placement support services

Those same barriers were found to also be generally true for Los Angeles, although some efforts have been made to address them, as described later in this report. Some major additional barriers include:

#### 1. Prevailing Mindset:

The majority of people interviewed said that "mindset is the main issue" and that attitudes about achieving permanency are paramount. Social workers, attorneys, court personnel, service providers, and the public often don't believe that older foster youth want to be adopted or that there are people willing and able to adopt them or to become their permanent families. The University of Wisconsin found, in 1998, that contrary to what is commonly believed, "41% of youth said that they wanted to be adopted." In 2000, Rosemary Avery reported that, in her New York State study of children waiting the longest for adoptive placement (an average of 11.8 years), she found that "caseworkers were not convinced of the eventual adoptability of the child in their care and this skepticism appears to be translated into reduced recruitment efforts on behalf of the child." In response to the question "Do you believe that this child is ultimately adoptable?" 41.1% of the caseworkers replied "no." For approximately 70% of waiting children, "none of the eight identified recruitment techniques had been used." She concludes that "caseworker and agency dedication to the belief in the adoptability of every child will be central to successful placement efforts."

Similarly, Coyne (1990) found that "one of the most pervasive barriers is the belief that no one would want to adopt that kind of child" and that this attitude "colors decisions

within agencies when scarce resources are allocated, and impacts decisions of caseworkers and their supervisors about recruitment strategies, timing of information provisions about specific children, and contact between children and potential adoptive parents.”

Avery points out that other significant barriers at the agency level are “inadequate recruitment efforts (especially for minority adoptive parents), an unwillingness to place children transracially” in spite of the 1994 Multiethnic Placement Act, as well as a reluctance to “either establish or use specialized minority adoption recruitment programs,” even though these programs “are more likely to make successful adoptive placements for African American children than are traditional programs.”

Further, not all workers, attorneys and court personnel understand that youth’s behavior, often thought to be a deterrent to permanency efforts, is sometimes the **result** of failed permanency efforts and is, in fact, indicative of the youth’s great desire for a permanent family.

## 2. DCFS Culture:

Some, including those who work for the department, say that “a great cultural shift is needed”; that workers “follow the letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law” and put compliance concerns above child welfare; that DCFS has not valued permanency for youth and, consequently, has not established the practices and procedures that would contribute to achieving this goal. It is believed by many that, with some system changes, as many as one-third of current foster youth could quickly achieve permanency. Avery (2000) stated that “many children grow up in foster care rather than adoptive homes as a result of administrative and policy problems within agencies.” This may have been the case in Los Angeles. There are reports of Supervising Children’s Services Workers approving long-term foster care recommendations for 3 year olds, of Regional Administrators not managing caseloads, of the failure of social workers to consider permanency early on, “wanting to save kids from families instead” and of “not wanting to clear out old cases, especially the PP cases which are more stable, because they will get new, harder ones.” Further, some say the Department discourages staff connections to youth and hasn’t done all it could to preserve ties among siblings. Finally, there is the current specialization versus decentralization debate going on regarding service delivery--many believe that specialization may work better/faster for moving older foster youth to permanency while others believe that this can only happen if “every Regional Administrator champions this issue” and the line is held responsible. There is wide recognition that, although “there are pockets of excellence, system-wide solutions are needed.”

## 3. Need for Different Strategies Associated with each Potential Placement Type:

- Relative Care:

- Many relatives have a poor perception of past departmental efforts to “push adoption or legal guardianship;” therefore, there is a lot of residual resistance (“people have dug their heels in”) to permanency; some relatives have chosen to care for their kin “off the books” to avoid contact with the department
- Adoption, in particular, is a difficult concept for many relatives to accept, because of the potential rifts/disruption it usually causes within families, forcing relatives to choose between the children’s needs and their relationships with other relatives...and youth often feel responsible for these problems; “when foster parents adopt, they move on to their families, but when relatives adopt, they still have the parents in their families;” adoption can “cause more harm to the family relationship than the good that legal permanence will bring;” further, adoption may be considered culturally or socially unacceptable; for these reasons, adoption is most likely to occur when “the birth parent is dead, missing or not coming back”
- Grandparents hope that their children will “get their act together” and are thus understandably reluctant to support terminating their parental rights
- Adoption causes role confusion whereby their “grandma becomes their mom and their mom becomes their sister” and “grandma goes from best friend to enforcer...and when mom calls, she’s the good guy;” boundaries among kin become ambiguous
- Many youth and their relatives consider their connection to be already permanent (“youth feel that they are home”) and don’t feel additional legal arrangements are necessary
- Department staff don’t always clarify expectations of nor the value of adoption
- Some CSWs have “an apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” attitude towards relatives and are not “respectful” or “trusting” of kinship care; therefore, they don’t “bend over backward to help them;” kin say that “they should be hugging us instead”
- Some workers feel that relative providers are untrained and resource poor compared with foster parents, so prefer placement in foster homes
- Other workers take a “relative placement at any cost” attitude and make questionable, “tearjerker” decisions (“97 year old grandma placements that create another loss for the child”) or place youth with relatives they don’t even know without allowing time for them to emotionally connect
- KinGAP is only for B rate foster youth, not for those with special needs; “KinGAP is fabulous if not getting any services”; relatives who enroll lose some important benefits like child care, tutoring, clothing allowances, camperships and mentors; DCFS made a commitment to participants that if they ever needed services they could go to Resource Centers...“recent staff cuts and redeployment will affect this;” also, “the department doesn’t know how to close out these cases properly—they close too quickly and then have to re-open;” several interviewees praised the Kinship Education Preparation and Support (KEPS)

- program, advising all potential KinGAP participants to attend “and get educated” before enrolling
- Legal guardianship is available for special needs youth still under the jurisdiction of the court, but it is not transferable from the state of origin to other states; thus, if the family moves out of California, they must go through the whole application process all over again; further, rates and rules differ across counties and states
  - Some say: “People make too much of legal guardianship. Relatives do what’s needed for kin—they don’t go running off to court for everything”
  - Most of the interviewees agreed that one of the main reasons relatives aren’t willing to adopt or become legal guardians is because they would lose services, resources and social work support; the availability of post-permanency services and support is absolutely key, including assistance with housing and furniture, child care, respite care, medical care, counseling, and support groups
  - The Adoption Assistance Payment (AAP) rate is too low, especially for older youth, as they are tied to foster care rates; many CSWs are “unfamiliar with these rates, as the finance division handles this function,” so new families don’t receive the highest possible rate; families are thus “forced to go to Public Counsel or to the Alliance for help with adjustments, especially when new needs arise”
- FFA/Foster Homes:
    - Some believe that legal guardianship with non-relatives, including foster parents, is “not real;” these people say that “most foster parents on whom we foist adoption are not permanent—only until the youth turns 18,” and thus do not aggressively pursue this option
    - Foster parents aren’t always given all the relevant information about youth in their care and aren’t always talked to first, before the youth, about the possibility of adoption; if the foster parent then says “no” after the youth has agreed, their relationship is undermined
    - As with most relatives, when foster parents adopt or become legal guardians, they lose services. If asked “if there were things we could do to help you, would you consider adoption? legal guardianship?, many foster parents would do it”
    - The FFA rate, in particular, is higher than that for foster care so these foster parents have even more to lose financially, in addition to customarily strong agency support; further, if these caregivers adopt, the FFA has to recruit another certified home which is an additional financial disincentive; and some DCFS foster parents feel that they get short shrift compared to those connected with FFAs
    - About eight years ago DCFS set up a hotline to help caregivers, but that “has turned into a referral system” and is not working; it is hard to get through on the phone and, if answered, “the staff aren’t familiar with some of the concepts, like respite care”



- At a recent roundtable meeting, the Foster Parent Association President's group agreed that CSW respect was the main issue for them
- Group Homes:
  - Many people feel that youth residing in group homes should be the highest priority population—that any effort to increase permanency for youth should start with them, as they are living in very restrictive environments and are the least likely to have viable families
  - More efforts to “step-down” youth from group homes to foster homes need to occur. As one youth said who entered the system at 14 and spent time in two group homes, “I wished I would have gone to a foster home...then maybe I would have been adopted or found a guardian”
  - Group home youth may be the hardest to work with in terms of achieving permanency, as most have spent many years in the foster care system and have been exposed to multiple losses and traumas; their workers may have “given up on them” and they may have given up on themselves

#### 4. Post-Permanency Services:

Almost without exception, the interviewees and research studies agreed that post-permanency services that support child safety, permanency and well-being are absolutely essential to secure commitments from prospective adoptive and guardian families, to sustain these permanency arrangements and to successfully support reunification. Permanency is not a “placement,” but rather a process. Older youth, in particular, face the daunting tasks of adjusting to new neighborhoods and schools and even new cultures, making new friends and developing new skills and competencies. Educational services, clinical services, financial assistance and support networks are especially important.

#### 5. Youth and Birth Family Involvement:

Youth must be key decision-makers and at the very center of the permanency planning process. As one youth put it, “nothing about us, without us.” However, they must not be permitted to refuse to consider adoption as an option.

Family members, including birth parents and relatives, “must be involved from the get-go” and all along the way. Permanency planning must start at the point of entry into the system.

#### 6. Multiple Connections:

Youth benefit from multiple relationships and should be encouraged to connect with as many adults and family members as possible. One youth said it this way: “Each

individual holds of piece of my life—they don't necessarily know each other, but all are needed, as they serve different purposes.”

In particular, youth should always be helped to maintain ties with family members/kin and, especially, siblings, no matter where the youth's plan is on the permanency continuum.

#### 7. Facts about Permanency Not Well Understood:

A major barrier to permanency for youth is the lack of information about permanency and an understanding of what it means. For example, relatives have not understood that legal guardianship can be used as a temporary means to secure safety and stability for youth without the involvement of outside agencies or the court...but that it can be reversed whenever the birth parent regains the ability to adequately care for his or her child. Youth have not understood that adoption does not mean severing all ties to their biological parents, kin, mentors, and friendships...that mediated adoptions are considered a “best practice” for older youth and can be used to ensure continued relationships and connections. Workers have not understood that youth with finalized adoptions after the age of 16 are eligible for ILP services and funds.

#### 8. Structural/Administrative Issues:

Even when permanency plans are made, structural and administrative issues within the department or between public and private agencies have intervened. Tensions exist between various DCFS divisions (e.g., the Adoptions Division and the line), between DCFS and Probation, between these departments and the courts and between all of the above and contract agencies. Timelines to adoption are much higher than the national average and the process itself is often “intimidating” and problematic. “It's easier to do foster care work than TPRs (Termination of Parental Rights).” The Court has the capacity to do over 10,000 adoptions a year and there are “tons of pro bono attorneys out there freeing plenty of youth for adoption, but DCFS is not moving cases quickly enough,” thus creating a backlog of over 3000 children waiting to be adopted. One adoptive parent reported that she waited two years between the TPR and the final adoption and then “ended up in an Adoption Saturday;” referrals for Adoption Saturdays have dropped significantly—only 150 cases were referred to the Alliance for Children's Rights this year and only 20 of these were ready for finalization; “Important data needed for planning is not readily available”. “Services for federally-eligible youth are not the same as for those who are not.” Immigration issues have an enormous impact on permanency for Los Angeles youth, yet needed policies have not been developed (e.g., “can youth be placed with undocumented relatives?”) nor have procedural problems been solved (e.g., these relatives usually lack the required government identifications needed for fingerprint screening). DCFS information on youth is dated (“photos aren't current”) and workers still do adoption matching manually instead of electronically, beginning with those families with the most seniority, “so matches are not always the most ideal.”

## 9. Connection between Permanency and Emancipation Programs:

“No 18 year old in the United States is ready to be on their own.” Thus, emancipation must not be the permanency goal for older youth; “it is a failure of permanency.” When workers focus on emancipation as the casework plan, efforts required to find permanent families for youth are often compromised or given short shrift. If youth achieve permanency prior to emancipation from foster care, then, as one youth said “we can do emancipation right.” Opportunities, services, and funds could be available for many more youth instead of having to provide expensive, crisis intervention/safety net programs for a few. Emancipated foster youth often say that they need lifelines as well as life skills--that, while transitional housing, educational assistance, job preparation and skills training are all very important, the most important assistance they need to become successful adults is the support of a permanent family or a connection to a caring, committed adult. That relationship allows them to learn what they need to know for independence “more naturally” and within a more conducive atmosphere. Youth permanency goals are very connected to those of Los Angeles County’s Emancipation Program and, if paid attention to early enough, will produce better youth outcomes. Permanency, in short, prepares youth for emancipation.

## 10. Probation Youth Quandary:

For Probation youth, out-of-home care is a “timed discipline” or “punishment for a youth’s behavior,” not a result of parental behavior. Most Probation youth return home after serving their sentences. However, if a youth is ready to leave Probation and truly has no acceptable home or family to return to, some say that “Probation is not in the business of raising kids” and, consequently, believe that DCFS should take responsibility for these youth. “These youth don’t need help with emancipation, but with achieving permanency just as is true for DCFS youth.” These advocates argue that it is not cost effective for both departments to establish and maintain permanency programs—that all such efforts should be administered by DCFS to avoid “building two infrastructures that do the same thing.”

## **SECTION D: Recommendations**

There are excellent models for a Los Angeles-based Youth Permanency Initiative, particularly those in Kentucky, Connecticut, New York, Washington, and Massachusetts, but none of these can—or should—be replicated exactly in California. However, each has produced some important learnings which, in combination with the testimony presented at the two Stuart Foundation National Convenings in 2002 and 2003, what is cited in the most recent permanency literature, and what was said by all those interviewed for this report, have led to the following recommendations.

### **Broad, overarching actions:**

1. Develop a Fact Sheet that lays out the department's vision, values, a definition of permanency for youth, the various components of a permanency continuum as well as the essential characteristics/conditions/legal and financial issues for each. It should provide clear, basic information about major permanency programs and tools and include a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) piece.
2. There must be a huge push and a clear commitment by DCFS to achieve permanency for the majority of youth in out-of-home care before they leave the system; as one youth said, "if we commit to do things right, it will happen"
3. Managers and staff must REALLY BELIEVE in what's possible—that there is a permanent family for every youth in care; "people have to want to do this;" "if you think you can do something, you can; if you think you can't, you can't—either way, you're never wrong"
4. All must also believe in the URGENCY of the need—"this is an emergency; these youth can't wait any longer"
5. Youth must be at absolute center of all planning/decisions regarding their status
6. Biological families must be involved in permanency planning efforts from the very get-go—from when youth are at risk of or are first removed from their homes
7. Legal and emotional permanency for youth must be worked on concurrently (and concurrency must be looked at differently for this age group); for example, with group home youth in particular, work on reunification/adoption/legal guardianship and AB 408 "lifelong connections" must be done simultaneously
8. Separate strategies must be developed for each youth population— those in group care, FFA certified homes, foster homes, and those living with relatives
9. Two approaches to achieving youth permanency should be implemented simultaneously:
  - Assist ongoing efforts in each regional office to meet the new MAPP goals related to permanency and to implement AB 408
  - Add to this a specific, concentrated Initiative in 4 regional offices, each targeting one youth population, to build enthusiasm and know how and glean the best ideas for wide use
10. Celebrate successes and continually teach each other how to do this work even better and faster

### **Proposed Los Angeles Youth Permanency Initiative (YPI):**

DCFS is currently in the process of implementing a major reorganization, including new priorities, possible new ways of financing their achievement (e.g. the proposed Title IV-E waiver), and extensive staff redeployment. Ultimately, this should produce significant improvement in child safety and well-being outcomes.

In the meantime, however, it is a difficult climate within which to begin a new Initiative. However, the youth can't wait. So, instead of attempting to immediately institute YPI countywide, using only existing staff, it is suggested that we begin with a dramatic one-year demonstration of what is possible...an effort that will inspire, surprise,

satisfy, succeed and teach. We will then know how best to proceed to find permanent connections for the thousands of other foster youth in out-of-home care.

Several weeks ago, there was a wonderful article in the Los Angeles Times about the Stanislaus County “cold case cowboys,” a group of retired police detectives who volunteered to return to their former department and solve old, unsolved murder cases, one at a time. Although widely doubted at first, they were phenomenally successful. Team had extensive police experience, they understood the policies and practices of their former department, they knew how to conduct searches, they had the time to comb old files and pay attention to the details, they were highly motivated and they believed in themselves, their mission and in the solvability of the crimes they were asked to investigate. This is exactly the kind of approach that is needed to tackle the daunting challenge of finding permanency for over 10,000 Los Angeles youth. Some refer to it as a “SWAT team,” but the name is not important. Whatever it is called, it has to be comprised of believers who treat each youth needing permanency with the utmost urgency--“as if his or her case were a medical emergency,” to quote Mary Stone Smith.

