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August 20, 2018

To: Supervisor Sheila Kuehl, Chair
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From: Judge Michael Nash (Ret.) 
Executive Director, Office of Child Protection

SUPPORTING PERMANENCY FOR FOSTER AND PROBATION YOUTH

On August 22, 2017, the Board passed a motion directing the Chief Executive Office (CEO), in conjunction with the Office of Child Protection (OCP), to coordinate with all relevant County departments—including the Health Agency (including Mental Health, Public Health, and Health Services); Public Social Services; Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services; the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE); Probation; and Children and Family Services (DCFS)—and with input from key stakeholders (such as legal advocates, judicial officers, transition-age youth service providers, housing providers, educational program advocates and providers, workforce development programs, the philanthropic community, relevant commissions, and others) to coalesce existing efforts as a basis for a cohesive multi-year countywide strategy that will support the self-sufficiency goals of transition-age foster and probation youth at the earliest stage possible.

In reviewing existing efforts that would support the self-sufficiency goals of transition-age system youth at the earliest stage possible, we found work in three areas: first, preventing children from entering the child welfare/juvenile justice systems to begin with; second, finding permanency for youth so they don't face aging out of these systems without a permanent adult presence in their lives; and third, for TAY already in these systems, ensuring that services which could help them attain self-sufficiency and build resilience are available and easy to access.¹

The CEO took the lead in ensuring that needed services for TAY were available and easy to access. With the Countywide prevention plan, *Paving the Road to Safety for Our Children: A Prevention Plan for Los Angeles County*, underway and working toward strengthening communities and preventing children from entering the child welfare/

¹ In this Board memo and in the attached *Permanency Plan for Los Angeles County Youth*, we use the term **transition-age youth** (or **TAY**) to refer to young people already involved with DCFS or the Probation Department.

juvenile justice systems, the OCP focused on developing a plan to increase permanency for foster and probation youth, and in turn decrease the number of youth who age out of the system without permanency.

In developing this plan, the OCP engaged multiple stakeholders—including DCFS and Probation managers and workers, the Alliance for Children’s Rights, Casey Family Programs, Children Law’s Center Los Angeles, and Public Counsel—to conduct a review of research, best practices, and current County permanency efforts. The OCP also participated in focus groups (convened by the CEO) of youth, line staff, and relative caregivers to gain input and feedback on this report’s recommendations. From this analysis, the OCP developed a plan to provide foster and probation youth with permanent adult connections to prevent them from aging out of the system alone. The OCP also participated in the TAY workgroup led by the CEO and helped engage philanthropy to identify projects, resources, and services in place for TAY.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (213) 893-1152 or by email at mnash@ocp.lacounty.gov, or your staff may contact Karen Herberts at (213) 893-2466 or by email at kherberts@ocp.lacounty.gov.

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- Los Angeles County Office of Education

Permanency Report for Los Angeles County Youth



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Office of Child Protection**

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BACKGROUND

Foster care is supposed to be a temporary safe haven for children who have been abused or neglected, or whose parents can no longer provide adequate care. It was never intended as a permanent living arrangement. The majority of laws affecting child welfare also emphasize the temporary nature of foster care and specify provisions to improve permanency outcomes.¹

- The Adoptions and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P.L. 105–89) requires states to begin court proceedings to terminate the parental rights for a child for adoption if that child has been in foster care for at least 15 of the last 22 months, except when such termination is not in the best interest of the child, or if the child is in the care of a relative.

Among other items, this Act also: 1) allows for the concurrent planning of family reunification and other permanency options; 2) placed time limitations on reunification services provided through the Safe and Stable Families program (revised under the Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act, passed on September 30, 2011); 3) emphasizes the importance of placing foster youth with adult relatives over non-related caregivers; and 4) mandates the documentation of efforts to find adoptive or other permanent placements for foster youth, including placements with fit and willing relatives.

- The Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (P.L. 106–169) was designed to help prepare youth to transition from foster care to self-sufficiency, but also emphasizes permanence by indicating that independent living programs are *not* an alternative to adoption, and that permanent-placement efforts need to continue **concurrently** with independent living activities.
- The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 requires all Title IV-E agencies to identify and notify all adult relatives of a child, within 30 days of a child’s removal, of relatives’ options to become placement resources for the child.
- The CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010 (P.L. 111–320) requires efforts to promote the adoption of older children, minority children, and children with special needs. It also requires the development and use of procedures to notify family and relatives when a child enters the child welfare system.
- The Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovations Act of 2011 (P.L. 112–34) requires each state plan to describe that state’s activities to reduce the length of time children under five years of age are without a permanent family. It also modifies family reunification services to mandate services/activities like peer-to-peer mentoring and support groups for parents and primary caregivers; it additionally facilitates visits between children and their parents and/or siblings.

¹ Children’s Bureau. (March 2015). “Major Federal Legislation Concerned with Child Protection, Child Welfare, and Adoption.”

- The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (P.L. 113–183) limits youth with Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) plans to those age 16 or older; and preserves a child’s eligibility for kinship guardianship assistance payments when a guardian is replaced by a successor guardian.

While federal law and County policies emphasize the temporary nature of foster care, for many of our youth, foster care has become a permanent arrangement—and our system has failed them.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PERMANENCY

Multiple research studies have demonstrated the importance of permanency and the need to address its challenges to improve outcomes for system youth. Youth who exit foster care without a permanent family or adult connection, for example, have a higher risk for many poor outcomes, including those involving teen pregnancy, poverty, homelessness, a lack of education, and involvement with the criminal justice system.

