



February 6, 2006

Dear County Welfare Directors:

We are pleased to send you the attached *Declaration of Commitment to Permanent Lifelong Connections for Foster Youth*, sponsored by the California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) and its Youth Permanency Task Force. This Declaration is the result of a concerted and collaborative effort to engage public and private agencies to build support for foster youth permanence. By endorsing this Declaration, your agency can publicly acknowledge its commitment to policies and programs that lead to permanent connections for foster youth, while raising attention to this important issue for policy makers and your local community.

As you know, counties are engaged in numerous strategies to improve outcomes for foster youth. In addition, CPYP is working with fourteen counties to incorporate youth permanency practice into local system improvement strategies. Some of the promising practices encompassed in youth permanency include "family finding" and inclusion of youth in case planning. Additional information about the project is attached, and the results of this effort have been encouraging.

Many counties have taken great strides in establishing permanent connections for foster youth given within existing resource constraints, and we recognize the need to improve permanency outcomes for *all* foster youth so that no youth leaves foster care without a permanent lifelong connection to a caring adult. This Declaration can be an important symbol of your organization's commitment to embracing and promoting policies and programs that support youth permanency.

Signing this declaration is completely voluntary. Please send your signed Declarations to the CPYP Office by March 31, 2006 to attn: California Permanency for Youth Project, 660 13th Street, Suite 300, Oakland, CA 94612. A public event will be held in the spring to publicize the Declaration and those who have signed. We further ask counties that choose to adopt this Declaration to incorporate its principles into your operations to the extent possible, as the ultimate objective is to infuse all organizations with practices which demonstrate a strong commitment to youth permanence. You may also share this Declaration with partner agencies in your community and encourage their endorsement as well.

Thank you for your consideration of this Declaration and for your continued efforts to promote foster youth permanence. For additional information concerning this Declaration or the Permanency for Youth Project, please contact Pat Reynolds-Harris, Founding Project Director, at (510) 562-8472.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director
County Welfare Directors Association
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Attachments (2)

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The California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) is a project of the Public Health Institute which started January 2003 as a result of a five year grant awarded by the Stuart Foundation.

Project Vision: To achieve permanency for older children and youth in California so that no youth leaves foster care without a lifelong connection to a caring adult.

Project Objectives:

1. To increase awareness among the child welfare agencies and staff, legislators and judicial officers in the state of the urgent need that older children and youth have for permanency;
2. To influence public policy and administrative practices so that they promote permanency
3. To assist four specific counties and the private agencies with which they work to implement new practices to achieve permanency for older children and youth.

Project Activities:

The Permanency for Youth Task Force The Task Force is a statewide group with broad representation, including public and private organizations, youth and funders.

Task Force objectives are:

1. To facilitate collaborations between public and private agencies to achieve permanent lifelong connections for youth in the system;
2. To create opportunities for key stakeholders (who affect outcomes for youth in the system) a. to realize the need for permanent lifelong connections for youth and b) to understand that it is possible to achieve these connections;
3. To identify and overcome structural barriers (within the system affecting youth) that prevent achieving permanent lifelong connections; and
4. To promote public relations, education and advocacy efforts that will address the needs of youth for permanent lifelong connections.

In November 2003, CPYP received a grant from the Walter S. Johnson Foundation to pursue the partnership objectives of the Task Force. The grant supports the work of three workgroups addressing issues of partnership between public child welfare agencies and a) the courts, b) group homes and c) adoption/family foster agencies. The groups will make recommendations on how effective partnerships can accomplish improved permanency outcomes for foster youth by November 2005.

Technical Assistance to Counties The project has been working with four counties, San Mateo, Alameda, Stanislaus, and Monterey, to develop programs to achieve permanency

for more youth. The project has been a) providing these counties with technical assistance over two and a half years to help them develop youth permanency practice in their counties and b) will document significant lessons about implementation useful to the field. Each county has developed a youth permanency plan that includes the following target areas: administrative practices, permanency practice, identification of project target group, staff development, partnerships, and integration with other initiatives.

Now that these four counties are now finding permanent connections for an increasing number of their young people, the CPYP will be assisting nine more counties starting in the spring of 2005 and continuing through 2007. These new counties are: Contra Costa, Fresno, Humboldt, Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, and Sonoma.