As one interviewee said, “the CSWs can’t do it all.” This is true, especially in the context of the extensive organizational changes now occurring, caseloads that are still too high and the serious budget cutbacks currently facing the department. Therefore, borrowing from Stanislaus County, we need to create our own “cowboys” in the form of retired social workers and assisted, perhaps, by retired DPOs, CASA volunteers and/or MSW graduate students.

These workers have “face validity.” They are already trained in this work—they know what the issues are; what the law requires; how to find, approach and communicate with relatives and other potential family members; how to talk with youth; and how to work with DCFS and within the County. Their primary responsibility would be to do everything they can to assist social workers with their youth permanency efforts. They would do the legwork--mine files, talk to youth/caregivers/placement staff, contact and follow-up with relatives and potential family members/connections and then confer with the case-carrying social worker, youth and family members regarding the best options. Most importantly, they would focus intensively and exclusively on this Initiative, with no other work-related priorities, responsibilities or distractions to slow things down. Who knows? Some may even decide to become permanent connections for the youth they work with.

A team of retired workers, selected by and headed up by a Team Leader, would be recruited to work with each of the 4 participating regional offices. Each regional office would assign an internal point person, perhaps one of the recently redeployed Permanency Planning Liaisons (PPLs) who already are familiar with this kind of work, to work in partnership with this team. These point people would handle the internal tasks, such as helping to determine which youth searches would be given to the Team, helping to develop educational programs for staff, acting as a broker between the Team and the office staff, assisting the CSWs with case management and any

necessary follow-through, managing the work flow, coordinating with other participating offices, keeping track of the outcomes for individual youth, helping to create incentives for individual and office achievements and ways to celebrate successes, etc.

This approach would also be very cost effective. DCFS could use 120-day contracts to compensate the Team Leaders, eliminating the need to pay any benefits or overhead. Modest stipends of \$20 or 25 per hour could be used for team members, who would have less responsibility. Perhaps the new IV E waiver monies, if secured, could be used to cover these costs, as the YPI directly addresses a couple of the waiver goals. Another option would be to seek a public or private grant.

This type of demonstration should go a long way to show workers, youth, communities and taxpayers that it is possible to connect older foster youth with permanent families, that, as several people said, “all children want and need a family,” that, as expressed in the Dave Thomas video, Finding Forever Families, “there is a family for every waiting child and adoption is an option for all children.” It will also highlight what works best in Los Angeles for youth in various types of placement arrangements and also give the department a way to jump start AB 408 implementation until the best practices can become institutionalized throughout the system. At any rate, as one DCFS manager said, “even if we find permanent families for 50 kids, it will have been worth it.”

#### Year 1:

- All regional offices will address the two MAPP permanency goals put in place in 2004: (a) monthly transition to legal permanency (Reunification, Adoption, Legal Guardianship/KinGAP) 2% of children who have been in foster care over 24 months and (b) annually transfer to adoption 15% of these foster children
- Ask four regional offices to achieve more ambitious youth permanency outcomes, based on their youth caseload size. Each office would be assigned to work with a different youth placement population—foster homes, group homes, relative homes or FFA certified homes. SPA 6 has the highest number of youth in foster homes, with the Wateridge office having the highest number in that SPA. SPA 3 has the highest number of youth in group homes, with the Pasadena office having the highest number in that SPA. SPA 8 has the second highest number of youth living with relatives (behind SPA 6), with the Lakewood office having the highest number in that SPA. Finally, SPA 7 has the third highest number of youth living in FFA certified homes (behind SPAs 6 and 3), with the Belvedere office having the highest number of youth in that SPA. These four offices might, therefore, be excellent choices to launch this Initiative, even though it is recognized that there is a disconnect between the SPA of placement and the office where the case is located
- Goals should be set high enough to be compelling and merit the intense effort, but reasonable enough to achieve; 1000 to 1500 youth achieving permanency might be a good number

- The YPI should be both competitive and fun, with outcomes specified for each office, individually tailored/customized strategies developed for achieving them and designated incentives for success
- Regional Administrators of the selected offices would be responsible for reaching their specific permanency targets and tracking results
- Celebrations should take place throughout the year; perhaps photos of youth who achieve permanency could be hung in office lobbies and monthly tallies posted prominently; CSWs could be honored on Adoption Saturdays
- Ongoing meetings should be held among YPI target offices to share learnings and experiences and to problem solve; recognition must be given to the fact “that workers often reach a hump” after two or three months, as noted by others who have done this work, and that it takes time to work through this plateau
- Collaborative work must be undertaken with nonprofits, community groups, and faith-based organizations so that essential partnerships can be built and a broad base of knowledge developed; one program director reported that it took at least a year for the system collaborators to “get the concept of permanency for adolescents”
- All offices should be encouraged to join in and do what they can to help youth connect with permanent families, over and above what they are already committed to accomplish via their MAPP goals; they could recruit their own retirees or volunteers or choose to implement any or all of the target office strategies; they could use redeployed Kinship Liaisons, Permanency Planning Liaisons and/or Independent Living Program Coordinators as lightning rods or for help in how to approach and talk with youth and relatives about permanency; they should be urged to reach out to their community partners for assistance and every effort by every worker in every office should be recognized and applauded; no one should feel left out
- At the end of Year 1, a Conference or Convening should be held for regional office staff, community partners and agencies, caregivers and youth to both celebrate and to learn. Each of the target offices should present their results, including what strategies, methods, and tools worked best for their assigned population. Youth and their now permanent families could tell their stories, photos of those achieving permanency could be displayed, and incentives for achievement awarded.

Year 2:

- Bring in everybody, including all DCFS offices and community agencies who serve youth and families. Ratchet up the performance expectations accordingly and, perhaps, contract with specialized recruitment agencies/organizations to assist with the most difficult youth.

**Other Program Elements Required for YPI Implementation and for Long Term Success:**

- Youth participation: As stated in the Findings section, “nothing about us without us” must become the motto for this Initiative. “Youth must help us define what permanency is for them” and must be at the very center of decision-making regarding plans for their futures. Older youth often have complex family relationships, extensive placement histories, and a host of social/emotional/behavioral issues, in addition to developmental and independence issues affecting all youth their age; therefore, efforts to plan for these youth in isolation, or without their complete engagement, may sabotage desired results. Special efforts must be made to “reach out to all youth, including those who may not be as verbal or as visible.”
- Staff Training: “Workers can’t sell something they don’t understand” was how one person put it. Another said, we “have to get to hearts.” CSWs are the key to case planning and to the success of YPI; accordingly, they must see that most, if not all, of their caseload youth can achieve permanency...and without extraordinary, superhuman effort. What is needed is a belief in the importance of youth permanency, that it is the absolute right of each Los Angeles foster youth, that it is doable and that, for older youth in particular, it can’t wait. It requires different ways of working with youth, their current families and their future families, an openness to trying new approaches, an objective assessment of what strategies seem to work best, and an aggressive stance that “leaves no stone unturned” in its quest. Los Angeles should kick off its YPI by bringing to Los Angeles some of those who have done this work extremely well (Pat O’Brien of New York, Mary LeBeau of Massachusetts, Virginia Sturgeon of Kentucky, Mary Stone Smith of Washington, etc.) to present their best ideas, tell their stories and inspire all of us with their unmatched enthusiasm, commitment and knowledge. YOUTH (Youth Offering Unique Tangible Help) working in the Bay Area and in partnership with CYC (California Youth Connection), is an excellent resource for teaching workers how to talk with youth.
- Community Education and Engagement: A sophisticated, culturally appropriate and intense media campaign that is directed at the communities surrounding the target regional offices, that explains the need for permanent families/connections for foster youth, that profiles some of the waiting youth, and that trumpets some of the success stories, would be an ideal way to create the kind of public awareness that is required. Careful marketing is needed to combat the negative perceptions people have about foster youth, particularly those who are teen-aged. In addition, a set of materials, including the Fact Sheet and FAQ tool referred to earlier in these recommendations, flyers, etc. must be developed and widely disseminated. Articles should appear in the LA Times and local newspapers, the LA Youth newspaper, community and faith-based organization newsletters and websites. Forums and meetings should be held throughout the targeted neighborhoods and reports made at local PTA,



block club, neighborhood watch meetings and spiritual gatherings. The more thought out and aggressive the outreach, the better the results will be.

A sense of humor helps. In 2000, the Oklahoma Youth Advisory Board created **Top 10 Reasons to Adopt a Teenager:**

1. No diapers to change.
2. We sleep through the night.
3. We will be ready to move out sooner...but we can still visit.
4. You don't just get a child, you get a friend.
5. We will keep you up to date with the latest fashions.
6. No more carpools—we can drive you places.
7. No bottle, formula or burp rags required.
8. We can help out around the house.
9. We can learn from you.
10. We will teach you how to run your computer!

- Youth-specific Recruitment Strategies: Families must be found for foster youth one at a time. There are no shortcuts. Each youth has individual needs, preferences and histories and these must always be taken into consideration. They have the best notion of who's important to them and where to look for possible connections. Often, they have strong feelings about permanency efforts and what information about them is shared and with whom. The person who works with a youth towards permanency should know the youth well and be both trusted and liked by them. That person should meet with the adults identified by the youth and “never settle for anything less than the most legally secure relationship.” Further, “a completed search also includes locating every sibling of the youth, and supporting family connections for all.”
- Recruitment Strategies for each Target Population: Besides launching both general and community-specific recruitment campaigns, specific outreach strategies must be developed for relatives, foster parents, and potential adoptive parents and legal guardians. In addition, simultaneous work must be done and a set of strategies formulated to ensure recruitment of possible lifelong connections, a la AB 408. Families who have reunified, adopted, or become permanent must be included, as must youth who have achieved permanency.
  - Adoptive parents should be encouraged to adopt their children's siblings and perhaps other youth as well. Some private recruitment agencies have looked at older families who have raised children of their own and “who aren't afraid of teens.” The Institute for Black Parenting has had success on military bases and, at a recent Nation of Islam gathering, “several pages worth of prospective parents” expressed interest in adoption. Many people mentioned the need to look at social workers and

attorneys, in particular, as “they already know and are connected to these youth and know what to expect.”

- Youth must not “be pushed” and they must be given the opportunity to visit regularly with prospective families. They generally need “lots of testing before they will trust that the family will be there for them.” They have to be ready to be adopted and frequently need special, skilled work to prepare them for this option. Attention also needs to be paid to cultural differences between their birth home and their adoptive home, especially with older youth.
  - Foster parents should be invited to a forum that lays out the issues, presents the YPI and then “lets them ask questions.” In turn, they should be asked what support they would need to adopt or become legal guardians to youth in their care. Although lots has been tried in the past and the ideas are not new, “someone needs to say Let’s Do It!”
  - Relatives need special attention, as they are the very best alternative to birth families and, as discussed in the Findings section, permanency is a difficult and sensitive area for them. Assessment tools must be strength-based and once a commitment is made to a relative family, the department should “do whatever it takes to preserve it.” Relatives should be approached carefully, with the positive message that “this is a way to help your family.” Many said that they thought legal guardianship is the best option for relatives, because it is reversible...that “TPRs are the kiss of death.” The general advice is to GO SLOW. For example, when a relative is identified, let them know that they are kin to a youth in foster care and that they are needed. Ask if they would like to meet the youth, and then, if the match seems appropriate, continue building the relationship between them, much as would be done with a potential adoptive parent, until all parties are ready to move to permanency. Many more resources need to be directed to relative recruitment efforts. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Utah Department of Children and Family Services estimate that ***the average American (including foster youth) has, conservatively, between 100 and 300 living relatives!*** Washington’s FAST Program found an average of 50 relatives for every foster child; searches ranged from one hour to 400 hours, with their average search requiring 39 staff hours. In January 2003, they partnered with EMQ in Santa Clara County to find permanent homes for 30 youth in residential treatment; ***more than 220 relatives were located for eight of the youth in nine hours of work*** and all 30 exited care by the end of June 2003.
- Retention Strategies: As can be seen from the above, and as was stated by several interviewees, “recruitment is not the issue, it is retention.” “People are interested, but we have to keep them interested.” Best practices include

holding “While You Wait” meetings and dinners to keep prospective families connected. “You have to do the little things like keeping the image of the youth in front of the family (here’s why you are doing this), handholding and personalizing.” In this spirit and as a preventive measure to prevent disruptions, post-placement support groups should be held with families while they are waiting for adoptions to be finalized. Due to the length of time for the adoptive process to take place in Los Angeles, this early support could prove highly beneficial in keeping new families together.

- Family Support: Birth families should be made partners in the permanency process, whenever possible, and engaged in the planning process from the moment of the youth’s removal from their home. “If the birth family believes that everyone (including the caregivers) is helping them, but they can’t be reunited with their children, it becomes easier for them to participate in making other permanency plans, including surrendering their children for adoption rather than going to court to terminate the parental rights.” Also, when the process is adversarial, it is the youth who often feels responsible and “ends up in the middle managing the relationships” between the adults. Further, it is the birth families who are most aware of other relatives who may be suitable guardians or adoptive parents for their children...and who are acceptable to them.
- Post Permanency Services: This is the most critical requirement for increasing permanency in Los Angeles County. As noted in the Findings section, the reduction in support services to foster parents and relatives who choose to adopt or become legal guardians is the most significant barrier to permanency. We need to be able to say “whatever it is you need to keep this youth in your family, we will provide...as long as you stay committed to this youth.” Families need a point person to talk with when they face difficulties with youth and youth need to talk with other youth about their situations. Freundlich and Wright reported that adoptive parents identified the following services as particularly important:
  - Support services, including support groups for parents and informal contact with other adoptive families, as well as help lines
  - Easily accessible information about services, supports and resources
  - Parenting education, including practical help with children’s needs
  - Respite care and babysitting for other children in the family
  - Counseling, including assistance with attachment issues; guidance in responding to their adopted children’s emotional, behavioral and developmental issues; assistance in dealing with the impact of adoption on their birthchildren; and help with life planning for their children
  - Crisis intervention services
  - Advocacy services, including assistance in negotiating the educational and mental health systems
  - Educational assessment, special education services and tutoring

- Counseling services for their children, including group services for older children
- Specialized children's services, including mental health services, drug and alcohol treatment, physical therapy and special medical equipment
- Adoption assistance subsidies and medical coverage

In addition, priority status for affordable housing programs such as Section 8, and assistance with private or parochial school tuition, were mentioned by several of the interviewees.

Many of these same or similar services, including information, support groups, structured networks through family support centers, mental health services, substance abuse treatment, special education, financial assistance, health insurance, respite care and advocacy are also needed by kinship families.

The offer by the National Resource Center's California Center to provide Los Angeles with a high number of hours in post adoption assistance should help serve the 22,000 children under the age of 18 who have been adopted within the County, especially the 571 youth adopted at 14 years or older from 2000 through 2002.

If Los Angeles is granted a Title IV-E waiver, these monies could very appropriately be used to provide this critical support. One program reports that it costs them \$10,000 for a youth-specific recruitment effort and then \$5000 per year in wraparound services to support the new family. This contrasts very favorably to what it would cost to maintain that same youth in out-of-home care, not to mention the related administrative and court costs.

- Community Partnerships: Partnerships with community agencies and faith-based organizations are an essential path to securing some of the key resource information and needed post-permanency services and supports. Many are already providing some of the pieces of the required service system, but the dots have to be connected and the programs integrated to properly support and enable a successful YPI. Initial steps to making this a reality, beginning with a set of community forums, should be made with the communities surrounding the target offices in SPAs 3, 6, 7 and 8. These forums, as well as broader community capacity-building efforts, could be done in conjunction with the SPA Councils and/or with the Emancipation Program's SPA-based HUB Community Councils. Some caution was expressed, however, that "although good in theory, communities are not always rich enough in resources to support families."
- Engagement with the courts and legal systems: The Court must be seen as a vital partner to achieving permanency for youth. It has a lot to offer and the clout to make many positive things happen. The court should be involved in the setting of permanency goals; it should then ensure that meaningful plans/efforts

towards achieving them are clearly spelled out in six month case reviews and that specific benchmarks/indicators are developed; AB 408 issues—“is there an adult out there for this youth?”—must be included; “There ought to be a war every day in court when these cases come up for review without this information.” The Permanency Continuum outlined in the Findings section must be agreed to and accepted across agencies, including DCFS, Probation, the Juvenile Court, County Counsel, as well as the Children’s Law Center law offices and other legal advocate organizations, so that everyone is working on the same priorities and goals, with the same understandings regarding desirable permanency options. “Systems meetings” must occur regularly between the courts and social workers to resolve issues such as the timing of TPRs. Joint training sessions must be held. Much more attention needs to be made to keeping siblings connected—“we have more statutory authority here in Los Angeles County than anywhere regarding sibling placements.” This is an exceptionally important area of concern for youth, one that was mentioned by every youth interviewed for this report. Finally, “youth’s voices are needed in court”—“they need to hear what’s going on and contribute their opinions”—and “the system needs to run on the time clock of youth.”