For most adults, the transition from childhood to adulthood is gradual, aided by a network of family members and social supports that guide the youth, often until the third decade of their life.² Various studies have found that a high level of social capital, or a support system upon which individuals draw to enhance their opportunities in life (e.g., a permanent family or connection), is a critical factor to their attaining higher education and developing positive self-worth. Furthermore, youth with less social capital have a greater risk of homelessness.³ The presence of at least one caring adult who offers social support and connectedness is a protective factor for at-risk youth.⁴ In fact, having at least one stable relationship with a committed, caring adult has been found to be the single most common factor in youth who develop resilience.⁵

Protective factors help build young people’s knowledge, skills, and confidence, and further aid in their successful transition to adulthood, their overall resilience, and a recovery from the trauma that most foster youth experience.⁶ Having a stable, permanent family and supportive community is linked with successful self-sufficiency, as involved individuals can help youth attain permanent housing, higher education, and emotional well-being.

While the average non-system teenager has social capital and supports to help them transition from childhood to adulthood, foster youth are often navigating life without these supports, in addition to transitioning out of care. A study from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago compared foster youth who aged out of the system to similar-age

² Avery, R. (2009). An examination of theory and promising practice for achieving permanency for teens before they age out of foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review* 32 (2010) 399–408.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child, 2016. https://ac.els-cdn.com/S0190740917308204/1-s2.0-S0190740917308204-main.pdf?_tid=0bcf4088-b6fe-4331-b64c-5cca982372c9&acdnat=1521147239_bc9bb4be74957ff2996b9a4277474e27

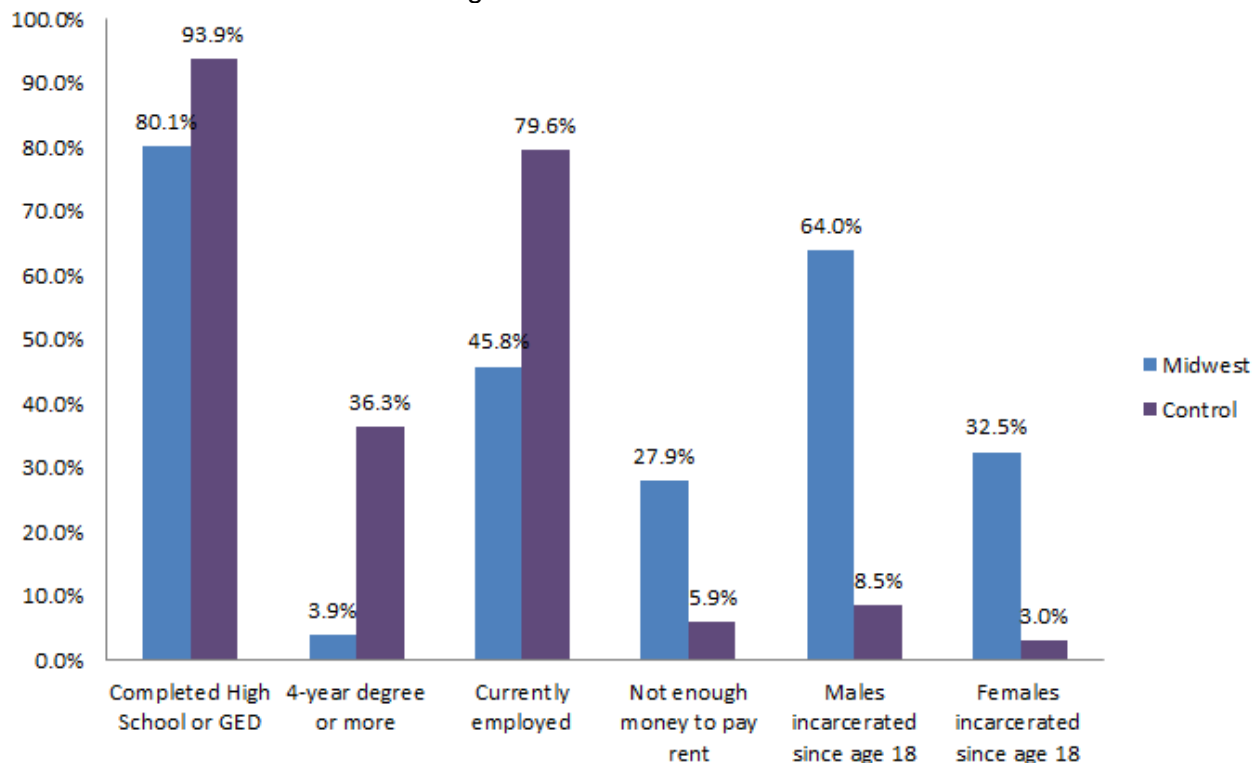
⁶ Mallon, Aledort & Ferrera, 2002. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12014475>

youth from the general population, and Figure 1 illustrates some of the negative outcomes for foster youth who exit care without permanency.

The “Midwest Evaluation of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 26 (2011)⁷” was a longitudinal study of a cohort of foster youth who had aged out of the foster care system from three state child welfare agencies (Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin). Baseline survey data was collected from 732 foster youth at 17 to 18 years old, and the youth were re-interviewed at ages 19, 21, and 26.

Figure 1 shows that, at age 26, former foster youth who had aged out of the system were not doing as well as the general population at the same age. They had lower employment rates (46% vs. 80%), higher incarceration rates (males—64% vs. 9%), and fewer four-year college degrees (4% vs. 36%). In addition, approximately one-third (31%) of the foster youth participants reported couch-surfing or being homeless for at least one night in the previous 27 months, and over one-third (38%) worried about running out of food.