Training A curriculum called Preparing Youth for Permanent Family Connections has been developed with the support of Zellerbach Family Foundation for use by California counties and is available to all public child welfare agencies and their partners as of April 2005 through the Child welfare Training Academies around the state. In conjunction with the California Youth Connection (CYC) and the Bay Area Academy, the project supported the development of “**Digital Stories**” on permanency by current and former foster youth which are available from CPYP and can be used in training.

Convenings As a part of the development of CPYP project, a national convening was held in April 2002 to explore the issues of permanency for youth. Subsequently, national convenings have been held in 2003 and 2004. April, 2004. April 27-29, 2005 the fourth convening will be held.

Documents To increase awareness of the issue, the project has developed two documents:

1. **Model Program for Youth Permanency:** A report on nine exemplary permanency programs throughout the U.S. and explanation of the critical elements of such programs.
2. **Youth Perspectives on Permanency:** An exploration of youths’ perspectives on permanency through a focus group process in partnership with the California Youth Connection (CYC).

Evaluation To measure results, CPYP is gathering data over time from workers in each county on the young people being targeted for youth permanency services. In addition, the project is doing a formative evaluation of each county's implementation process that will inform the field of strategies for implementation and change.

Website The project website is www.cpyyp.org. Convening summary reports, CPYP documents, digital stories, are on the website among other interesting youth permanency materials. Some materials can be downloaded. Hard copies of CPYP documents and VHS or DVD copies of digital stories are available free of charge at 510-268-0038.

Declaration of Commitment to Permanence for Older Foster Youth

As members of the Child Welfare community in California, we recognize the crisis that exists for older foster youth who lack permanence. We hereby declare our commitment to support and achieve permanence for all youth, and that:

We are deeply concerned that approximately 80,000 foster children are in care in California, many of whom are unable to return to their families, and who thus rely on the foster care system to provide them with a family and a sense of permanent belonging; and

Youth in foster care need the same permanent family connections as youth in the general population. Permanency for youth is a process that includes involvement of the youth as key participants in defining permanency for themselves and finding stable and secure lifelong connections; and

Research has demonstrated that a lifelong connection and relationship with a supportive adult, related by blood or not, is one of the key variables associated with resilience and will have the single greatest impact on each youth's ability to navigate the transition to adulthood; and

A committed adult is one who provides a safe, stable and secure type of parenting relationship; love; unconditional commitment; and lifelong support in the context of reunification, a legal adoption, guardianship or some other form of committed lifelong connection; and

Many foster youth currently leave care without a single lasting relationship or connection with any adult, and many youth only have relationships with adults that are limited solely to professionals and last only as long as the youth is in foster care; and

Statistics show that many negative outcomes experienced by foster youth are a result of having no one to turn to for help and support once they exit the foster system; and

Older foster youth greatly need and want permanent connections and lifelong relationships with adults, particularly as they prepare to leave the foster care system and face the challenges of life alone; and

For permanency to be achieved for adolescents, public and private child welfare professionals must work in partnership together with the youth in defining lifelong connections, that are permanent, secure and healthy relationships; and

We acknowledge the particular role and the significant contributions of youth themselves and recognize that their full involvement and participation is crucial to effectively achieving permanence for youth;

We commend the leadership role the California Permanency for Youth Project has taken in acting as a resource to public and private child welfare agencies, providing training, inspiration and support to obtaining lifelong relationships for teens in foster care; and

We acknowledge that the current resources devoted to achieving permanence for older foster youth are not commensurate with the magnitude of the need; so therefore

Working within our organizations, agencies, and communities and through the growing permanency for foster youth movement we promise to support and promote these objectives by doing the following:

Promote recognition of and respect for the urgent need to ensure every foster youth has at least one lifelong permanent relationship;

Educate all we come into contact with on the need, urgency, and promising practices for achieving permanence for foster youth;

Support local and statewide projects and efforts to raise awareness, recommend policy changes, increase funding for and provide assistance to improve older youths' opportunities to develop a lifelong connection with a committed adult before leaving foster care;

Initiate change within our own organizations to support youth permanence and lifelong connections.

Fortify our common commitment to the permanence of older foster youth- not as a matter of charity but as an obligation of the entire child welfare and human community to the children in our foster care system.

Signed by

Name Title Organization Date

Name (authorized signer for) Organization Date