- Expansion of Mentoring Programs and Integration with AB 408 Implementation: Most of those interviewed—especially youth--mentioned the tremendous importance of mentors for older foster youth, in addition to other adult or family relationships they may have. A good mentor can help youth have better relationships with their peers and family members, can help them do better in school and, as one youth said, “just generally feel better about ourselves.” One relative caregiver said that “kids don’t even know what they could be.” Mentors need support too, as well as clear expectations, ongoing training, and opportunities to interact with youth in various structured activities and settings. And some of the best mentors “aren’t the people in a program who get assigned to you, but the ones you find yourself.” Even better, according to youth, are adults they identify who commit to being lifelong connections. AB 408, which became effective on January 1, 2004, is the perfect vehicle for helping group home youth establish and maintain these kinds of connections, whether they be parents, siblings, other relatives, neighbors, former foster parents/caregivers, social workers, DPOs, CASA volunteers, teachers, coaches, therapists, a best friend’s parents, pastors or other people who are important to them and have the youth’s best interests at heart. Boundary issues should not stand in the way of these relationships, but creative solutions found to enable them. For example, if the youth’s social worker is the person that can best meet his or her permanency needs, then that relationship should take precedence and be encouraged and the youth’s case assigned to another worker. To do this connecting right, protocols for outreaches and approaches must be created, partnerships formed with community and faith-based organizations to help locate these connections and market the effort and caregivers asked to assist with building these relationships. Massachusetts Families for Kids found that, “although the project’s goal was a permanent

commitment rather than a legal relationship or placement,” 25% of these lifelong connections turned into permanent placements for youth. That is why it is so critically important that implementation of the YPI go hand in hand with that of AB 408, thus ensuring that legal and emotional permanency efforts are sought concurrently.

DCFS management must assure that each of these YPI program elements is designed and carried out with as much care, thoughtfulness and quality as possible and that each is evaluated for their relative contribution to the overall Initiative youth outcomes. There must be accountability at every level. A plan then needs to be developed to institutionalize best practices. Several interviewees expressed interest in assisting with this work and should be asked to participate.

### **Recent positive changes and policies DCFS has made regarding permanency:**

The Department has made some significant strides, particularly in the last year, that will serve as a foundation for a successful YPI:

- Concurrent planning is now mandated for all foster youth
- Consolidated home studies for all new adoptive and foster families at the adoption level “up front,” with plans to also do this for new relative placements
- Family Group Decision Making Model implementation has been successfully piloted and plans are in place to roll-out it out countywide if enough resources can be identified to secure the facilitators required by this model; in the interim, the Director has requested that a family team decision-making approach be used, at the front end, in all regional offices
- Family to Family approach is being used in some offices
- No longer permitting long term foster care to be considered permanency
- Not permitting emancipation to be “the” permanency goal for youth ages 14 years and older
- Good video for adoptive families
- Using Judicial Council of California’s user-friendly forms for families wishing to finalize their own adoptions and a video, “In Pro Per,” being developed collaboratively with County Counsel that will include step-by-step instructions for completing them
- Fox television collaboration (“Wednesday’s Child”) that highlights waiting children and the need for adoptive families and publicizes success stories
- Community forums at Senior Centers to inform older adults about the needs of older foster youth for permanency and the benefits of adopting these youth
- TIES for Adoption (Training, Intervention, Education and Services) program, operated by UCLA, that provides in-depth assessments and service plans for waiting children and education and support for adoptive families
- New procedures to shrink the adoption process and associated timeline
- Reduction of the number of policies pertaining to permanency, thus empowering CSWs to make more of the decisions

- Redeployed PPLs in regional offices are doing initial assessments and TPR work, bringing new expertise to the line
- The Torrance Model, a successful effort to better integrate adoptions work with line work which has resulted in needed relationship-building between adoptions and line staff, was implemented countywide in January 2004
- The Point of Engagement program, begun in the Wateridge office, engages families voluntarily in decision-making regarding their children without the necessity of court involvement, and is demonstrating the kind of positive results that can be achieved by engaging families in planning from the very beginning; it is now spreading to other offices
- The Alternative Response approach used by the department's family preservation program is working, as evidenced by the fact that only 6 of the initial 113 families have dropped out in the past 2 ½ months
- The Permanency Planning Mediation (PPM) program, funded by the state and operated by the Consortium for Children, offers professional mediators to participating county departments; it promotes openness in adoptions and uses Post Adoption Contact Agreements to preserve relationships between youth and those persons important to them; PPM has been shown to reduce a child's stay in care by about two years and save the judicial and child welfare systems as much as \$50,000 per child; 100 slots were allocated for the use of LAC in 2003
- DCFS is also exploring a partnership with The Consortium on the Supporting Adoptive Families with Effective Resources (SAFER) program, a key way to expand the county's available post-adoption services; this program would identify community service providers, provide training on adoption practice issues and provide ongoing clinical support to adoptive families; 13,273 children were adopted locally between 1995 and 2003, so the need for post permanency services is growing
- Using prospective foster and adoptive parents as youth mentors; these relationships sometimes evolve into permanent ones
- DCFS reports that, as a result of its 2003 Permanency Through Adoptions Initiative:
  - teenagers are now being routinely adopted
  - openness and maintaining a child's connections are widely held values
  - many successful adoptive parents are single adults and adoptive parents no longer need to be the same race as the children they are adopting
  - unmarried couples, including gay and lesbian couples, can now adopt

And these changes have become a routine part of everyday practice for adoption staff, providing "greater opportunities for legal permanence for all children"
- Perhaps most of important of all, administratively, is the new Permanency Resource Division being created right now; this Division, parallel to Adoptions, will build on and make possible some of the above program improvements; it will implement the major recommendation made by the Auditor-Controller in his November 25, 2002 report and by DCFS in its Permanency Through Adoptions Initiative Report—i.e., it will separate work with children from work with

applicants; the new Division will deal exclusively with applicants while Adoptions will deal only with children, though not exactly in the way proposed by the A-C; every caregiver for every child in the system will go through this Division and all must meet the same high standard before receiving a child, producing an unprecedented consistency of assessment; it will eliminate unnecessary moves between placements because of differing home study requirement differences (right now relatives only have to meet the lowest standard, followed by foster parents at a middle standard, followed by adoptive parents at the highest); Section 1, already fully staffed, will do all ASFA assessments (initial ones, replacements to relative homes and annual re-assessments); Section 2, one-third staffed, will do consolidated home studies at the highest, adoption level for all prospective foster parents and adoptive parents; and when operational, Section 3 will do these studies for all new relative placements

In all of these laudable efforts, it will be important to build credibility by demonstrating that the department is “really doing the ideas and not just changing the labels.”

### **Long Term:**

- Prevention is best! **The key to achieving permanency is to start earlier.** Youth need to be in a stable family before the age of 14, “so they don’t bounce through as many placements” and they must keep in contact with their birth parents and their siblings throughout their stay in foster care
- Connections must be built with the various Los Angeles communities so the initial placement rate can be reduced. The Compton Project and other means of establishing collaborative relationships with communities are producing very positive results
- Structured Decision-Making and other practice improvements have contributed to a drop in the placement rate from 5% to 4% in the last Quarter; these tools must be rigorously used to increase this trend
- Other system improvements should be instituted as well, such as the establishment of Master Social Workers; these highly skilled and experienced CSWs would receive an increased salary and/or pay bonus in recognition of their abilities and, in addition to carrying a caseload, would coach/educate other workers as well as mentor new ones (“workers learn from their peers”); this way, they won’t be “lost” to supervisory positions because of financial need; TPR proceedings shouldn’t wait until an adoptive family is identified—although the reality of “legal orphans” is objectionable, “new families often won’t adopt until they are absolutely certain that the youth won’t be reunited with their birth family”; dedicated caseloads for youth and their siblings should be considered; more “Shared Family Care” programs are needed, where the birth family moves in with the foster family and is mentored by them; cases should be assigned by neighborhoods so that community partnerships can be fully developed and implemented



- A decision needs to be made between DCFS, the Probation Department and the Juvenile Court with respect to responsibility for Probation youth who have served their time in that system and now need permanency, taking into account how this decision might affect Los Angeles County's Title IV-E waiver proposal

## **SECTION E: Next Steps**

Following the CPC motion report back to the BOS in early April and DCFS's commitment to move forward:

1. Presentation of YPI Report to BOS Children's Deputies on April 15
2. Review/incorporate pertinent recommendations by the Commission's AB 408 and Relative Care Permanency Subcommittees by April 30
3. DCFS group finalizes the YPI design, determines who will oversee its launch and be accountable for its implementation, identifies the four regional office participants and their internal point people (e.g., PPLs), sets performance goals, develops overall policies and procedures and a preliminary work plan by June 1
4. YPI Team (DCFS and Probation staff, Juvenile Court and Children's Law Center representatives, Children's Commissioners, community partners, advocates, academics, caregivers, and youth) convenes in June and finalizes work plan by July 1; then meets every other month through December to monitor, troubleshoot, broker etc. Would meet quarterly in 2005
5. July YPI kickoff
6. From July to December 2004, gear up—e.g., hire/recruit/train retirees and volunteers; work out the communication processes between internal (regional office) and external (retirees and volunteers) team members and among all team members; assign tasks and develop operational procedures; identify youth cases; create a tracking mechanism for youth permanency targets; locate space, etc. and get started on the Initiative
7. In January 2005, start counting successes
8. In January 2006, hold the first Conference or Convening for all regional office staff, community partners and organizations, caregivers and youth to celebrate achievements and present Best Ideas/Lessons Learned for each of the four target populations

## **Acknowledgements**

Tremendous thanks are extended to all those who helped teach me about permanency for youth and who assisted with this Plan. You are all very much appreciated.

Special recognition is due to the following people who were absolutely instrumental in making this Plan possible:

**DCFS Permanency Initiative Team:**

Gene Gilden, Chief, Emancipation Services Division  
Teri Gillams, Children's Services Administrator, Compton Project  
Trish Ploehn, Director, Services Bureau 4  
Ed Sosa, Chief, Out-of-Home Care Programs Division  
Amaryllis Watkins, Chief, Alternative and Specialized Programs Division

**DCFS Data:**

Greg Breuer, Emancipation Services  
Cecilia Custidio, Information Technology Services  
Diane Wagner, Adoptions Division

All those who agreed to be interviewed and gave so generously of their time and themselves, as listed in Appendix A.

The Committees and Workgroups that invited me to participate and who graciously shared their knowledge and expertise, as listed in Appendix B.

**Appendix A**

## **Interviews Conducted**

### **Board of Supervisors:**

Wendy Aron, Children's Deputy, 3rd District  
Martha Molina-Aviles, Children's Deputy, 1<sup>st</sup> District  
Raine Ritchey, Children's Deputy, 5<sup>th</sup> District  
Miriam Simmons, Children's Deputy, 2<sup>nd</sup> District  
Linda Tarnoff, Children's Deputy, 4<sup>th</sup> District

### **Commission for Children and Families:**

Dana Blackwell, Executive Director and Adoptee  
Trish Curry, Co-Chair, Emancipation and Permanency Committees  
Chuck Hurewitz, Chair, Adoptions Committee and Co-Chair, Permanency Committee  
Nina Sorkin, Co-Chair, KinGAP Subcommittee  
Harriette Williams, Chair, Commission and Relative Care Committee

### **Department of Children and Families:**

Mo-Ching Chan, CSW, Covina Office  
Jaime Horta, Regional Administrator, Hawthorne Office  
Madeline Jackson, Interim Manager, Kinship Care Services Program  
Elan Melamid, Chief, Adoptions Division  
Trish Ploehn, Director, Services Bureau 4 and Adoptive Parent  
David Sanders, Director, DCFS  
Rhelda Shabazz, Manager, Family Preservation Program  
Rosa Rodriguez, CSW, Latino Family Preservation Program  
Romalis Taylor, Regional Administrator, Wateridge Office  
Diane Wagner, Assistant Chief, Permanency Resource Division

### **Probation Department:**

David Mitchell, Director, Emancipation Services  
Carol Ritchie, Director, Permanency Division  
Richard Shumsky, Chief Probation Officer

### **Superior Court:**

Michael Nash, Presiding Judge, Juvenile Division

### **Service Providers, Community Organizations and Youth Advocates:**

Peggy Belcher-Dixon, Social Services Director, Faith Communities for Families and Children and Adoptee

Marcia Buck, Child Advocate and Member, Adoptions, Relative Care and Permanency Committees and kinGAP Subcommittee  
Miriam Krinsky, Executive Director, Children's Law Center of Los Angeles  
Mary LeBeau, Program Director, Permanency Mediation Services, Children's Services of Roxbury, Massachusetts Families for Kids  
Pat Levinson, Foster Youth Services, Los Angeles County Office of Education  
Linda Lewis, Executive Director, Western Child Welfare Law Center  
Lisa Mandel, AB 408 Committee Co-Chair and Law Office Director, Children's Law Center of Los Angeles  
Jacquelyn McCroskey, School of Social Work, University of Southern California  
Alex Morales, President and CEO and Lou Graham, Director of Foster Care and Adoptions, Children's Bureau  
Pat O'Brien, Executive Director, You Gotta Believe! The Older Child Adoption & Permanency Movement, New York City  
Zena Oglesby, Executive Director, Institute for Black Parenting  
Michael Olenick, Past Co-Chair, CPYP Permanency for Youth Task Force  
Sacha Klein Martin, Child Welfare Policy Director, Association of Community Human Services Agencies (ACHSA)  
Eileen Mayers Pasztor, Department of Social Work, California State University, Long Beach, Adoptive Parent and Foster Parent  
Amy Pellman, Legal Director, Alliance for Children's Rights  
Pat Reynolds-Harris, Director, California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP)  
Stacey Savelle, AB 408 Committee Co-Chair, Emancipation Program Consultant, Adoptive Parent and Mentor  
Mary Stone Smith, Vice President, Catholic Community Services, Western Washington  
Virginia Sturgeon, former Adoption Specialist and Trainer, Kentucky Special Needs Adoption Program, former Consultant to the State of Illinois and Adoptive Parent  
Sue Thompson, Assistant Director, Child Advocates Office/CASA Program of Los Angeles  
Gloria Waldinger, School of Social Welfare, UCLA (Retired)  
Virginia Weisz, Children's Rights Project, Public Counsel Law Center and Adoptive Parent  
Trula Worthy-Clayton, The Foster Care Project, All Saints Church, Pasadena and Adoptive Parent

**Caregivers:**

Gwen Bartholomew, Founder of Grandma's Angels and Relative Adoptive Parent  
Priscilla Charles-Carter, Foster Parent, Past VP of Carson Foster Parent Association and former CASA volunteer  
Jean Crisp, Relative Adoptive Parent  
Deanne Dantignac, Relative Legal Guardian  
Delia Johnson, Relative Caregiver and Executive Director, Community College Foundation  
Zoe Pruitt, KinGAP Caregiver

**Foster Youth:**

Berisha Black, Emancipation Ombudsman and Member, Permanency for Youth Task Force

Reality D.