Figure 1. Midwest Evaluation



These studies illustrate the importance and benefits of permanency, along with the consequences of foster youths’ not achieving it. It is imperative that Los Angeles County implement a practice model that prioritizes both permanency and self-sufficiency to prevent youth from aging out of the foster care system without permanency.

⁷ Courtney, M., Dworsky, A., Brown, A., Cary, C., Love, K., Vorhies, V. (2011). “Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Outcomes at Age 26.” Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

PERMANENCY DEFINED

Through the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, federal law established a hierarchy of permanency goals to be pursued: 1) reunification, 2) adoption, 3) guardianship, 4) placement with a fit and willing relative, and 5) another planned permanent living arrangement (APPLA), formerly known as long-term foster care.

For the purposes of this report, permanency is defined as:

- Legal permanency through reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship
- Placement with a fit and willing relative
- Emotional permanency, or a safe emotional relationship between a youth and caring adult (family or non-family member) who will offer mentorship and support to the youth (for example, by providing a place to visit during the holidays, housing, moral support, etc.) throughout his or her life

Out of these permanency options, only reunification and adoption presume that the adult will stay in the child's life for a lifetime. Options such as emotional permanency may be more important to some youth, however,⁸ and can also improve a variety of outcomes, including educational attainment, living situation, emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, and coping.⁹

Youth Voice on Permanency

Through forums conducted with former foster youth, the OCP collected a variety of comments on how they would like permanency to be achieved in their lives. For these youth, the most important element is having stable and caring adults throughout their lives to provide guidance and support when needed.

Many youth in the TAY forums indicated that they had not previously experienced legal permanency in their lives, but several listed family members, advocates, social workers, and other adults as their permanent connections. When asked how important a permanent adult connection is for them, several TAY stated that they wanted mentors to help them find careers, educational opportunities, and housing, and to connect with when times get tough.

Youth also wanted to be integrally included in their permanency process. They want the system to focus on permanency solutions that are not "cookie cutter" and that take into account youths' individual needs when finding placements and resources for them.

⁸ Sanchez, R.M. (2004). *Youth Perspective on Permanency*. California Permanency for Youth Project. <http://www.ocfcpacourts.us/assets/files/list-778/file-1026.pdf>.

⁹Ahrens, K. R., Lane DuBois, D., Garrison, M., Spencer, R., Richardson, L. P., & Lozano, P. (2011). Qualitative exploration of relationships with important non-parental adults in the lives of youth in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 33, 1012–1023. doi:10.1016/j. childyouth.2011.01.006; Child Welfare Information Gateway (May 2013). Enhancing Permanency for Youth in Out-of-Home Care. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/focus/enhancing/>.

LOCAL PERMANENCY DATA

Los Angeles County operates one of the largest child welfare agencies in the nation. In 2017, it received an average of over 18,600 child welfare hotline calls a month, with approximately 30% of those calls resulting in an investigation. As of April 2018, over 34,000 youth were receiving child welfare services, of whom over 10,000 received family reunification services and over 10,000 were eligible for a permanent placement with an adult other than their parent. Approximately 18,000 of these youth were in out-of-home placement, with an additional 1,124 youth in adoptive homes and 1,543 youth in a guardian’s home.

As of May 30, 2018, 493 probation youth were in residential foster care, with an additional 27 living with a relative or non-relative under a suitable-placement order.

Because the County touches the lives of so many children and families through its foster and probation systems, permanency must become a top priority.

DCFS Data

County data illustrates that for many of our youth, foster care is not a temporary intervention. Youth are staying in the system for multiple years, and numerous youth are not achieving legal permanency before they exit care.

Length of Time in the Child Welfare System

Table 1 reflects point-in-time data in 2016 for 16-, 17-, and 18-year-olds in the child welfare system.¹⁰

Table 1. The Age the Youth Entered the Child Welfare System

Point-in-Time Report: 2016	Age the <u>16-year-old</u> entered system		Age the <u>17-year-old</u> entered system		Age the <u>18-year-old</u> entered system	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Age						
Ages 0–5 years	108	7.3%	118	7.8%	124	12.5%
Ages 6–10 years	188	12.7%	148	9.8%	115	11.6%
Age 11	56	3.8%	57	3.8%	49	4.9%
Age 12	85	5.7%	76	5.0%	56	5.7%
Age 13	132	8.9%	106	7.0%	80	8.1%
Age 14	212	14.3%	146	9.7%	98	9.9%
Age 15	452	30.4%	242	16.1%	131	13.2%
Age 16	252	17.0%	412	27.4%	168	17.0%
Age 17			201	13.3%	160	16.1%
Age 18					10	1.0%
Total	1,485	100.0%	1,506	100.0%	991	100.0%

Note: Data source is from CWS/CMS data warehouse.

¹⁰ Data courtesy of DCFS Business Information Systems.

As shown, the majority of these youth have been in the system for multiple years. Almost a quarter (24%) of 18-year-olds entered the child welfare system at age 10 or younger, as did one in five (19.9%) 16-year-olds. A large number of youth entered the child welfare system as teenagers, as well, with over 30% of 16-year-olds entering at age 15, and over 27% of 17-year-olds entering at age 16. One in three of those youth (34% and 35%, respectively) were re-entries into the child welfare system.