Tramisha Poindexter, Outreach Coordinator, California Youth Connection

Linda Velasquez

## **Meetings Attended**

Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council's Scorecard Recommendations  
Workgroup for Safe, Stable, Nurturing Homes on 10/3/03 and 11/7/03

Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families on 1/5/04 and 1/26/04

Permanency Committee on 11/21/03, 2/5/04 and 3/10/04  
AB 408 Subcommittee on 1/12/04, 2/9/04 and 3/2/04

Relative Care Committee on 1/26/04  
KinGAP Subcommittee on 1/23/04  
Permanency Workgroup on 2/13/04, 2/27/04 and 3/12/04

California Permanency for Youth Project's Permanency for Youth Partnership  
Workgroup on Child Welfare and the Court on 2/11/04

**Appendix C**

## **Materials Reviewed**

Summary of Discussion with 6 Foster Youth held on 2/27/04 at a Rites of Passage Meeting

Various DCFS and Probation Department reports and materials

Auditor-Controller's "Department of Children and Family Services Adoption Review," November 25, 2002

City of New York's "Protecting the Children of New York" Plan of Action, 1996; 1997 Plan Implementation Status Report; 2003 ASFA Implementation Memo

Various materials published by the California Permanency for Youth Project and CPYP Task Force on Permanency Meeting Notes

Summaries of the Stuart Foundation National Convenings on Youth Permanence, 2002 and 2003

Various news releases and articles related to youth permanency (Los Angeles Times, Daily News, Sacramento Bee, Pew Commission)

Various articles published by You Gotta Believe! The Older Child Adoption & Permanency Movement

National Resource Center For Foster Care & Permanency Planning (Hunter College School of Social Work) Newsletter "Permanency Planning Today" (Fall 2003)

Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption "Finding Forever Families" video

AB 408 and 490 legislation and analyses

Avery, Rosemary J.: "Perceptions and Practice: Agency Efforts for the Hardest-to-Place Children" 2000

Child Welfare: "Independent Living Services: The Views of Former Foster Youth" 1997

Cornerstone Consulting Group: "Guardianship: Another Place Called Home" 2001

Courtney, Mark E., Piliavin, Irving, Grogan-Kaylor, Andrew and Nesmith, Ande: "Foster Youth Transitions to Adulthood: A Longitudinal View of Youth Leaving Care" 2001

Coyne, A.: "Administrative and Policy Issues" 1990

Festinger, Trudy: "No One Ever Asked Us: A Post Script to Foster Care" 1983

Freundlich, Madelyn and Wright, Lois: "Post-Permanency Services" (Casey Family Programs) 2003

Geen, Rob: "The Evolution of Kinship Care Policy and Practice" 2004

Massinga, Ruth and Pecora, Peter J.: "Providing Better Opportunities for Older Children in the Child Welfare System" 2004

Testa, Mark F.: "When Children Cannot Return Home: Adoption and Guardianship"  
2004





# *Permanency Goals/Resolutions/Solutions*

*A Permanency Planning Report to the  
Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors*

Submitted by:  
The Relative Caregiver Committee and the  
LA County Commission for Children and Families

Dr. Russ Carr and Dr. Harriette F. Williams,  
Co-chairs

August 2, 2004

Prepared by:  
Shirley D'Angelo

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## **The Charge**

### **Recommendation 6:**

Instruct the Director of the Department of Children and Family Services and the Chief Probation Officer to lead a collaborative effort with other key stakeholders to decrease the amount of time for a child to be legally adopted, and increase significantly the percentage of foster youth age 14 and older who leave the system with legal permanence, and also with strong and enduring ties to one or more nurturing adults.

This effort shall be defined in an implementation plan, to be completed in 60 days, with specific goals and performance measures, and should include strategies to improve systems and implement policies to achieve this recommendation.

*Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors  
Tuesday, February 3, 2004*

### **Committee Members**

Russ Carr, Harriette F. Williams, Co-chairs

Dana Blackwell  
Marcia Buck  
Paul Costello  
Delia Johnson  
Peggy Belcher Dixon  
Jacquie Dolan  
Iola Fountain  
Leslie Heimov  
Elizabeth Hinton  
Jaime Horta  
Madeline Jackson  
Charles Johnson  
Susan Barkley Jones  
Jane Kwon  
Roberta Medina  
Darlene Morton  
Zena Oglesby  
Mary Ann Smiley  
Nina Sorkin  
Gloria Waldinger  
Trinity Wallace-Ellis  
Sharon Watson  
Jenny Weisz

## *RELATIVE CARE COMMITTEE PERMANENCY RECOMMENDATIONS*

### **History and Background**

On December 23, 1999, the Board of Supervisors requested the Commission for

Children and Families to develop a mechanism, together with the Director of the Department of Children and Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Dependency Court, to review the safety and care of foster children currently residing with relative caregivers, and to report back to the Board with their findings and recommendations.

A Relative Caregiver Committee was then established by the Commission, composed of a broad spectrum of individuals from both the public and private sectors. The group met several times a month in

various locations from March 2000 to July 2000. The Committee gathered information and data from all available resources,



including surveys, participatory forums, and interviews with caregivers and youths.

After several necessary postponements, the report of the Committee was finalized and submitted to the Board February 13, 2001. By Board motion, the Department and the Dependency Court were ordered to work together to implement the recommendations, and DCFS subsequently

submitted its response indicating actions to be taken.

In order to monitor the progress of implementation, the Relative Caregiver Committee was made a standing committee of the Commission, and has met on a regular basis since that time in an effort to insure the safety and quality of life for children, and the provision of support and assistance to relative caregivers. Accepting the assignment to participate in planning efforts regarding the Permanency initiative was a logical extension of the Committee's on-going activities.

### **The Process**

The Committee met as a whole 15 times to deliberate and develop its recommendations, and further conducted interviews and field visits (the results of which are included as Appendices B-Rites of Passage; C-Relative Care Support Group; D-Kinship Focus Group; E-Relative Caregivers Roundtable. It was recognized that these recommendations should ultimately be integrated into the implementation planning of the Department. In the end, the Committee reaffirmed its position that there are at least two basic elements that make children living with relatives and their caretakers a discrete and unique population that presents particular challenges and rewards to the system. The two basic elements are:

1. The quality of care of children in relative placement is directly related to the philosophical focus or views that DCFS and other system participants have for care. Until fairly recently in Los Angeles County as well as across the nation, relatives have been accorded little respect for their contribution to the protective system and perilously little recognition for the role they play in conserving family values and cultural and ethnic ties, so critical to a child's well-being.



2. Relatives, the greater number being grandparents, are often resource poor, financially fragile and initially awed by the system . . . . They do not come to their caregiver position after careful and deliberate thought. They are confronted, sometimes in the middle of the night, with the option of accepting the child or having that child placed with a stranger in foster care. Accepting the placement is a life altering experience, fraught with complicated family dynamics, for which they must now attempt to find coping mechanisms. They need a thorough orientation and other resource support.

Unless there is full recognition of these factors, all attempts to establish

permanency for children in relative care will surely fail.

### The Scope of the Challenge

As of June 2004, of the approximately 8,000 children 14 years and older who are in the system, about 3,000 (DCFS and Probation) are in relative placement. Of this number, 1,068 (figure does not include Probation

#### **Goal:**

*To ensure every youth, 14 years or older, living with a relative under the supervision of Los Angeles County (DCFS or Probation Departments) achieves legal permanency through family reunification, adoption, Kin-GAP or guardianship, and having a connection to a caring adult, open to a lifelong commitment to the youth.*

children) have been in the home of a relative for 10 years or more. These figures would seem to indicate that for one reason or another, the relative has not chosen to adopt, accept Kin-GAP or become a legal guardian. Indeed, for many years the mind set both for relatives and within the Department has been that long-term care was a stable and permanent placement. Anecdotal information received conveys the message that relatives are extremely reluctant to enter into any kind of legal permanency.

The Committee initially discussed and hypothesized about the reasons for the rate of non-legal permanency among children placed with relatives. In an effort to verify our thoughts we scheduled several activities as discussed later in this report: Rites of Passage, Appendix B; Relative Care Support Group, Appendix C; Kinship Focus Group; Appendix D; Relative Caregivers Roundtable, Appendix E; and Youth Permanency Summit, Appendix F. Based on input from these respondents, the Committee arrived at the following conclusions:

- Termination of parental rights is disruptive to relationships with the family member (birth parent). Hope remains eternal that the abusing parent will solve his/her drug problem, get out of jail, receive adequate mental health care or counseling, comply with Dependency Court ordered parenting instruction and once again become the custodial parent. The Department's statistics of years in placement would appear to refute this, but it is reality to the caregiver.
- Changes in status from long term care to legal permanency change the dynamics within the family. Where once "Grandma" was the indulgent, bringer of gifts and experiences, she now becomes the disciplinarian. This can create a sense of loss to both the youth and the adult.
- Many youths do not wish to change the equation. They do not want to be

moved from long-term care, or as Willie Brown, then Mayor of San Francisco, said at a Kinship Conference, "they do not care to be 'out-sourced.'"

It is true that with "education" relatives may come to understand the value of legal permanency. However, it can also be anticipated that there will be considerable resistance to changing the status quo. Relatives may see the attempts to force the issue as arbitrary and capricious.

All of the above objections will hinder the ability of the DCFS to further its goal of legal permanency for all children. This goal may be particularly difficult to achieve for the subset of children age 14 and older in relative care, even with the exceptions allowed under the "compelling reasons" document (see Appendix G).

### **Goals/Solutions/Resolutions**

The Committee prioritized the multiple barriers to permanency for this population. In the charts that follow, the concept of barriers is converted to positive actions or goals designed to improve opportunities for permanency for youth in relative foster care. The chart is organized under the headings: **Goals; Description; Solutions/Resolutions; Indicator; Who Will Be Responsible; Time Frame to Implementation, and Outcome.**



Indeed, this interpretation of permanence mirrors the sentiment expressed by the youth and families in the focus groups held by the committee and should be considered when developing a legal permanent plan for our youth and their families.

### **Permanency Defined**

It is clear that the DCFS and Probation places importance on the value of keeping families together. The majority of the children under the supervision of DCFS are placed with relatives. While their goal to achieve legal permanence through family reunification, adoption, Kin-GAP (not available to Probation youth) legal guardianship provides many benefits to both the family and the youth, it is important to note that the idea of permanence is greater than that which can be characterized by a legal relationship.

The California Permanency for Youth Project describes permanency for youth as consisting of:

- At least one adult;
- A safe, stable, secure parenting like relationship;
- Love;
- Unconditional commitment;
- Lifelong support;
- Involvement of youth as a participant or leader in the process;
- A legal connection where possible; and
- Opportunity to make firm connections with important people including siblings.



Goal	Description	Solutions/Resolutions	Indicators	Whose Responsible	Implementation Time Frame	Outcome
<b>1. Change in the Culture</b>	There is a need for a philosophical and cultural change in the County, which values the participation of family, especially <u>relative caregivers</u> , in the placement planning process.	1. Recognize and respect for the relatives who are keeping the family together.	Increase focus groups/meetings that incorporate relative caregivers.	1. DCFS, Probation, SIB, IUC, CPC, the Dependency Court, and other community partners	1. Ongoing	Relatives are empowered to advocate for their families  Recognize and respect for relatives
		2. Provide CSW and support staff training to address specific relative and family dynamics.		2. DCFS, Probation, IUC, SCSW, CSW	2. 9-04-10-04	
		3. Initiate countywide awareness campaign re: value of permanence.	Increase number of trainings that address relative and family dynamics.	3. DCFS, Probation, CAO's Public Information Office, CPC's SPA Councils, and community partners	3. Immediate	

Goal	Description	Solutions/Resolutions	Indicators	Whose Responsible	Implementation Time Frame	Outcome
<b>1. Change in the Culture (continued)</b>	There is a need for a philosophical and cultural change in the County, which values the participation of family, especially <u>relative caregivers</u> , in the placement planning process .	4. Assist community partners to form grassroots councils, which could result in a countywide representative body.		4. DCFS, Probation, IUC, RAs, relative caregivers, Interfaith Council members, Roundtable representatives, CPC SPA Councils, Relative Care Committee for Children and Families, and other community partners	4. 9-04 and ongoing	
		5. Empower relatives to advocate for their families.		5. DCFS, Probation, Kinship Resource Center, Interfaith Councils, The Community College Foundation (TCCF), and other community partners	5. Immediate and ongoing	

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Solutions/Resolutions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Whose Responsible</b>	<b>Implementation Time Frame</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>2. Increased Levels of Resources and Support</b>	As compared to their counterparts in the foster care community, there is a disparity of available resources and support for this population, which may create a financial hardship and/or disrupt placement.	1. Expand programs designed for youth 14 years and older and develop/implement a system to disseminate this information, e.g., financial and medical benefit, educational benefits, Wraparound, Systems of Care, and job training.	1. Establish a system of Information/ Resources via designated staff, website, newsletter, etc.	1. DCFS, Probation, and other County departments, MH, HS, Community and Senior Services, CBOs, and TCCF	1. 1-05	Increased number of people accessing information, resources, and/or support
		2. Identify/secure community mental health resources for youth that support the concurrent planning and legal permanency options.	2. Develop resource list for children ages 14+.	2. DCFS, Probation, and other County departments, MH, HS, Community and Senior Services, CBOs, TCCF and other community partners	2. Immediate ongoing	

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Solutions/Resolutions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Whose Responsible</b>	<b>Implementation Time Frame</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<p><b>3. A Workforce Knowledgeable and Committed to the Provision of Kinship Issues</b></p>	<p>There is a paucity of training for CSWs, administrators, relatives, community-based providers and other potential “partners.” Additionally, because of the high turnover of caseworkers, such training needs to be on going and mandatory.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Improve training specific to relative-care for 14 to 18 year olds resulting in skilled knowledgeable workers and service providers.</li> <li>2. Enhance training for social workers and support staff specific to relative care assessment and provision of services. Provide accurate and consistent information that includes concurrent planning policy and culturally sensitive, strength-based family practices.</li> </ol>	<p>Evaluate these trainings for effectiveness in transferring specific information.</p> <p>Increase number of trainings that focus on 14+ year olds and specific needs.</p> <p>Increased positive ratings on trainings as assessed by a training evaluation form.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. DCFS Policy and Training Division, IUC, RA, SCSW, and community partners</li> <li>2. DCFS Policy and Training Department, RA, SCSW, and community partners</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. 9-04</li> <li>2. 9-04 and ongoing</li> </ol>	<p>A more knowledgeable and committed workforce</p>

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Solutions/Resolutions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Whose Responsible</b>	<b>Implementation Time Frame</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>4. Inclusion of Youth in Permanency Decisions</b>	The needs, options and wishes of the youth often are not sought nor determined or factored into the permanency decisions.	1. Implement standards of AB 408 by developing protocol to include youth's wishes and identifying a mentor.		1. The Dependency Court, DCFS, CSW, SCSW, ARA, and community partners	1. Immediate	Youth included in permanency planning
		2. State the youth's wishes in the Dependency Court report.	Increase number of youth that include a statement of their wishes in Dependency Court.	2. The Dependency Court, DCFS, CSW, SCSW, ARA	2. Immediate	
		3. Work with the youth to identify a mentor with the youth consistent with implementation of AB 408 and incorporate in TILP plan.	Increase number of youth that have a mentor identified.	3. The Dependency Court, DCFS, CSW, SCSW, ARA	3. Immediate	

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Solutions/Resolutions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Whose Responsible</b>	<b>Implementation Time Frame</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>5. Inclusion of Family and Extended Family Members in Permanency Decisions</b>	Family and extended family members often are not active participants in the decision-making process.	1. Require multi-disciplinary team decision-making, case review with family and other significant parties at all critical decision points.	Increase family presence in multi-disciplinary team decision-making process.	1. DCFS, CSW, SCSW, MH, health services, family, extended family members, and other significant parties, e.g., FFAs, mentors, Interfaith Council members, etc.	1. 9-04	Family involved in permanency planning
		2. Advocate for the Dependency Court to recognize relatives as having standing.		2. The Dependency Court, presiding judge, CLC, panel attorneys, County Counsel, CYC, Children's Rights, Public Counsel and other community partners	2. 1-05	

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Solutions/Resolutions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Whose Responsible</b>	<b>Implementation Time Frame</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>6. Policy and Practice Address Language, Culture, and Service Needs of a Diverse Population</b>	An increasing population within this target group has culturally specific characteristics, which need to be recognized and addressed. Issues of language, the need for interpreters, issues of citizenship status, and ineligibility of youth for federally funded programs must be studied and resolved.	1. Increase international collaboration and develop bi-lingual services in collaboration with community partners.	Increase resources for undocumented relatives and youth via a published resource list.	1. DCFS, Probation, community stakeholders, Dependency Courts, and lawmakers	1. 1-05	Resources and services meet the needs of this diverse population
	Additionally, undocumented status delays the permanency process.	2a. Identify early (prior to ages 14-18) and initiate a process to obtain legal residency of undocumented children with immigration issues.	Increase # of bilingual service providers in contracted service agencies.	2a. DCFS, Probation, community stakeholders, the Dependency Courts, and lawmakers	2a. 1-05	
		2b. Extend applicable resources to undocumented caregivers, youth, and relatives.		2b. DCFS, Probation, UCU, SIS	2b. 1-05	

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Solutions/Resolutions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Whose Responsible</b>	<b>Implementation Time Frame</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>7. Increased and Improved Post Legal Placement Services</b>	Inadequate post legal placement services for relatives create disparities. Additionally, adoptive parents receive limited information regarding post legal placement services.	1a. Fund and provide support services to relative caregiver families to reduce placement disruption rates. Support for families to include a list of resources that include e.g., health/mental health centers, and emancipation services, etc.	Develop resource and information website and quarterly magazine in English and Spanish.	1a. DCFS Budget and Fiscal Services, Post Adoption Services, Kinship Resource Centers, Community-Based Support Division, and community partners	1a. 1-05	Increased awareness of post legal services
		1b. Create a website for post legal placement resources and support.	Increase number of people accessing the website.	1b. DCFS	1b. 3-05	
		1c. Send periodic resource information to Kin-GAP families.	Increase the circulation of the quarterly magazine with published resources.	1c. DCFS, DMH, and other community stakeholders	1c. 3-05	
	Relative caregivers with special needs youth are being pressured to accept Kin-GAP, which is not an option.	2. Ensure mental health and physical assessment results are fully utilized in the development and implementation plan.		2. DCFS (RA, SCSW, CSW, DMH, DHS, the Dependency Court, DPSS, Probation and other community stakeholders	2. Immediate and ongoing	
<b>7b. Initiate a Kin-GAP Option for Probation Youth</b>	Currently relative caregivers for Probation youth are not eligible for Kin-GAP	Explore and identify a method to change the law.		Probation	Ongoing	



<b>Goal</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Solutions/Resolutions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Whose Responsible</b>	<b>Implementation Time Frame</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>8. Expanded Educational Advocacy</b>	The limited educational advocacy for youth in this age group (and older) places youth at a disadvantage to successful transitions to permanency.	1a Urge relative caregivers and non-related extended family caregivers to attend KEPS, which provides a module that trains for educational advocacy and permanency planning.	<p>Create specific training for education advocacy for youth.</p> <p>Provide education resource packets and invite college representatives and other resources to participate in this training.</p> <p>Publish education resources in the previously mentioned website and dedicate at least one page to education and training resources.</p>	1a. DCFS, CSW, local school districts, DCFS, Probation, Education Coordinating Council and community partners	1a Immediate	Increased educational advocacy
		1b Encourage school districts to minimize “confidentiality” process that prohibit sharing the child/youth’s academic records in order to ensure and provide appropriate educational planning.	Increase the number of families attending this training.	1b. Education Coordinating Council, TCCF, school districts	1b Immediate	

Goal	Description	Solutions/Resolutions	Indicators	Whose Responsible	Implementation Time Frame	Outcome
<b>8. Educational Advocacy (continued)</b>		1c Provide training for all school personnel on DCFS systems to foster understanding of challenges faced by the child/youth and caregivers.		1c. Educational Coordination Council, TCCF, school districts	1c Immediate	
		1d Provide mandatory incentives for attending KEPS classes and for participation in services and other support groups as they go through a permanency planning process.		1d. DCFS, CSWs, TCCF, and community partners	1d 9-04	
	CSWs, caregivers, and youth often lack awareness of educational benefits and job training possibilities that influence permanency decisions	2. Provide to caregivers and youth at the permanency planning meeting resource packets that include academic information related to graduation requirements, tutoring resources, and regional occupation programs.	Increase # of youth making contacts with college, university, job training representatives	2. DCFS, LACOE, and other educational systems	2. Immediate and ongoing	
	Implement the Board of Supervisor's motion addressing the educational rights and needs of the youth.	3. Move forward the Board motion that addresses the educational rights and needs of the youth and implement motion protocols.		3. DCFS, LACOE, and other educational systems	3. 10-04	

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Solutions/Resolutions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Whose Responsible</b>	<b>Implementation Time Frame</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Expectant mothers and new parents recently emancipated from foster care require special supports to provide permanency for their babies.	1. Seek secure housing and stable supports for young families.		1. Alumni Resource Centers, and community partners	1. Immediate and ongoing		Successful transition to permanence
	Transitional/emancipation services need to be intensified to provide understanding of permanency planning.	2. Identify county services training that enable youth to participate in decision-making processes such as family-group decision making and family support practices.	Increase number of youth that attend the training.	2. DCFS, CSW, Emancipation Services, TCCF County and Senior Citizens	2. 9-04	
	Transitional/emancipation services are needed to assist dependent minors on challenges and responsibilities of unplanned early parenting.	3. Incorporate family planning and parenting training for dependent minors and their partners.	Increase number of youth that retain information learned as measured by a training evaluation form.	3. ILP, and community partners	3. 9-05	
	Expectant mothers and new parents recently emancipated from foster care require special supports to provide permanency for their babies.	4. Seek secure housing and stable supports for young families.		4. Alumni Resource Centers, and community partners	4. Immediate and ongoing	

Goal	Description	Solutions/Resolutions	Indicators	Whose Responsible	Implementation Time Frame	Outcome
<p>10. <b>Effective and Streamlined Interstate Compact (ICPC) Processes</b></p>	<p>The current Interstate Compact laws/protocols often delay and/or prohibit the timely placement of children with relatives that reside out-of-state.</p>	<p>1. Work with representatives from the federal and state level, including: CWDA and the CAAA to streamline the process for obtaining approval for Interstate Compact of the Placement of Children (ICPC).</p>	<p>Create a user's guide on ICPC that includes information on criteria and eligibility for ICPC.</p> <p>Number of ICPC guide distributed to CSW, DPOs, and other staff</p>	<p>1. DCFS Legislative Analysts Section with community partners including the Commission and the BOS.</p>	<p>1. Immediately and on-going</p>	<p>Improved Interstate Compact (ICPC) process</p>
	<p>There is a lack of funding to support further development of ICPC services nationwide</p>	<p>2. Support any pending legislation, including any proposals to increase funding allocations for the advancement of the program.</p>		<p>2. DCFS Legislative Section, CLC</p>	<p>2. Initiate by 7-04, as 8-20-04 is the last date to submit amendment.</p>	
	<p>Once the relative caregiver is approved as a placement option, these relative caregivers may still experience additional delays in the transfer of child pending acquisitions of a foster care license as a condition of ASFA compliance, and/or additional delays in the transfer of foster care payments.</p>	<p>3a. With the same agencies, investigate the possibility of modifying the existing ICPC protocol to facilitate the assessment and development of a transitional plan for current relative caregivers wishing to relocate, including but not limited to: conducting the home assessment and initiating the process to grant a new guardianship in the new state.</p>	<p>.</p>	<p>3a. DCFS Legislative Section, CLC</p>	<p>3a. Initiate by 1-05 until completed</p>	

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Solutions/Resolutions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Whose Responsible</b>	<b>Implementation Time Frame</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<p>10. <b>Effective and Streamlined Interstate Compact (ICPC) Processes</b></p>		<p>3b. Urge the federal and state agencies to create a database to identify the status of reciprocity between all states.</p>		<p>3b. DCFS, ITS and ICPC Unit</p>	<p>3b. 4-05</p>	
		<p>3c. Create a user's guide on ICPC, which includes information on the criteria and eligibility for ICPC and instructions on the steps needed to initiate the process in assisting the relative caregiver obtain legal standing in the new state (i.e. grant new guardianship). Train all social workers and support staff on the new protocol.</p>		<p>3c. DCFS ICPC and Training Section</p>	<p>3c. 4-05</p>	

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Solutions/Resolutions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Whose Responsible</b>	<b>Implementation Time Frame</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>11.Supportive and Responsive and Consistent ASFA 1997 Approval Process</b>	ASFA 1997 regulations have made the assessment process for relatives a barrier to permanency both for new and continuing placements.	1. Seek grants and community resources when making improvements in homes to comply with ASFA 1997 standards.	Create list of community resources that provide grants or assist caregivers in making necessary improvements that will comply with ASFA standards.	1. DCFS and community partners	1. Immediate and ongoing	A more supportive ASFA 1997 approval process, which increases the number of relative caregivers complying
	All possible efforts must be extended to caregivers to assist them in achieving compliance.	2. Involve relatives in ensuring that timelines and improvements required by corrective actions plans are explained, facilitated and monitored.	Increase number of resources on the list of community resources and increase circulation of resource list.	2. DCFS, relative caregivers, and community partners	2. 7-05	

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Solutions/Resolutions</b>	<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Whose Responsible</b>	<b>Implementation Time Frame</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>12.A Reformed and Responsive CLETS/Live Scan System</b>	State and federal regulations regarding Live Scan/CLETS can prevent and/or disrupt placements with relatives.	1. Work with DOJ to revise current Live Scan forms.	Ensure priority processing for relative placements when a delay will result in placement with a non-relative foster parent	1. DCFS, LA Sheriff's Dept., DOJ	1. Ongoing	A more responsive CLETS Live Scan system
	There is a need for Live Scan processes that can decrease the time for placement .	2. Advocate ensuring priority processing on Live Scan for relative placements when a delay will result in placement with a non-relative foster parent.	Decrease placement disruption due to Live Scan Delay	2. DCFS, DOJ. CDSS	2. Immediate	
	There is a need to understand pending legislation relating to CLETS	3. Support pending legislation relating to CLETS (AB 1913-Cohn and AB 1988-Wolk).	The number of drafted policies tracked that support pending legislation.	3. CWDA, Commission, Board of Supervisors (BOS), DCFS Legislative Analyst Section	3. Immediate	

**Appendices List**

- Appendix A: Appendices List
- Appendix B: Rites of Passage, 2-27-04
- Appendix C: Relative Care Support Group, 3-18-04
- Appendix D: Kinship Focus Group, 3-26-04
- Appendix E: Relative Caregivers Roundtable, 5-18-04
- Appendix F: Youth Summit on Permanency, 7-08-04
- Appendix G: Alternate Indicator List
- Appendix H: Compelling Reasons Document
- Appendix I: Relative Caregiver Committee Meeting Dates
- Appendix J: Acronym Definitions



**Rites of Passage  
Discussion around Permanence  
February 27, 2004**

Tammy:	23 years old
Delores:	18 years of age
Kiavia:	16 years old
Frank:	15 years of age
Isaac & Issah (Twins):	14 years old
Ricky:	17 years old

**Discussion with Tammy**

Tammy says that opportunities for attachments are not encouraged or respected. Tammy has a sister who is seven years younger than she. Her sister is still in the system and has a baby. Tammy was unable to take care of her sister because she does not see herself able to care for herself. Tammy participated in ILP but did not connect with the resources she was told about. The baby lives with her biological father in Atlanta. Tammy and her father are just becoming connected.

**Discussion with Delores**

Delores feels a connection with a foster mother who moved to Tennessee. Her social worker would not let her move with the foster mother. Dolores still communicates with the foster mother in Tennessee. Dolores is still part of the system, but runs away. She currently lives with Tammy. Dolores sees the system as moving too slowly and believes the system does not allow enough freedom to participate in the life style she would like. Delores and Tammy live downtown.

**Discussion with Kiavia**

Initially Kiavia was taken with her brother by their material grandmother. They were adopted. The grandmother grew ill so they were sent to Arizona to live with other family members. The relationship did not work. She was then sent back to Los Angeles where she stays in contact with her attorney. Kava lives in a foster home. The attorney was instrumental in getting Kiavia to visit the family in Arizona. Kiavia admits to having a poor attitude but wants to be with her grandmother in Arizona.

### **Discussion with Frank**

Frank has been in placement only two years and has been in three homes. Frank is close to the son of one of these caregivers. He remains in contact with the 27 year old son of the previous placement. Frank sees himself connecting there or with the 27 year old more/rather than with his own biological family member.

### **Discussion with Isaac and Issah**

Isaac and Issah were adopted at age three. They lived in the home of the adoption until the age of 14. They came back into placement because they did not respect their mother (adoptive). They are both wanting to go back to where they were raised. They visit the adopted home every weekend. The social worker and the mother want the boys to come home. The social worker's supervisor wants the young men to have more counseling.

### **Discussion with Ricky**

Ricky was in placement with his brother at the grandmother's home. The grandmother took them in at birth. His grandmother grew ill and could not care for them. Ricky and his brother have had a number of placements. His brother was adopted by one of the foster parents. The foster parent wanted to adopt Ricky but he did not want to live with the rules. Ricky is connected to a 23 year-old biological sister. Ricky and his biological sister are making plans to live together in Louisiana where the sister currently lives. Ricky had just been expelled from continuation school prior to the interview. He admits to having attitude problems and does not want to be confined.

### **Challenges to Permanence**

Youth when questioned openly, do have a significant adult in their lives, however:

1. Is the significant adult wanting or able to take full responsibility (adopt) the youth?
2. Can anyone get the buy-in from the young person that there is something he/she is willing to do to make a change in his/her behaviors to accommodate adoption permanence?
3. What types of services are available for the potential eligible adult? What is the plan for the future? How will this information get communicated when the social worker is no longer available?
4. With the identification of the significant adult what mechanisms are in place in:
  - a. Supporting the relationship (new) of the young person and the adult?
  - b. Continuing to develop resources to support the adults supporting the youth?
  - c. Training and working with the young person to be manageably empowered?

## **Appendix C**

### **Relative Care Support Group Meeting Report**

#### **Relative Care Support Group Meeting Report**

Jacqueline Dolan

On March 18, 2004, I attended the Relative Care Support Group meeting held in East Los Angeles. My purpose for going was to identify possible corrections of Kin-GAP policies in Los Angeles County or necessary legislative changes at the state level.

Under the artful and caring direction of Claudia Bustillos-Hess, Social Worker with the Department of Children and Family Services, 16 relative caregivers planned an outing to Knotts Berry Farm. When all the excitement over this day of respite for the caregivers and a fun filled day for the children in their care, the group moved on to their concerns of the daily needs of the children.

It became obvious that those in attendance had children with very special needs. Three of the families had been Kin-GAP'd, but when it became obvious that the children in their care needed services (special ed and mental health services) they filed a 388 and had their cases reopened.

A woman arrived having been released from jail an hour earlier. She had given birth 3 months ago, while in custody. She had given the baby to her cousin to care for and now the cousin would not return the baby. The baby had not been placed by the Dependency Court so there was neither open case nor supervision by DCFS. Claudia strongly advised the mother to get "clean" and stay clean to prove that she was responsible and able to care for her child. She has three other children in foster care. The women in the group gave suggestions to the mother of places where she could get help for her addiction.

The support by the social worker, along with her ability to get these caregivers to support one another is exemplary. It is clear that social workers, who are knowledgeable of the unique ways of working with relatives caring for abused and/or neglected children, ease their task and raise their chances for success for the children in their care.

## **Kinship Focus**

On Friday, March 26, 2004, The Community College Foundation hosted a Kinship Focus Group in Sylmar, California at the request of Dr. Harriette Williams, Commissioner for the Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families. The Foster and Kinship Care Education Department of Los Angeles Mission College graciously provided a

**The Kinship Focus Group Agenda**  
**March 26, 2004**

Los Angeles Mission College

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Group Discussion
  - What are the challenges to adopting your relative?
  - What has been your experience with Kin-GAP, if applicable?
  - Has your DCFS Social Worker encouraged you to adopt the child(ren) in your care?
  - What needs are not being met for you or the child(ren) you are caring for? Who or what do you believe is responsible for this deficiency?
  - What has been useful to you in caring for the child(ren) placed with you?
  - What new services or resources do you need to do a better job of caring for the children?
3. Concluding Remarks

location for the 2-hour meeting, and recruited local relative caregivers from the San Fernando Valley to attend and offer their input. A total of 18 people participated in the Roundtable, 11 of whom were relative caregivers, with the remaining attendees comprised of staff from The Community College Foundation's Kinship Education, Preparation and Support (KEPS) Program, KEPS trainers, representatives from Mission College's Foster and Kinship Care Education Department, and

Madeline Jackson, Program Manager for Kinship Care with the Department of Children and Family Services.

Commissioner Williams opened the Roundtable with an explanation of a motion being set forth by the Board of Supervisors and the Children's Planning Council to examine Permanency, with a particular focus on youth ages 14 –18. She noted that a main point of concern for this age group is that the youth are not adequately prepared to become independent at age 18 when they no longer receive support from caregivers. Additionally, Dr. Williams explained that, while there has been a lot of emphasis placed on permanency for this age group, there is a concurrent awareness that relatives do not want to adopt because of feeling they are "writing off" their **own** children or other family members. In regard to the topic of Permanence and related issues, 6 questions were posed as follows. The responses are noted after each question:

**1. What are the challenges to adopting your relative?**

Relative: Fear of losing services and financial resources for special needs.

Problem with not allowing birth parents' names to remain on the birth certificate.

Children don't want their parents as siblings.

Birth parents object to the adoption.

Creates conflict between natural children and relative children.

Unsure of benefits of adoption for the youth, particularly concerning special needs like mental health services.

Dr. Williams: Work with "chain of command" if not getting what's needed.

**Relative: Relatives are scared to complain because of conflicts with social workers; fear of "retribution" from social workers (e.g. threats that they will "take away the children").**

Need an "advocate" who is not part of DCFS to help in these situations.

Another problem with adoption is fear of future problems; need for ILP to be extended to all youth who have been in "the system," even if adopted.

**2. What has been your experience with Kin-GAP, if applicable?**

There were no responses to this question as relatives present were not in this system.