These data are consistent with findings from the National Center for Youth Law’s report *Promoting Permanency for Teens: A 50 State Review of Law and Policy*,¹¹ which indicated that for this age group, “much of the policy and programmatic focus is not on permanence, but on independence. Teens need both.”¹²

Additionally, the study “There’s no place like home: achieving safety, permanency, and well-being for lesbian and gay adolescents in out-of-home care settings”¹³ found that only 8% of respondents were in fact adopted at some point in their lives. That study went on to state, “However, more than one-third (34%) of the youth surveyed indicated that, if they could be adopted, they would like to be adopted.” Although adoption may not be what all older youth want, it needs to be actively promoted as a desirable permanency option for older youth.

For foster youth aging out of the system, the average length of time spent in care has fallen since 2012, when 148 21-year-olds aged out after spending an average of over 10.5 years in the system. But we still need to do better. In 2016, 520 21-year-olds exited without legal permanency, having spent an average of 7.75 years in care (Table 2).¹⁴

Table 2. Number of Youth Aging out of Foster Care and Their Average Days in Care

Age	2016		2015		2014		2013		2012	
	# of youth	Avg time	# of youth	Avg time	# of youth	Avg time	# of youth	Avg time	# of youth	Avg time
Under 18	6	376	4	1,042	10	612	11	1,229	11	682
18	241	1,622	241	1,543	206	1,307	263	1,697	277	1,754
19	116	1,852	148	2,433	180	2,086	217	2,112	286	2,514
20	57	2,076	57	2,461	84	2,790	93	2,710	199	3,176
21	520	2,831	522	3,133	348	3,374	167	3,759	148	3,864
Over 21	8	2,778	5	4,612	4	2,878	7	4,727	9	4,078

CWS/CMS Datamart as of 12/27/2017

Permanency

According to point-in-time data received from DCFS for 2012 through 2016, approximately 9,000 children/youth every year had case plans calling for Permanent Placement. A plan of Permanent Placement means that efforts to reunify the family (if any)

¹¹ Johnson, A., Speiglmán, R., Mauldon, J., Grimm, B., Perry, M. (February 2018) *Promoting Permanency for Teens, A 50 State Review of Law and Policy*. National Center for Youth Law.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Mallon, Aledort & Ferrera. (2002). There’s no place like home: achieving safety, permanency, and well-being for lesbian and gay adolescents in out-of-home care settings. *Child Welfare*. Mar–Apr;81(2):407–39.

¹⁴ Data courtesy of DCFS Business Information Systems.

have ended, and identifying a permanent home for these youth no longer involves returning to their biological parent’s home.

DCFS data for 2016 (Table 3), shows that 1,171 (12%) of the 9,298 youth with a Permanent Placement case plan were placed into Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA), formerly known as long-term foster care. Of those APPLA youth, 935 (80%) were placed with non-relatives, and 504 (43%) were under 16 years of age. The remaining 8,127 children/youth, with an average age of 8.77 years, were available for adoption or other legal permanency options.

APPLA does not achieve legal permanency, and it lasts only while a youth has an open case in dependency court. The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 stipulates that an APPLA plan must be used only for youth 16 years of age or older.¹⁵ This federal law was incorporated into California state law on October 1, 2015, with state guidance released in April 2016.¹⁶ When a youth has an APPLA permanency plan, the case plan must include “ongoing and intensive efforts to return home, adoption, tribal customary adoption, legal guardianship, or placement with a fit and willing relative, as appropriate.”¹⁷ APPLA plans for children younger than age 16 should be inspected to ensure their compliance with this law, and placements with non-relatives should be reviewed to determine if a more formalized permanency plan can better address the youth’s needs.

Table 3. Youth Available for a Permanent Placement (Not With Original Parent) and Those Youth in APPLA

Age	2016			Total APPLA
	Permanent Placement	APPLA with non-relative	APPLA with relative	
0	156			-
1	535		1	1
2	622	2	1	3
3	610	3	5	8
4	504	1	4	5
5	469	2	5	7
6	466	6	5	11
7	399	2	6	8
8	432	11	8	19
9	444	12	7	19
10	434	24	6	30
11	422	24	8	32
12	395	32	12	44
13	432	51	13	64
14	465	84	13	97
15	541	131	30	161
16	611	190	31	221
17	747	265	60	325
18	429	78	17	95
19	137	11	4	15
20	45	5		5
21	3	1		1
Total:	9,298	935	236	1,171

1. Data source is CWS/CMS data warehouse

2. APPLA pop. based on Service Compt = PP

Table 4 shows the number of exits from DCFS over the past five years. Although the number of finalized adoptions increased over the last four years—from 1,370 (14.1%) in 2014 to 1,585 (17.3%) in 2017—the overall percentage of youth who exited care in 2017 with legal permanency (88.15%) was the lowest in those five years, and 11.85% of our youth (1,084 individuals) aged out of the system without those permanent supports.

¹⁵ Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (PL 113–183). The provisions of this Act were signed into California law on October 1, 2015, through Senate Bill 794 (Chapter 425, Statutes of 2015).

¹⁶ California Department of Social Services All County Letter No. 16-28, Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement. <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/lettersnotices/ACL/2016/16-28.pdf?ver=2016-04-26-130918-000>

¹⁷ Ibid.

Table 4. Exit Statistics
 Children Exiting Foster Care through Reunification, Adoption, Guardianship, or Aging Out

	CY 2013	CY 2014	CY 2015	CY 2016	CY 2017
Number family reunifications	5,922	6,372	5,749	5,769	5,404
Number finalized adoptions	1,308	1,370	1,439	1,532	1,585
Number of children with guardianship granted	1,059	1,077	1,196	1,212	1,076
<i>Legal Permanency Subtotal</i>	8,289	8,819	8,384	8,513	8,065
<i>Legal Permanency Percentage</i>	92.03%	90.77%	88.20%	88.82%	88.15%
Number of exits per year of youth 18 and over	718	897	1,122	1,072	1,084
Total Exits	9,007	9,716	9,506	9,585	9,149

1. Data source is CWS/CMS Datamart as of 7/8/2018.

2. Table includes all cases.

Over the past five years, 4,893 youth have exited our foster system without permanency. Based on 2016 data from Table 2, we can extrapolate that these youth have spent multiple years in the system and, as shown earlier, are at a higher risk of experiencing many negative outcomes after leaving care.