**3. Has your DCFS Social Worker encouraged you to adopt the child(ren) in your care?**

Relative: Social workers "coerce" relatives to adopt, but it seems that legal guardianship with benefits is better for the family.

Social workers seem pressured to "make" relatives adopt, even when the family doesn't feel its best.

Ms. Jackson: Post-adoption services should provide specialized services if need arises after adoption

Relative: There are problems with the Regional Centers.

Dr. Williams: A closer relationship is needed between the Department of Children and Family Services and the Regional Centers.

Relative: The Ombudsmen don't do anything, they just give referrals.

Relatives must be party to the Dependency Court case.

**4. What needs are not being met for you or the child(ren) you are caring for?  
Who or what do you believe is responsible for this deficiency?**

Relative: Information about services doesn't filter down to relatives.

Relatives are not party to the Dependency Court case, even though the children are in their care.

Relatives need good local resource lists, connections and advocacy.

Transportation is a problem within "pockets of isolation" where there aren't extensive bus services.

Need better mental health care services.

Kids need special programs like summer camp, music and dance lessons, programs to support special talents. Little is available to support kids who are doing well.

Child care and after-school programs.

Tutoring for youth at all ages (outside of ESTEP program age range).

Respite Care.

Relatives need equality of opportunity to foster parents.

**Appendix E**  
**Relative Caregivers Roundtable Agenda**

**Relative Caregivers Planning Committee and Roundtable Agenda**

May 18, 2004

**Co-chairs:**

**The Commission for Children and Families and  
the Department of Children and Family Services**

1. Introductions
2. Presentation of New Kinship Liaisons
3. Relative Care Permanency Committee (update)
4. Relative Care Kin-GAP Committee (update)
5. Relative Care Training (KEPS)
6. Conference Reports
7. Future agenda items
8. Meeting Schedule (2004)
9. Adjournment

**Appendix F**  
**Youth Summit on Permanency**

**Youth Summit on Permanency: July 8, 2004**

YOUTH SUMMIT FACILITATOR'S AGENDA	
JULY 8, 2004	
8:00 am to 4pm	
8:30—9 Breakfast	Registration & Continental
9:10—9:45	Welcome Guidelines & Icebreaker
9:50—9:55	Permanency Defined
10:05—11 workshop	Youth's definition of Permanency
11—11:15	Break
11:20—11:30	AB 408 defined
11:30—12:15	Youth's definition of AB 408 workshop
12:15—12:50	Lunch
12:55—1:30	Work on presentations or Adult lead groups
1:35—2:30	Presentation to Distinguished Guests
2:30—3:30	Evaluations and Next Steps

**Background**

The Youth Summit began being conceptualized when administrative staff of The Community College Foundation's (TCCF) Early Start To Emancipation Preparation and the Independent Living Program (coordinated for Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)) saw that information and understanding of AB 408 and legal permanency was needed. The administrative staff brought together youth in-out-of-home care to seek the youth's thoughts and ideas about permanency. What followed was a decision to hold a Youth Summit on permanency and significant/permanent connections issues. Consistent with the belief that the youth voices and thoughts should be heard, a team of TCCF

staff met with eight youth for several months to facilitate the youth's ability to plan and lead the activities. The Youth Summit Committee activities included designing the Summit, selecting activities, preparing youth leaders/facilitators for the workshops, outreach for the event, planning menus, etc.

On July 8, 2004, the Youth Summit was held. It was a significant opportunity for attendees to define and strategize how permanency for youth will be communicated to the numbers of young people throughout Los Angeles County.

The Summit took place at the Doors of Hope Ministry, 1327 S. Atlantic Boulevard, East Los Angeles, California from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Forty plus youth were present. Youth committee members served as leaders/facilitators.

During the morning, youth gathered on their own to discuss permanency and significant adults in their lives. To begin the dialogue youth reviewed the following information to discuss in more detail in breakout small-group sessions:



### **Definition of Permanency**

There is no clear, universal definition of permanency, especially for this age group. Legal permanency is generally meant to include reunification with birth parents, adoption, or legal guardianship by relatives. Some, including DCFS, would include legal guardianship by non-relatives in that category; others vigorously and passionately oppose this inclusion, including some Department staff, arguing that since this type of legal arrangement ends at age 18, it does not constitute “real permanency,” from Dr. Sharon Watson’s, report, *A Plan For Increasing Permanency for Los Angeles Foster Youth Ages 14 Years and Older*. March 2004.

### **Permanency Continuum**

Most people agree that reunification is the most desirable form of permanency. The following options are listed in order of preference:

- Family Preservation/Maintenance
- Reunification with birth parents
- Adoption by a relative
- Legal Guardianship with a relative or Kin-Gap
- Legal Guardianship with a non-relative
- Adoption by a non-relative
- Mentor+” or Lifelong Connection
- Positive relationship with unrelated adult
- Mentor

### **AB 408**

AB 408 has two distinct components that impact the child’s psychosocial development and potential for positive outcomes. One is the “**Quality of Life**” piece which calls for a foster youth’s ability to engage in age appropriate social, enrichment, and extracurricular activities without artificial barriers to discourage this involvement. The second portion of AB 408 speaks to the importance of “**Permanence**” and ensuring that no youth leave the foster care system without a lifelong connection to a committed, caring adult.

### **Intent and goals of AB 408**

- Ensure that all children in foster care **retain and or establish relationships with important individuals** in their lives;
- Promote permanency and stability by ensuring that no child leave the foster care system without a **lifelong connection to a committed, caring** adult;
- Implement changes to the Welfare & Institutions Code by imposing **new requirements** on the court, social workers, and attorneys to assure permanence and stability for foster youth; and
- Assure that children 10 years of are or older receive notice of and have the **right to attend their court proceedings**.

Based upon these definitions and each youth’s perspectives on permanency, youth were given the opportunity to develop their perspectives using the following scenarios called, *The Decision Game* (See *Youth Responses*)

### **Afternoon Session—Skit, Panel Presentations**

In the afternoon, the youth facilitators presented their definitions, suggestions, and questions about permanency to the Distinguished Guest panel. Distinguished Guest Panel were: Angela Carter, Deputy Director, Bureau of Administration, Department of Children and Family Services; Nina Sorkin, Commission, Children and Family; Paul Freedlund, Deputy Director, Services Bureau I, Department of Children and Family Services; Harriette Williams, Commissioner, Children and Families; Armand Montiel, Emancipation Co-chief, Department of Children and Family Services; Berisha Black, Foster Youth Ombudsmen, Los Angeles County.

The youth performed a skit enacting how a youth might select a responsible adult based upon the values and insight to provide meaningful guidance. The youth solicited advice on life situations of five individuals. The role players gave bad and good advice to the youth looking for a mentor. The outcome of the skit was that the following values were identified as significantly important:

- Respectful to others
- No excuses
- Takes care of business
- Honest and loyal
- Able to relate to youth

After the skit a dialogue between the distinguished guests and facilitators included questions and responses. Both youth and guests gained further clarity that there are many solutions to be identified regarding permanency. The youth were excellent in their ideas they brought from the workshops. The distinguished guests were appreciative of the opportunity to listen and to have dialogue with the youth.

#### **Evaluation Results:**

Participants attending the day submitted approximately 50 evaluations. Attendees overwhelmingly responded that the summit was meaningful in learning about AB 408 and Permanency. Youth reported that workshops were helpful. Frequent responses were that the youth learned that they had a voice and learned about their rights. Twenty-one youth attending the Summit were interested in becoming a member of a planning/organizing committee for a future Youth Summit. Suggestions to improving the Summit included: More media coverage, more time with panel, less wasted time, and better air conditioning.

#### **Youth suggestions included:**

- Survey/ask youth questions
- Maintain contact with CSW 12-18 months after permanency plan begins for monitoring purposes
- Make permanency optional, not mandatory
- Get MSW candidates that can monitor youth for internship
- Permanency grace period should be implemented (Example: one year)
- Clarify reunification process for youth (all steps and loop holes)
- Provide a way to talk to CSW in private, neutral environment

## Youth Responses

### AB-408: The Decision Game

1. ***Would you consider a schoolteacher, who has no children of her own, but shows no passion in what she does, as a significant adult?***

Agree: Some people have a job to do; they can still be responsible, yet not passionate. The person could still have influence over you.

Disagree: Need passion for teaching to reach kids and help them.

2. ***Would you consider a man that works on Wall Street, has lots of money, and is willing to take of you financially, but is never at home, as a significant adult?***

Agree: Wall Street person is ambitious and youth could observe his/her ambition (see what to do and not to do).

Disagree: Need someone (parent) to talk to and be a positive role-model. Money does not solve problems. No "life" connection.

3. ***Would you consider a 35 year-old woman that has completed 6 months of rehab (been clean for 6 months) has a place to live and a steady income, as a significant adult?***

Agree: Former addict has life experience and there for you at home. Role model—from mistake to success.  
Free from drug addiction (6 months) may show responsibility—a good start—shows effort on a person's part—determination, give the person a chance.

Disagree: Person can help you with similar problems  
Recovering addict is more at-risk. Six months is not enough time. Drug addiction is shady, need more time for recovery.

4. ***Would you consider an older brother or sister who has 2 children and a house, as a house, as a significant adult?***

Agree: Because they are family, we would have a house to live in.  
Able to help because he is my brother

Disagree: Has too many kids to take on another kid. Need to know income,  
Must be responsible, not able to get along.  
You can't choose family, but you can choose a mentor.  
Older brothers and sisters may be controlling—they have kids,  
distracting.  
Family not understanding

5. ***Would you consider your biological parents(s), as a significant adult?***

Agree: Sober parent has done a lot for them  
Parent has been through everything  
Yes, strong relation with parent, someone to talk to

Disagree: Never took care of me/different beliefs and not a responsible parent  
You can't choose family, but you can choose a mentor  
I am her biological child of my biological parent, yet I can't call her a significant adult. Too hard to rebuild relationship

**6. Would you consider a co-worker who can't financially support you but gives you good advice and is there for you emotionally, as a significant adult?**

Agree: Need support/advice

Disagree: No financial support—if they can't take care of them, how are they going to take care of me?

Don't really know them.

Agree: Went through similar experiences

Put you on the right track

They want to help and support you

Gives good advice

Their job shows that they are trained to understand the needs of foster youth.

The kind of person, who will point you in the right direction, provides information on how to change "life" pick-up tools and put them to use.

Disagree: None

**7. Would you consider your boyfriend's/girlfriend's family member as a significant adult?**

Agree: Know that significant other is getting taken care of, then I will be taken care of.

Get along with the family.

Bringing up their kids right; they can help me.

His/her Mom is a good friend to me.

Disagree: Not trying to depend on others for my well-being.

Family not understanding

**AB 408: Youth Responses to What Youth Want in an Adult/Mentor/Significant Others**

- Acceptance
- Always there for you, especially during hard times
- Comfortable—feel love
- Communicative, reliable
- Dependable
- Emotionally supportive/mental
- Good friend
- Good listener, helpful, confidant
- Good role-model, responsible, positive attitude
- Honest, self-supportive
- Kind, caring, etc.
- Kindness, love, support, disciplining
- Knowledgeable on life resources
- Quality Time (Q.T.)
- Respect
- Stable, reliable, trustworthy, selfless
- Support, but also "KIR,"—keeps it real
- Teacher, hard-working
- To live with/caregiver that youth knows and trusts—not an unknown—stable--trusting
- Treat you like they want to be treated
- Treated the same, equal respect
- Trustworthy
- Willing to "meet in the middle"
- Willing to take care of regardless of the money

### **AB 408: Youth Responses to What Mentors Look for in Mentees**

- Be a good student, be helpful in the community
- Caring
- Communicates
- Follows directions/follow-through
- Honest, self-reliant
- Keeps promises
- Kind
- No excuses—admits mistakes
- Obedient
- Open to support
- Respectful
- Responsible, reliable
- Some positive belief in oneself
- Takes advice
- Takes care of business
- Trustworthy
- Youth accepts constructive criticism
- Youth asks for help
- Youth must be motivated
- Youth who networks

### **Youth Comments on Permanency**

- A band aid to a bigger problem
- A band aid to develop a permanent living arrangement without ILP/ESTEP resources
- Bush using extra money saved from permanency on war
- Government ordered-cut backs
- Having an influential person in your life to assist you with all of your needs
- Kids in system getting “screwed over”
- No more money
- Place to live
- Permanency helps foster youth join people just like you with a stable family environment
- Place where you are some where and with someone you don’t know
- Place where you can go change your ways
- Place where you can make positive changes
- Place where you don’t want to be
- Safety blanket
- Stay for the rest of your life

### **Youth Ideas and Thoughts on Permanency**

- All about money
- “Caring” caregivers
- Be placed with someone who is financially stable
- Everyone must agree on welfare of youth—3rd party decision
- Group home accountability
- Housing Assistance
- Leave it up to the youth
- No more group homes
- No more money for caregivers
- Pay the caregivers something
- People placed with below average caregivers
- Permanency should be optional, not mandatory
- Permanency should include a grace period
- Permanency will mean financial cutbacks for caregivers
- Social worker problems/unreliability
- Some take advantage of it
- Stay with someone you know
- Supervise funds for youth
- Transitional Housing continues
- Voluntary foster parents (money should not be an issue or deciding factor)
- Where do younger folks go?
- Youth learn to self-advocate

**Appendix G**  
**Alternate Indicators and Outcomes**

The list of indicators that follows, prepared by Walter Yi-lung Kiang, Ph.D., MSW, Head of DCFS Contract Management, represents a preliminary attempt to attach specific numbers to the goals proposed by the Relative Care Permanency Committee. We recognized that because of time constraints and representation of significant agencies who would participate in operationalizing the implementation of those recommendations, it would be impossible at this time to put numeric values on these outcomes.

<b>Goals and Indicators</b>		
<b>Goals</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Indicator</b>
<b>Change in the Culture</b>	There is a need for a philosophical and cultural change in the County, which values the participation of family, especially <u>relative caregivers</u> , in the placement planning process.	% of relatives who keep the family together  % of CSW and support staff receive training to address specific relative and family dynamics  # of initiating county-wide awareness campaign: re: value of permanency  # of grassroots councils formed  % of relatives empowered to advocate for their families
<b>Increased Levels of Resource and Support</b>	As compared to their counterparts in the foster care community, there is a disparity of available resources and support for this population, which may create a financial hardship and/or disrupt placement.	% of relatives receive the information, e.g., financial and medical benefit, educational benefits, Wraparound, System of Care, and job training.  % of youth secure community mental health resources that support the concurrent planning and legal permanency options
<b>3. A Workforce Knowledgeable and Committed to the Provision of Kinship Issues</b>	There is a paucity of training for CSWs, administrators, relatives, community-based providers and other potential "partners."  Because of the high turnover of caseworkers, such training needs to be on going and mandatory.	% of relatives receive training specific to relative-care for 14 to 18 years old resulting in skilled knowledgeable workers and service providers  % of social workers and support staff receive relative care assessment and provision of services training

<b>Goals and Indicators</b>		
<b>Goals</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Indicator</b>
<b>Inclusion of Youth in Permanency Decisions</b>	The needs, options and wishes of the youth often are not sought nor determined or factored into the permanency decisions.	<p>% of youth meet AB 408 policy and practice</p> <p>% of youth's wished stated in the Dependency Court report</p> <p>% of youth identified with a mentor consistent with implementation of AB 408 and incorporate in TILP plan</p>
<b>Inclusion of Family and Extended Family Members in Permanency Decisions</b>	Family and extended family members often are not active participants in the decision-making process.	<p>% of multi-disciplinary team decision-making used with family and other significant parties at all critical decision points</p> <p>% of relatives recognized as having standing advocated for the Dependency Court</p>
<b>Policy and Practice Address Language, Cultural, and Service Needs of a Diverse Population</b>	<p>An increasing population within this target group has culturally specific characteristics, which need to be recognized and addressed. Issues of language, the need for interpreters, issues of citizenship status, and ineligibility of youth for federally funded programs must be studied and resolved.</p> <p>Undocumented status delays the permanency process.</p>	<p>% of relatives use bi-lingual services who need this service</p> <p>% of undocumented children with immigration issues obtain legal residency</p> <p>%of undocumented caregivers, youth and relatives receive applicable resources</p>
<b>Increased and Improved Post Legal Placement Services</b>	<p>Inadequate post legal placement services for relatives create disparities.</p> <p>Adoptive parents receive limited information regarding post legal placement services.</p> <p>Relative caregivers with special needs youth are being pressured to accept Kin-GAP, which is not an option.</p>	<p>% of kinship families receive a list of resources that include health/mental health centers, and emancipation services, etc. to reduce disruption and placement</p> <p>% of relatives use a website for post legal placement resources and support</p> <p>% of Kin-GAP families receive periodic resource information</p>

<b>Goals and Indicators</b>		
<b>Goals</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Indicator</b>
<b>Expanded Educational Advocacy</b>	<p>The limited educational advocacy for youth in this age group (and older) places youth at a disadvantage to successful transitions to permanency.</p> <p>CSWs, caregivers, and youth often lack awareness of educational benefits and job training possibilities that influence permanency decisions</p> <p>Some relatives and non-related extended family members have a limited ability to be linked to resources.</p> <p>Implement the Board of Supervisor's motion addressing the educational rights and needs of the youth.</p>	<p>% of relative caregivers and non-related extended family caregivers attend KEPS</p> <p>% of relatives receive incentives for attending KEPS classes</p> <p>% of caregivers and youth at the permanency planning meeting receive resource packets that include academic information related to graduation requirements, tutoring resources, and regional occupation programs</p> <p>% of the youth whose educational rights and needs of the youth addressed by the Board motion</p>
<b>Successful Transitions to Permanence</b>	<p>Youth may lack life skills, which will permit a successful transition into legal permanency.</p> <p>Transitional/emancipation services need to be intensified to provide understanding of permanency planning.</p> <p>Transitional/emancipation services are needed to assist dependent minors on challenges and responsibilities of unplanned early parenting.</p> <p>Expectant mothers and new parents newly emancipated from foster care require special supports to provide permanency for their babies.</p>	<p>% of youth educated on legal permanency options and protocols through a revised ILP curriculum and related services activities</p> <p>% of youth participate decision-making process training such as family-group decision making and family support practices</p> <p>% of dependent minors and their partners attend parenting training incorporated with family planning</p> <p>% of young families secure housing and stable supports</p>



<b>Goals and Indicators</b>		
<b>Goals</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Indicator</b>
<b>Effective and Streamlined Interstate Compact (ICPC)</b>	<p>The current Interstate Compact laws/protocols often delay and/or prohibit the timely placement of children with relatives that reside out-of-state.</p> <p>There is a lack of funding to support further development of ICPC services nationwide.</p> <p>Once the relative caregiver is approved as a placement option, these relative caregivers may still experience additional delays in the transfer of child pending acquisition of a foster care license as a condition of ASFA compliance, and/or additional delays in the transfer of foster care payments.</p>	<p>% of placement of children with relatives that reside out-of-state delayed by the current ICPC</p> <p># of proposals to increase funding to support further development of ICPC services nationwide</p> <p>% of relative caregivers experience delays in the transfer of child pending acquisition of a foster care license as a condition of ASFA compliance</p> <p>% of relatives use database to identify the status of reciprocity between all states</p> <p>% of relatives use a user's guide on ICPS</p>
<b>Supportive and Responsive and Consistent ASFA 1997 Approval Process</b>	<p>ASFA 1997 regulations have made the assessment process for relatives a barrier to permanency both for new and continuing placements.</p> <p>All possible efforts must be extended to caregivers to assist them in achieving compliance.</p>	<p>% of relatives involved in ensuring that timelines and improvements required by corrective actions plans are explained, facilitated and monitored</p>
<i>A Reformed and Responsive CLETS/Live Scan System</i>	<p>State and federal regulations regarding Live Scan/CLETS can prevent and/or disrupt placements with relatives.</p>	<p>% of current Live Scan forms revised</p> <p>% of relatives have disrupt placements due to Live Scan/CLETS</p>

***Compelling Reasons for Determining That Termination  
of Parental Rights Would Be Detrimental To the Child***

**[WIC Section 366.26 (c)(1)(A) – (E)]**

The following is a list of the ONLY compelling reasons for determining when termination of parental rights would be detrimental to the child. While the law provides for all these reasons, DCFS policy dictates that the most permanent legal plan for the child must be pursued, and that true legal permanency is achieved through **adoption** or legal guardianship with relatives (Kin-GAP). In order to recommend non-TPR, diligent efforts must be made to assess and address those barriers to seeking the most permanent plan, and those efforts must be thoroughly documented in the Concurrent Planning: Permanency Planning/Adoption Assessment, case plan and Dependency Court report.

- ◆ Parents or guardians have maintained regular visitation and contact with the child and the child would benefit from continuing the relationship.
  1. **Assess the quality of the visits and the quality of the child's relationship to the parents or guardians, weighed against the child's need for legal permanence.**
  2. **Explore the options available to search for an adoptive home that will maintain regular visitation with birth family through establishing a postadoption contact agreement.**
  3. **Re-explore the possibility of reunification and/or re-activate the search for relatives (for hearings subsequent to the WIC 366.26)**
  4. **Use permanency-planning mediation.**
  
- ◆ A child age 12 or older objects to termination of parental rights
  1. **Explore the reason(s) for the child's objection, and clear up any misconceptions. Explore, with the child, options that will meet his or her need to maintain contact with birth family members.**
  2. **Include the need for permanency in the treatment plan if the child is already engaged in therapy. If not, engage the child in therapy to address permanency needs and prepare for adoptive planning.**
  3. **Refer the child to PRU for an Adoption Specialist to work with the child and for matching/recruitment efforts to identify a permanency planning family willing to maintain contact with birth relatives, if applicable.**
  
- ◆ The child is placed in a residential treatment facility, adoption is unlikely or undesirable, and continuation of parental rights will not prevent finding the child a permanent family placement if the parents cannot resume custody when residential care is no longer needed.

1. Explore the child's treatment needs, and type of placement and support required upon discharge.
  2. Work with the child's service provider, and build permanency into the discharge plan.
  3. Explore services such as wraparound and family preservation that can support child moving to a permanent family.
  4. Document the search for a family who would be able to meet the child's needs, including relatives and families with whom the child has had a previous nurturing relationship.
  5. Activate initiation of the adoption home study when relatives, previous caregivers or non-related extended family members in the child's life want to adopt upon discharge.
  6. If there is no identified permanency caregiver, refer to PRU for an Adoption Specialist to work with the child and for matching/recruitment efforts.
  7. Include active visitation for the identified permanency caregiver in the case plan while the child is in the residential treatment facility.
- ◆ The child is (a) living with a relative, OR (b) living with a non-relative and is over age six or a member of a sibling group which should be placed together where all siblings are over age 6; AND the relative or foster parent is unable or unwilling to adopt the child because of exceptional circumstances, that do not include an unwillingness to accept legal or financial responsibility for the child, but who is willing and capable of providing the child with a stable and permanent environment and the removal of the child from the physical custody of his or her relative or foster parent would be detrimental to the emotional well-being of the child.

**Relative Care:**

**NOTE:** A child living with a relative who is determined to be the most appropriate relative caregiver available is an acceptable permanent plan and is an exception to the requirement of filing a petition for termination of parental rights.

1. If the relative is not the best placement or match for the child or cannot care for the child for the long term, explore other relatives/siblings who are willing to provide legal permanence for the child.
2. Use Family Group Decision Making to engage the family in making a determination of the best long term relative caregiver or to identify other possible relative placements.

**Non-Relative Care:**

3. Assess the caregiver's reasons for not considering adoption. Determine if there are options to address the perceived barriers to adoption. Assess the child's relationship to the non-relative caregiver, weighed against the child's need for legal permanence. Engage the child in discussions for his or her hopes for the future.

**NOTE:** Meeting the child's need for permanence is DCFS' primary goal. A permanent family can help the child overcome the losses of previous relationships, including a temporary caregiver.

- ◆ There would be substantial interference with a child's sibling relationship, taking into consideration the nature and extent of the relationship, including but not limited to, whether the child was raised with a sibling in the same home, whether the child shared significant common experiences or has existing close and strong bonds with a sibling, and whether ongoing contact is in the child's best interest, including the child's long-term emotional interest as compared to other benefit of legal permanence through adoption.
  1. **Search for an adoptive family willing to accept the sibling group or an adoptive family willing to maintain sibling contact.**
  2. **Explore the possibility of postadoption contact agreement for siblings.**
  3. **Use permanency-planning mediation.**

### **WIC 281.5**

"In accordance with Welfare and Institutions Code Section 281.5, at the time of the removal of a child from the custody of his/her parents, preference shall be given to placement in the home of a relative, if such placement is in the best interest of the child. If there are no appropriate relatives, out-of-home placement shall be in the least restrictive, most family-like setting, which would meet the child's needs.

Assembly Bill (AB) 1695 clarifies California's relative caregiver approval process that employs the same standards used to license foster care homes in accordance with the Federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 and eliminates the "certification pending licensure" process. This bill also created a new category of prospective caregiver entitled "nonrelative extended family member." A "nonrelative extended family member" is defined as any adult caregiver who has established familial or mentoring relationship with the child. This prior relationship shall be verified by interviews with the parent and child and with one or more third parties.

In compliance with welfare and institutions code 309, 319, 361.3, prior to placing a child in a relative or non-relative extended family member's home, the social worker shall initiate an assessment of suitability of the prospective caregiver, which shall include an in-home site visit to assess the safety of the home and the ability of the prospective caregiver to care for the child on a temporary basis, including consideration of the results of criminal records check and any allegations of prior child abuse or neglect concerning the prospective caregiver and other adults in the home.

It is the policy of the Department of Children and Family Services (Procedural Guide 0100-520.10-Evaluating a Prospective Caregiver) that the efforts to locate relatives and/or nonrelative extended family members as a placement resource is a recurring process which does not cease until a child is returned home, the Dependency Court has approved adoption as the permanent plan, parental rights are terminated, a legal guardian is appointed, or the case is closed.

**Appendix I**  
**Relative Caregiver Committee Meeting Dates**

Relative Caregiver Committee Meeting Dates

December 16, 2003

January 26, 2004

February 13, 2004

February 27, 2004

March 5, 2004

March 12, 2004

March 22, 2004

March 30, 2004

April 6, 2004

April 19, 2004

April 27, 2004

May 11, 2004

May 18, 2004

June 21, 2004

June 30, 2004

July 27, 2004

## Appendix J Acronyms

### Acronyms

<b>ARA</b>	Assistant Regional Administrator
<b>ASFA</b>	Adoption and Safe Families Amendment Act of 1997
<b>BITS</b>	Bureau of Information Technology Services
<b>BOS</b>	Board of Supervisors
<b>CAAA</b>	California Association of Adoption Agencies
<b>CAO</b>	Chief Administrative Office
<b>CASA</b>	Dependency Court Appointed Special Advocate
<b>CBO</b>	Community-based Organization
<b>CCL</b>	Community Care Licensing
<b>CDSS</b>	California Department of Social Services
<b>CLC</b>	Children's Law Center
<b>CLETS</b>	The California Law Enforcement Telecommunications System
<b>COURT</b>	The Juvenile Dependency Division (for DCFS) or Juvenile Delinquency Division (for Probation) of the Superior Dependency Court of Los Angeles County
<b>CPC</b>	Child Protection Custody
<b>CPS</b>	Child Protective Services
<b>CSW</b>	Children's Social Worker
<b>CWDA</b>	Child Welfare Directors Association
<b>CYC</b>	California Youth Connection
<b>DCFS</b>	Department of Children and Family Services, Los Angeles County
<b>DHS</b>	Department of Health Services
<b>DMH</b>	Department of Mental Health
<b>DOJ</b>	Department of Justice
<b>DPSS</b>	Department of Public Social Services
<b>DPO</b>	Deputy Probation Officer
<b>FFA</b>	Foster Family Agency
<b>ICPC</b>	Interstate Compact of the Placement of Children
<b>ILP</b>	Independent Living Program
<b>IUC</b>	Inter-university consortium consisting of USC, UCLA, CSULB, and CSULA
<b>KEPS</b>	<i>Kinship Education and Preparation Support</i> curriculum
<b>LACOE</b>	Los Angeles County Office of Education
<b>MH</b>	Mental Health
<b>RA</b>	Regional Administrator
<b>SCSW</b>	Supervising Children's Social Worker
<b>SDPO</b>	Supervising Deputy Probation Officer
<b>SIB</b>	Service Integration Branch, and CAO
<b>SIS</b>	Special Immigration Status Unit
<b>SPA</b>	Service Planning Area
<b>TCCF</b>	The Community College Foundation

***A PLAN FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION  
OF ASSEMBLY BILL 408***

*The Road to Permanence: creating caring connections  
for Los Angeles County foster youth*

Prepared by

Lisa E. Mandel, Children's Law Center of Los Angeles  
Stacey Savelle, Program Consultant

June 1, 2004

## Youth Perspectives

*"It's really important to make sure before emancipating a youth that they have one person. If I have somebody that I know I can depend on, that loves me and cares that I wake up tomorrow and am still breathing, I can get through it."*

*"It's important to know that there is someone I can count on who wouldn't turn their back on me."*

*"Permanency would make all the difference in the experience of a youth's life in the system because it's stability. It provides a youth with the opportunity to really know what it's like to be cared for, not just because you're a foster child."*

"Yes, I have a permanent connection - simply because I've been blessed to find at least one adult at any given phase since being in foster care that's totally taken me under their wing and that I've totally gotten attached to and they've been there for me."

*"When I'm eighteen and leaving the system, am I going to get a replacement parent or a network of people?"*

*"The system got in the way of developing myself and my trust with other people..."*

*"Encourage the youth, while they are still in foster care, to make relationships outside of the foster care system and with people their own age, maybe even a couple of years older."*

(Quotes are from "Youth Perspectives on Permanency" – California Permanency for Youth Project/California Youth Connection, 2004)



## AB 408 IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

The Permanency Committee of the Commission created the AB408 subcommittee for Children and Families to review the law surrounding Assembly Bill 408 and to offer recommendations leading to its implementation within the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and to consider its applicability to Probation youth as well.

AB408 has two distinct components that impact the child's psychosocial development and potential for positive life outcomes. One is the "**Quality of Life**" piece which calls for a foster youth's ability to engage in age appropriate social, enrichment and extracurricular activities without artificial barriers to discourage this involvement. The second portion of AB408 speaks to the importance of "**Permanence**" and, ensuring that no youth leave the foster care system without a life long connection to a committed, caring adult. As another work group is addressing the "quality of life" piece, **this report will address the second mandate surrounding permanence for youth.**

Participants representing a wide spectrum of public and private partners were included in our discussions and recommendations. Specifically, input was solicited from former foster youth, DCFS, Probation, the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles, Children's Planning Council, County Counsel, Public Counsel, CAO, LACOE-FYS, Western Child Welfare Law Center/State Child Welfare Services Redesign, faith community, and private and public mentoring programs.

The work of connecting youth with caring, committed adults who will champion them and become their lifeline beyond the realm of foster care can have far-reaching results that can lead to emotional and in many instances, legal permanency.

The passage of Assembly Bill 408 gives weight to the conviction that despite the provision of social services to youth in care, it is the connection between child and a caring adult that will have the most profound and positive influence on lifelong outcomes. In many ways, this law seeks to expand a child's safety circle beyond those connections with caring professionals and caregivers, to the realm of "real life" people who care for the child without regard to: legal status, living arrangements, geography, predetermined time frames, accomplishments, challenges, or availability of funding.

The work of this group has been approached in concert with the development of permanency recommendations by Dr. Sharon Watson and presented in the report, "*A Plan for Increasing Permanency for Los Angeles Foster Youth*". Many of our recommendations complement the findings contained in Dr. Watson's report. In addition to this study, this report draws from the research and lessons learned from the following sources: former foster youth, "Represent...the Voice of Youth in Care", Catholic

Community Services of Western Washington, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Democratic Leadership Council, National Child Welfare Resource Center, You Gotta Believe!, Stuart Foundation, CWS Redesign, California Youth Connection, Casey Family Programs, and National Resource Center for Youth Development.

### **Intent and Goals of AB408**

- Ensure that all children in foster care **retain and/or establish relationships** with **important individuals** in their lives;
- Promote permanency and stability by ensuring that no child leave the foster system without a **lifelong connection to a committed, caring adult**;
- Implement changes to the Welfare & Institutions Code by imposing **new requirements** on the court, social workers and attorneys to assure permanence and stability for foster youth; and
- Assure that children 10 years of age or older receive **notice of** and have the **right to attend** their **court proceedings**.

### **Key Provisions of the Law**

- Requires the court to determine whether the placing agency has made reasonable efforts to establish and maintain a child's relationship with individuals important to a child who is ten years of age or older and who is placed in a group home.
- Requires the court to make any order to ensure that actions are taken to maintain those relationships.
- Amends WIC 349 and requires that notice of all hearings be sent to children 10 years of age or older; that the child be made aware that he/she is entitled to be present in court for the hearing; that he/she be represented by counsel and if the child is not present in court, the judge shall determine whether or not the child was properly notified of their right to attend the hearing.
- Requires agencies to make efforts to identify those "important" persons and to make efforts to maintain those relationships consistent with the child's best interests, even if parental rights are terminated.
- Requires agencies to ask every child 10 years and older to identify those "important" person(s), consistent with the child's best interests.