Probation Data

The Probation Department’s Placement Permanency and Quality Assurance (PPQA) unit works with Probation foster youth—wards of the delinquency court who are mainly under Probation’s jurisdiction—to help them achieve permanency. As of May 2018, the PPQA had 47 active permanency cases out of the 103 dual-system cases for which Probation was the lead agency (45% of cases). Of these 47 active permanency cases, three youth had re-entered the foster system at least once.

Table 5 illustrates the service breakdown, and Table 6 provides the length of time the 47 youth have been in the system by age.

Table 5. Probation Foster Youth Permanency Services

Type of Permanency Service	# of youth	% of youth
Family Reunification	17	36.1% ¹
Family Finding	9	19.1%
APPLA	14	29.7%
Legal Guardianships	5	10.6% ¹
Adoptions	2	4.3%
Total	47	100%

Table 6. Number of Probation Foster Youth by Time in Care and Age

Time in Care	13 yrs old	14 yrs old	15 yrs old	16 yrs old	17 yrs old	18 yrs old	Total
	n	n	n	n	n	n	
0–6 months	0	1	2	4	3	0	10
6–12 months	0	0	2	7	8	0	17
12–18 months	0	0	1	4	2	1	8
18–24 months	1	0	0	1	2	0	4
24+ months	0	1	1	1	4	1	8
Total	1	2	6	17	19	2	47

As shown, youth ages 16 and 17 make up the bulk of PPQA’s permanency cases. While a large percentage are working toward reunification with their families, the next highest permanency exit outcome is APPLA, or long-term foster care.

Two issues warrant further review: 1) to determine if other permanency services or assistance should be provided to the remaining 56 youth for whom Probation is the lead agency; and 2) to ask that Probation review APPLA cases to see if a more formalized permanency plan can better meet the needs of these youth.

What the Data Tell Us

As of December 31, 2017, over 2,200 youth in the child welfare system had not yet achieved permanency; the majority (1,942 youth) were in extended foster care (Table 7).

Table 7. Foster Youth 18 and Older with No Permanency

	Year End 12/31/2017
Number of youth 18 years and over not in AB12 extended foster care	328
Number of children 18 years and over in AB12 extended foster care	1,942
Total	2,270

1. Data source is CWS/CMS Data Warehouse.
2. Table only includes court cases.
3. Data reflect year-end child population with active cases.
4. Children 18 years and over in ext. foster care (based on out-of-home placement rec.)

In addition, exit data from 2013 through 2017 show that family reunifications declined from a high of 6,372 (66%) to 5,404 (59%) during that time period. Approximately 4,900 youth 18 and over exited the system expecting to face adulthood without the social connections and stability that permanency can provide young adults (Table 4).

Collectively, these data demonstrate that our youth are staying in the system far too long, and that 12% are exiting the system without permanency after spending a quarter to a third of their lives in care. This is unacceptable. We must urgently address this issue to improve the future trajectory of youth in our care.

CURRENT PERMANENCY EFFORTS

Several efforts and programs are underway throughout the County to help increase permanency outcomes for foster youth.

Concurrent Planning

Concurrent planning is a case-management method used to support legal permanence (family reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship) within a specific timeframe. It emphasizes the initiation and/or completion of permanency tasks as soon as a child enters placement to resolve a child's temporary status. Concurrent planning focuses on achieving family reunification as the primary permanency option for a child (plan A). The alternative permanency option (plan B) is established at the time of the Welfare & Institutions Code (WIC) 366.21e hearing so option of adoption or legal guardianship is left in place for the child. The Concurrent Planning Assessment (CPA) tool is used to develop plan B and identifies the alternate permanent plan and prospective resource/adoptive family.

Resource Family Approval

Resource Family Approval (RFA) allows for all out-of-home placements to be approved for adoptive placement and legal guardianship as well as for temporary foster care placement. All families go through the same RFA assessment process so foster parents as well as relatives can be ready to proceed with alternative permanency options if family reunification efforts are unsuccessful.

Permanency Outreach Around Foster Youth

DCFS has some significant media-based campaigns, such as Wednesday's Child, Heart Gallery, and KidSave, to help recruit families for older youth who have not yet been matched with adoptive families.

Probation has conducted several media campaigns and child-centered efforts to provide probation foster youth with permanency. While it has had some successes—and the most probation foster youth adoptions in the country—it still struggles to recruit families for this population. To further enhance permanency options for probation/child welfare youth, Probation has contracted for a holistic marketing campaign of multiple channels (digital, media, television, mail, radio, and more) offering a variety of avenues to reach county residents within the targeted audiences. The campaign strategy has a unique data-informed/data-driven approach, its design supports the goals of both Probation and DCFS, and it is intended to support a single-portal entry system for the County of Los Angeles in the future.