- Allows agencies to ask children younger than 10 years to identify those persons.
- Requires the county welfare department to provide information to a dependent child who has reached the age of majority on maintaining his/her relationship(s) with important individuals and to verify this in their report to the court.
- Encourages approaches to ensure that no child leaves foster care without a lifelong connection to a committed adult.
- Requires a case plan (TILP) for youth 16 years and older be developed jointly with the youth, the social worker, and other identified important persons in that youth's life. The report is to reflect information about those individuals and what efforts were made by the social worker to identify and maintain the relationship with the youth.

### **Who is Our Population?**

Data provided as of December 31, 2003 indicates that the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has 1578 children 10 years and older (our target youth) in group home placements. Probation has 1120. Data on placement distribution by Service Planning Area (SPA) of the children and youth in this group are attached. SPA 3 has three times as many target youth than other SPAs although it is recognized and must be noted that the data may not be accurate in that the numbers represent the SPA to which the case is assigned and not necessarily the SPA in which the child currently resides.

### **The Scope of Recommendations**

In addition to considering requirements of AB408, the subcommittee's recommendations will go beyond those mandates and will, in addition to other recommendations, suggest best practices when a child is not able to identify an important person or when that identified person is either not in the child's best interests or declines to become involved. The group suggested extending those best practices to Probation youth, with the understanding that the law does not legally require this action.

## Issues Addressed

### I. Define the Characteristics of a Committed, Caring Person

This discussion focused on knowledge of, and history with the child. The key factor is finding someone who will act in the child's best interest, placing their health, education and safety as paramount concerns. It is recommended that this important person be an adult, i.e., 18+. Boyfriend/girlfriend relationships would not be considered in this category but would exist outside of this more formalized framework. In addition, sibling relationships are excluded from this designation, although their involvement in the child's life is legally and emotionally recognized. The age of this adult is not as important as his/her ability to play a meaningful, supportive and hopefully permanent role in the child's life. This may include aged grandparents who may not be able to provide a home for the child, but are willing and able to provide emotional support and life lessons.

Ideally the "committed, caring person" will be someone with whom the child has a shared history, is still involved in the child's life, or still maintains at least minimal ongoing contact with the child. This person/s may have a demonstrated history of acting in this youth's best interest, or at least show evidence that they have the potential to do so. Consideration should be given on how they live their life. Often, youth look to a transitional adult to learn how to trust and how to live.

People who may be considered for their ability to become the "committed, caring person" could include former teachers, team coaches, parishioners, best friend's family, close family friends, social workers, Probation Officers, former caregivers, relatives, fictive kin, mentors, counselors, attorneys, etc.

Priority should be given to family members, either close or extended. Often there might be extended family or fictive kin who have not been approached about participating in the child's life without the need to provide housing for them. Some may have only been asked about providing a home for the child and nothing further. It will be incumbent upon the social workers to not only ask the questions regarding housing, but to look at other ways that family can and should support these youth. There may also be people in the child's life that once provided live-in care but now, for a variety of reasons are unable to do so. They may be the ideal persons to help these youth with continuity of caring for them in other significant ways.

Qualities to look for in an ideal, committed, caring person would include: patience, commitment, acceptance, stability, the ability to connect with the child in a constructive way, time to have one-on-one interactions with the child, etc.

The overarching goal is to establish a relationship that could become permanent with an eye to perhaps more permanent legal status as well, i.e., guardianship and adoption, while also helping to create a network of supportive caring people for the youth that could include a combination of kin, interested known adults and even a mentor.

### **Recommendations:**

This caring, committed person should:

- Be at least 18 years of age
- Have a history of a relationship or connection with the child
- Have the potential to develop a strong and lasting bond with the child
- Be willing to commit to a long-term relationship with the child
- Be able to put the child's best interests at the forefront
- Live close enough to the child and/or has the ability to maintain personal visits
- Be willing to participate in case planning
- Provide a good role model
- Want to assist in nurturing the development of the child
- Could potentially develop into a permanent, legal placement for the child

## **II. What Safeguards Should Be Considered in the Selection or Approval of the "Important" Person?**

It is important that child safety concerns are addressed prior to sanctioning any relationship. We need to ensure that this person has the ability to make good decisions, can relate to the child in a constructive way, understands the child's needs, knows the difference between discipline and punishment ...in other words, can relate to and advocate for the child as a prudent parent would.

### **Recommendations:**

- Ensure that "Lifeline" candidates have a criminal background check through CLETs and a DMV check, and personal reference review.
- Overcome the cost of the criminal checks by promoting legislation to have those fees waived in this circumstance.
- Conduct an interview and contact personal references if the interview yields positive results.

### **III. Define the Role of this Person**

The important, caring person must agree to engage in an active relationship with the child, beyond just that of a friend. This person must be willing to become an integral part of, and become involved in the child's life. This could include:

- Visits to the person's home
- Involvement with the person's family
- Involvement in the group home and ILP case plan
- Collateral contact for court reports
- Attendance in court as a support for the child
- Respect of case confidentiality
- Assistance with schooling and future planning
- Serving as a surrogate at educational IEP meetings when needed
- Holding educational rights for the youth if appropriate
- Participation in school and other activities and attendance at events in which the child participates
- Participation in and engaging the child in cultural and social events
- Consider welcoming the child into their home in the future

### **IV. Departmental Obligations if No One is Identified**

AB408 requires that children age 10 and older living in group homes and teens with a Transitional Independent Living Plan be asked to identify someone that is important to them; a caring person that they would like to have in their life. It is essential that the social worker who is required to interview the youth be skilled at introducing the issue of identifying this person, also known as the "lifeline", and of walking the child through the process of trying to identify someone that he or she would like to see fill that role. If, despite effective interviewing, the child is unable to identify someone from his/her past or present, the Department will need to take steps to try to fill this void through other means. Similarly, the Department is obligated to not only identify this "individual" but to nurture and then support that relationship.

For those with no one, a solution might be to link these children with a mentor... someone that has volunteered to serve in this capacity, someone that has been properly trained and willing to take on the job. The hope and ultimate goal being that if the match were properly made and then nurtured and supported, that many relationships would in fact grow into the life long connection that these children deserve.

The Department will need to train the social workers on working with mentors and systems change would need to be implemented in order to properly support these mentors.

### **Recommendations:**

- Follow interview protocol which guides the child to explore potential areas where connections might be identified
- Educate social workers on child development and how to “ask” these questions appropriately
- Help youth identify the qualities a “committed, caring person” might have
- Help youth review their placement history
- Social workers will need to review early case history to see if relatives or other significant persons have been omitted from the child’s life, and whether reintroduction would be appropriate
- Social workers will need to work with the child’s attorney to help identify this person or persons
- If no one is identified; the social worker must look to outside resources in order to link the child with a caring, important person – such as a mentor, big brother/sister.

### **V. Training Considerations**

It is very important that the Department develop and deliver a comprehensive training module to help implement AB 408. Staff must believe that creating these opportunities and connections for children and older youth is possible, and that these connections could ultimately provide options for permanence. It is not enough for the social worker to ask a child, “who is important in your life?”, note a non-response from the child, and move on to other issues. This conversation must be a part of their ongoing work with the child, and in an open and sensitive way to address the needs of each child. Introducing the subject of identifying or creating this special relationship can be tricky. What if the child has no one? What if the child suggests someone that can’t be located? What if the person is totally inappropriate? What if that person declines involvement?

The committee discussed having training which combines youth (current and/or former foster youth) and adults as presenters. The youth trainers would discuss how these types of relationships have played an important part in their lives and how, in some cases, they have helped identify those people and create their own circle of support. The adults similarly could explain how their work with the youth has been rewarding, challenging and significant to them as well as the youth.

## **Recommendations:**

Training should be developed in the following areas—

- Introduction to AB408;
- Interviewing techniques;
- Child development and best practice approaches to youth in this area;
- How to review (or “mine”) a case to find reference to potential people of importance;
- How to set aside notions of who the ideal person is and respond to all potential resources (including the extended family who may often be left out of the child’s life);
- How to evaluate people for this role; and,
- How to present this to caregivers of older youth so that they will accept the child or youth and work cooperatively to support the relationship.

Delivery methods--

- Youth conferences that address this issue by youth to youth;
- Group home conferences or trainings that discuss the role of the group home in helping to identify and nurture these relationships, and that reinforce their legal mandate;
- Foster parent and kinship conferences, association presentations and newsletter articles;
- Training for trainers presented to supervisory staff;
- Individual training to social workers by child development experts ;
- Court training to assist the attorneys as well as the Judges on the process and the need for their support and input; and,
- Mentor agency summit to let organizations know about the needs of foster youth and invite them to partner with DCFS to help train and/or recruit potential mentors.

## **VI. Marketing Strategies**

An aggressive marketing strategy should focus on locating and engaging committed, caring adults, creating collaborations and developing meaningful partnerships at all levels with youth and adults.



## **Recommendations:**

- Public service announcements
- Targeted messages to the faith communities
- Targeted messages to the school districts
- Publications in target newsletters
- Articles in target magazines
- Use of ILP online website
- Links from related websites
- Build on special month designation, e.g., National Mentoring Month – January, Foster Care Awareness Month – May, etc.
- Include and incorporate existing organizations, i.e., the Los Angeles County Bar Association
- Have flyers to distribute at appropriate events
- Make presentations at appropriate venues
- Host a Mentoring Conference

## **VII. Funding and Support Options**

Support for this newly identified group of people is vital to the success of the pairing. The Department should designate someone to be an “Ombudsperson” specifically for the implementation of AB408, someone who could answer questions, suggest possible resources, follow-up on issues with social workers, DPOs, or caregivers. In addition to this personal support, there must be regular ongoing support groups/meetings available for these individuals where they could have a forum to discuss successes, frustrations and obtain ongoing support for their work. These groups would need to be led by professionals able to assist with crisis and relationship building issues.

It is also important that we acknowledge these “volunteers” either with recognition events, public ways to honor successes and perhaps, some incentives such as gift certificates, event tickets, etc. This is a new and unique category of relationship with no precedent and no legal title. There is neither financial incentive nor contract to bind the adult with the child, only a bond of caring.

Currently, there are many mentoring programs throughout Los Angeles County. There is very little, if any connection between the many programs, DCFS and the advocacy community. If mentors are looked upon to fill the many voids for these children, there will need to be a concerted effort to organize and administer the many mentoring programs that currently exist. Funding for this type of public/private clearinghouse would be

essential in order to create this type of public/private systematic organization. To date a few of our private non-profit partners have shown an interest in this area such as the Children's Law Center and Public Counsel.

**Recommendations:**

Some of many funding opportunities that might be pursued include:

- Weingart Foundation
- Joseph Drown Foundation
- Eisner Foundation
- Fulfillment Fund
- California Endowment
- The Always Dream Foundation
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Magic Johnson Foundation
- Andrus Family Fund

Subscribe to Foundation Directory On-Line and regularly review the Federal register for potential funding opportunities.

Create public/private partnerships which link DCFS/Probation with private non-profits will expand the funding appeal. Special event fundraising efforts and soliciting private donations (both monetary and in-kind) will help support group activities that will focus on retention of committed, caring adults and mentors.

**VIII. Implementation Recommendations**

Since AB408 is already the law, the committee recognized the urgency of implementation. While the Permanency recommendations in Dr. Watson's report call for pilot programs and a gradual rollout over the next two years, this initiative will need to pursue countywide implementation with clear and concise training and information provided to all stakeholders.

**Recommendations:**

- Development of policy
- Development of protocols
- Development of training for staff, youth and caregivers

- Development of orientation/training for all stakeholders, i.e., attorneys, Judges, FFA workers, etc.
- Consideration of the use of Departmental retirees to help locate, screen and evaluate people
- Establishment of a training and support system for those who agree to mentor or become involved with the youth
- Teach the child/youth how to have a relationship and support them through this process
- Address issues such as self-esteem, building trust and loyalty, dealing with loss and disappointment, building safe relationships

## **IX. Structure**

Often there are many potential important individuals or lifelines in a child's life that have previously been discouraged. Examples include social workers, probation officers, teachers, etc. We need to recognize that sometimes a strong, caring bond has been created by the nature of the work involved, and we must learn to appreciate that these relationships, on a more personal level, should not be overlooked. For DCFS and Probation, policies need to be reviewed and revised to allow for this role shift.

## **X. Mentorship**

The group discussed how the mentor role fits into this paradigm and how the Department can best respond to this heightened need brought about by the passage of AB408. For those youth unable to self-identify the significant, caring person they want in their lives, and for those that the Department and attorneys are unable to find significant individuals to fit this role, mentor programs appear to be the best resource for filling this void.

It is recognized that there are many excellent mentoring programs operating in the Los Angeles County area. Sadly, there is no one base of neither operations, nor a way to identify the many programs and mentors available within the areas needed. It is essential that a public/private oversight group be established that could act as an umbrella organization that would have the ability to identify the many mentoring programs and opportunities on a Countywide basis and to serve as the clearinghouse to assure that children in need of a mentor are afforded the opportunity to have one. A few of our private non-profit partners, the Children's Law Center as well as Public Counsel have already shown an interest in helping to create such an oversight system in collaboration with DCFS.

## **Recommendations:**

- Remove boundaries that currently prevent workers from becoming mentors. Allow CSWs, DPOs, attorneys, etc. to mentor youth if they are willing, as long as the youth does not remain on their caseload. These relationships can be springboards to other strong relationships.
- Establish a public/private mentor oversight group to gather information on all current and upcoming mentor programs and opportunities and to partner with the Department in acting as a clearinghouse for matching youth with mentors. This partnership would need to be a public/private venture and could obtain outside funding for development. The Children's Law Center or Public Counsel might be considered as the potential "partner" for this activity.
- Look to a partnership outside the confines of DCFS/Probation to develop and maintain a mentor resource directory of existing programs that are willing to serve foster children and youth. This could include development of a training module for other agencies to use that addresses the specific needs of foster youth.
- Establish a mentor liaison in each Bureau to focus on this issue. This position would provide local recruitment of potential mentors for existing mentor agencies, help with training, and problem solving. There should also be a designated liaison (assigned to Service Bureau I) to focus solely on identifying resources and recruitment of mentors/mentor agencies for transitioning youth, countywide. Perhaps the new Permanency Division could take the lead in coordinating the work of the liaisons.
- Request that the newly revived Director's Youth Council consider forming a Speaker's Bureau of current and former foster youth to help mentor liaisons recruit mentors and speak to other youth in care about building relationships. Pay speakers a stipend.

## Conclusion

The road to permanence may not always be a direct path. Sometimes there are roadblocks and detours, but the challenge is to navigate around obstacles, avoid potholes and forge ahead. Legal permanence is always the goal at the end of the road but emotional permanence along the way may make the journey more meaningful.

The passage of AB408 lays claim to the fact that children need a partner to guide them along the road to permanence and to a successful ever after. With the Departmental commitment to permanence, more and more children and youth will have the opportunity to find lasting family connections. For those who cannot find legal permanence, AB 408

challenges us to help those children 10 years and older in group homes to identify, create and nurture permanence. Children and youth who feel connected with a personal support network or even a mentor, may develop the esteem and skills to embrace legal permanence when a plan is put in motion. Similarly, once the relationship and connection is established, it is our hope and goal that the relationship develop into a more permanent, legal one that could include legal guardianship and adoption.

Recommendation priorities, therefore, focus on public private partnerships with better resource management, training of social workers/probation officers, working collaboratively with group homes, providing group orientations to group home youth prior to individual discussions about this concept, and most importantly, following through with the child's suggestions and nurturing any relationship that is established as a result.

We are also required to forge lifelong connections for youth preparing to transition to adulthood. The charge cannot stop there, however, because the Department has an obligation to explore ways to link all youth with person(s) who will add stability and unconditional support regardless of placement failures, school changes, etc.

As Dr. Watson's Permanency Report identified, there is a long relationship continuum. Family maintenance, reunification, adoption, legal guardianship are the most preferred with long-term kinship care with relatives, foster care and mentor connections being less permanent and in some cases even transient.

The Committee's far-reaching recommendations and the law's lack of funding should not preclude the Department from taking necessary steps that will further guide our children down the road to permanence. Children and youth who feel connected to someone who cares about them, someone who is not getting "paid" to care about them, be it a personal support network or a mentor, will develop the esteem and skills necessary to embrace legal permanence when a plan is put in motion. This is the best path to success and permanence for our children.