Mentoring Programs for Parents

The Parents in Partnership (PIP) program began in 2006 with a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. PIP utilizes parent mentors who have successfully reunified with their children to guide families with children in foster care—especially those who have recently lost custody—through their rights and responsibilities. A 2017 preliminary study published in the *Journal of Social Service Research* found that parents who attended a

PIP orientation were five times more likely to reunify with their children than those who did not. While the initial study was limited in size, it highlights PIP as a promising intervention.¹⁸

Youth Permanency Units (YPU)

Two DCFS regional offices have youth permanency units (Santa Clarita and Pomona), where six caseworkers each serve 15 youth on their caseloads. These units focus on finding and engaging family members and non-relative extended family members to provide permanent, lifelong family connections to older youth in long-term care. They also work with the youth at developing at least one durable connection with a committed adult through existing relationships or through mentoring programs before the youth exits the system. This unit conducts family-finding for youth age 11 and up, and connects youth to an educational mentoring program that stays with them until they are 21. This unit does not currently track data, but a 2009 report by Casey Family Programs¹⁹ did track these units, then in the Metro North and Pomona regional offices. Collectively, the YPUs served 147 youth, connecting approximately 73% to family members where no connections had previously existed. Although this was an initial positive outcome, without consistent data collection it is difficult to tell now what progress the YPUs have made.

Upfront Family-Finding Pilot

In November 2016, the OCP developed and implemented an upfront family-finding pilot in the Glendora and Santa Fe Springs DCFS offices. This pilot utilized existing DCFS Permanency Partners Program (P3) social workers to bring family-finding efforts to the front end of the system. As of August 2017, placement rates with relatives and non-related extended family members had increased from 59% to 82% in Santa Fe Springs and from 58% to 75% in Glendora during the pilot months of October 2016 through May 2017, growing by over 20% in both offices. The pilot was recently expanded to Vermont Corridor and West Los Angeles.

While this work has a potential impact on permanency efforts, it is too soon yet to determine whether finding family members will improve permanency outcomes for youth. However, a report by DCFS in 2010 on the P3 Upfront Family-Finding and Engagement Plan-Do-Study-Act pilot found that for youth in the treatment group of the pilot, family-finding efforts doubled the number of connections for youth, greatly increased identified parental relatives (30 new parental relatives, as opposed to the control group's three), and increased the rate at which these youth were reunified with their families.

¹⁸ Enano, S., Freisthler, B., Perez-Johnson, D., Lovato-Hermann, K. (2017) Evaluating Parents in Partnership: a Preliminary Study of a Child Welfare Intervention Designed to Increase Reunification. *Journal of Social Service Research*, 43:2, 236–245, doi: 10.1080/01488376.2016.1253634

¹⁹ Casey Family Programs (2009). Stories of Practice Change: What flexible funding means to the children and families of Los Angeles County.

https://www.shieldsforfamilies.org/download/art_0902_01.pdf

Permanency Child and Family Teams

Permanency Child and Family Teams (PCFTs) and permanency-values training for DCFS workers, done through a partnership with Casey Family Programs, are additional promising practices. PCFTs meet every 30 days (more frequently than the typical CFT) for an intensive review of a child's entire case plan, from system-entry on, to find relatives or other permanent connections. Over 18 months, Casey Family Programs examined over 125 cases across the Van Nuys, Compton, Lancaster, Belvedere, and Pasadena DCFS offices. PCFTs target youth who have been in the system for two or more years, starting with those as young as nine. While this process can be time-consuming, it has allowed several youth to find previously unexplored connections and achieve permanency. An evaluation of this work will be released by Casey Family Programs at a future date.

Permanency for Older Youth

DCFS and Probation have both focused on achieving permanency for older youth through non-minor dependent adoptions, in which Los Angeles County is currently a leader. This work has been driven by the Alliance for Children's Rights and DCFS, in partnership with the juvenile court, and has helped 23 non-minor dependents be adopted since 2013.

While many youth and caregivers believe that they lose out on Independent Living Program (ILP) benefits if youth are adopted, they are actually entitled to ILP benefits as well as Adoption Assistance Payments (AAP) up to age 21, if they are adopted at age 16 or older. Likewise, youth in relative guardianships qualify for Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payments (Kin-GAP) until age 21, if the guardianship was established when the youth was age 16 or older. Youth in guardianships with non-relatives qualify for state foster care benefits.

Non-minor dependent adoptions are especially useful as they provide older youth, who may understand more of what they want, another opportunity for permanent adult connections.

Mentorship Programs for Youth

Mentorship programs through nonprofit, faith-based, and philanthropic entities can be an option for youth. A recent mentoring summit explored best practices and emerging innovative models with the goal of coordinating and expanding trusted mentoring programs throughout Los Angeles County. When mentoring matches a long-term caring adult with a youth, it can build social connections and provide concrete supports in times of need—two protective factors that are critical to effectively enhancing child development.

Research shows that up to 70% of youth exiting from care who had long-term mentorships gained important informational advice, emotional support, and enhanced social skills, with those relationships helping to keep the youth on a track to prevent negative outcomes and in turn provide support to achieve positive outcomes.²⁰ However, the

²⁰http://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/images/PDF/Mentoring_for_Youth_in_Foster_Care_Population_Review.pdf

CalYOUTH Study by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago indicated that “L.A. County youth had fewer people to turn to for social support, particularly when they needed tangible support or advice and guidance.”²¹

As discussed earlier, youth in the TAY focus groups wanted and believed in the importance of having a permanent adult connection. While legal permanency should always be pursued first, emotional permanency is also important to consider and prioritize for foster youth.

BARRIERS TO PERMANENCY

The following barriers outline the themes that we heard or found in our analysis of permanency efforts within the County.

Lack of Local Data on Foster-Youth Outcomes Once They Exit the System

While DCFS tracks data concerning youth currently in care, little to no data is available on how youth fare after they exit the system, either through legal permanency or through aging out. No mechanism exists, either, to track the number of adoptions or legal guardianships that dissolve. Additionally, several programs with permanency components do not collect data, making it difficult to determine which promising programs should be leveraged and/or expanded.

Lack of Urgency on Permanency

When it comes to permanency for Los Angeles County’s foster youth, the numbers are troubling. A large number of youth stay in the system for years without achieving permanency, and adoption rates for the County—despite a greater than 3% increase from 2014 to 2017, for a 17.3% rate—are lower than they are for the state as a whole, at 24.0% (6,679 adoptions out of 27,748 foster youth) for 2017.²² Although the foster system emphasizes the need for child safety, permanency, and well-being, the focus is most often on the youth’s most important and immediate problems—often safety and well-being. As a result, concurrent planning and the timely submission of the CPA concurrent-planning tool often take a lower priority.

Furthermore, with the additional workload that the Resource Family Approval (RFA) process has brought to DCFS, current permanency efforts have mostly focused on RFAs and have negatively affected the amount of time adoptions-unit children’s social workers are able to spend on adoptions and other permanency options.

²¹ Courtney, M.E., Okpych, N.J., Charles, P., Mikell, D., Stevenson, B., Park, K., Kindle, B., Harty, J., Feng, H. (2016). *Findings from the California Youth Transitions to Adulthood Study (CalYOUTH): Conditions of foster youth at age 19*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

²² Webster, D., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Wiegmann, W., Saika, G., Eyre, M., Chambers, J., Min, S., Randhawa, P., Sandoval, A., Yee, H., Tran, M., Benton, C., White, J., Lee, H. (2018). CCWIP reports. Retrieved 7/31/2018, from University of California at Berkeley California Child Welfare Indicators Project website.
http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare

Placement Instability

Youth cited placement instability as a significant barrier to achieving permanency, particularly with respect to a DCFS policy that outlines the grievance-review process following the receipt of a seven-day written notice of intent to remove a child from a foster home.²³ A few youth spoke of instances where they were “seven-dayed” for reasons such as changing schools or misbehaving. The youth were frustrated that there was no meeting to sit down and discuss grievances and try to work out issues before a placement was terminated. Although some divisions hold CFTs prior to youth being moved, this seems not to be standard practice. DCFS policy appears to be silent as to the youth’s involvement during efforts to resolve disagreements leading to removals, which misses an important opportunity to potentially stabilize placements.

According to the California Child Welfare Indicators Project,²⁴ the average number of placement moves in Los Angeles County increases as youth get older (Table 8). These figures reflect an average number of moves, which means, of course, that some youth experience more. Although the County had fewer placement moves than those reported by the state as a whole (2.91 vs. 3.76), it has not achieved its goal of “first placement being last placement.”

Table 8. Placement Stability in Los Angeles County
Children Who Entered Foster Care During a 12-Month Period

Age Group	Foster-Care Days for Children with Entries	Placement Moves	Per 1,000 Days
Under 1	322,883	632	1.96
1–2	208,858	586	2.81
3–5	244,029	694	2.84
6–10	328,113	1,008	3.07
11–15	245,713	934	3.80
16–17	74,359	285	3.83
Total	1,423,955	4,139	2.91

Data Source: CWS/CMS 2017 Quarter 4 Extract.

²³ http://policy.dcfslacounty.gov/Content/Grievance_Review_Regardi.htm

²⁴ Webster, et al. California Child Welfare Indicators Project, University of California at Berkeley

Placement Distance

Placement distance, coupled with the difficulty of coordinating transportation in Los Angeles County, may hinder visitation efforts while reunification services are being provided.²⁵ In fact, research has found that children placed closer to their birth homes are more likely to reunify than children placed farther away.²⁶ Table 9 shows the average distance children are placed from their original home of parent, broken out by DCFS regional office. These distances range between 20 to 30 miles, which in Los Angeles means a minimum of one hour or more travel time. While a closer placement may not always be the most appropriate setting, distance is important to consider; in addition to affecting reunification efforts, longer distances also disrupt a child’s education and may remove them from supportive family and community resources.

Table 9. Distance from Home of Parent to Placement Location

DCFS Office	Avg Distance
Belvedere	20.46
Compton	22.67
El Monte	27.80
Glendora	28.94
Lancaster	30.34
Metro North	26.21
Palmdale	27.78
Pasadena	27.67
Pomona	27.19
Santa Clarita	28.41
Santa Fe Springs	20.73
South County	25.49
Torrance	22.67
Van Nuys	23.91
Vermont Corridor	23.45
Wateridge North	25.78
Wateridge South	24.41
West Los Angeles	24.74
West San Fernando Valley	24.08

1. Data source is CWS/CMS data warehouse

2. Avg Distance is an avg driving distance

3. Avg Distance excld placemts over 500 mi

Concern around Continued Eligibility for Benefits

The relative caregivers the OCP interviewed were a mixture of those who had adopted and those who provided foster care, APPLA, and legal guardianship. Adoptive caregivers indicated that, in the past, adoption was the only option they were given, that the process created tension between them and the biological parents, and that adoption also terminated access to services and benefits for the children. The caregivers were committed to the children in their care, but were concerned about possibly losing access to benefits and services, especially benefits available for higher education and services for developmental and mental health issues. The OCP attempted to compile the various benefits for foster and probation youth, including their eligibility requirements, and found it challenging to fully understand what is available.

Lack of Comprehensive Post-Permanency Services

The DCFS post-adoption unit provides time-limited services to families with finalized adoptions, but no services were identified to help stabilize other permanency exits.

²⁵ <http://www.lao.ca.gov/reports/2013/ssrv/child-neglect/child-neglect-080813.pdf>

²⁶ Freundlich, M., & Avery, R. J. (2005). Planning for permanency for youth in congregate care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27, 115–134.; Lery, B., Webster, D, Chow, J. (2004). “Far from Home: The Effect of Geographic Distance on the Likelihood of Reunification for Children in Foster Care.” Paper presented at the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management Fall Research Conference, Atlanta, GA, October 28–30.

Multiple and Uncoordinated Efforts Around Permanency in the Public and Private Sectors

As discussed previously, several permanency efforts are occurring within the County, such as DCFS' Youth Permanency Units and upfront family-finding pilots, as well as the work of Casey Family Programs, the Alliance for Children's Rights, and others. However, these programs do not coordinate across the DCFS regional offices, and initiatives may not be aware of the other permanency resources available.

Permanency Difficulties Around Specialized Foster Youth Populations

Probation foster youth, youth with mental health needs, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth often have poorer permanency outcomes compared to other foster youth. They are harder to find permanent homes for, and are often not placed in family settings. For example, LGBTQ youth are twice as likely to live in group homes than family placements,²⁷ and foster youth with mental health needs are less likely to exit care to reunification or adoption than their undiagnosed counterparts.²⁸

Lack of Youth Voice in Permanency Planning

Youth want more involvement in their care planning. Survey results have found, and youth participating in our forums confirmed, that foster youth typically have little to no involvement when decisions are made about their short- or long-term care plans.²⁹

FISCAL IMPACT OF LEGAL PERMANENCY

The Jim Casey Youth Initiative estimates that an average of \$300,000 is paid in social costs over the lifetime of every young person who ages out of the child welfare system.³⁰ Permanency not only improves youth outcomes, it may also provide significant cost savings for the County that could be reinvested in other youth services. When youth leave the child welfare system alone, they often require services to address homelessness, substance abuse, early pregnancy, or unemployment. By investing early in child-centered specialized permanency services, the County can improve permanency outcomes for all youth and reduce the social costs that follow. Table 10 outlines the potential savings for the County of Los Angeles³¹ based on a report by Families Now³² that analyzed permanency savings across California counties.

²⁷ Sexual and Gender Minority Youth in Foster Care: Assessing Disproportionality and Disparities in Los Angeles. https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LAFYS_report_final-aug-2014.pdf

²⁸ Howard, J. & Berzin, S. (2011). "Never too old: Achieving permanency and sustaining connections for older youth in foster care." *Policy and Practice Perspective*. New York, NY: Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute.

²⁹ Unrau, Y.A. (2006). Research on placement moves: Seeking the perspective of foster children. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29(1), 122–137.

³⁰ Thompson, A.E. & Greeson, J.K.P. (2015). Legal and Relational Permanence in Older Foster Care Youth. *Social Work Today*. July/Aug. Issue Vol. 15 No. 4.

³¹ This report lists savings based on a non-IV-E waiver county, in anticipation of the Title IV-E waiver's ending in 2019.

³² Families Now. (2015). Funding Youth Permanency. https://www.sierrahealth.org/assets/Funding_Youth_Permanency_Guide_June_2015.pdf

Table 10. Permanency Savings

Permanent Placement Type	Previous Placement	Total County Controlled Savings
Adoption	Group Home Level 14	\$74,198
	Foster Family Agency	\$10,856
	Licensed Foster Home	\$1,671
Kin Guardianship	Group Home Level 12	\$67,582
	Foster Family Agency	\$11,821
	Licensed Foster Home	\$2,095
Second Chance Reunification	Group Home Level 10	\$62,772
	Foster Family Agency	\$15,770
	Licensed Foster Home	\$6,584

As shown, the potential saving to the County for achieving permanency is significant, and these savings would accrue each year a youth would have been in care. For example, if a youth placed in a foster family agency is adopted at age 16, the County could potentially save a total of \$54,280, assuming the youth would have stayed in care until the age of 21. If this same youth were adopted at age 13, the County could potentially save \$86,848.

To achieve permanency, an investment in front-end specialized permanency services is often needed. A one-time cost of these services can range from \$12,000 to \$15,000. In the above example, assuming the youth received the most expensive specialized permanency services in California, the savings to the County would potentially be a total of \$39,280 if the youth were adopted at age 16, and \$71,848 if the youth were adopted at age 13.

These savings do not consider any services provided once youth enter legal permanent relationships, such as post-adoptive services or mental health treatment. However, these savings do take into account Adoption Assistance Payments (AAP).

PLAN TO INCREASE PERMANENCY FOR FOSTER YOUTH

In 2011, DCFS released “A Guide to Permanency Options for Youth,” which included a call to action to ensure that the child welfare system does not become, by default, the “parent” of the children it protects. It is time to refocus and prioritize permanency to be just as important as the safety and well-being of foster youth.

Permanency is a process that can be achieved only through continual child-centered efforts to understand what permanency for each individual youth looks like, and by

helping the youth understand what options are available. As the youth in our forums reminded us, not all youth need the same thing.

The goal is to ensure that all foster youth achieve some form of permanency—legal or emotional. While legal permanency is preferred, the child welfare system should ensure that youth have at least one secure long-term adult connection as soon as possible after they enter the system, and help to strengthen their personal network before they exit care.

We don't profess to know it all, but we believe these areas warrant further exploration.

Expand Current Permanency Efforts

These programs appear to be making an impact on permanency, and expanding them should be considered.

- Upfront Family-Finding With the initial success of this pilot, as well as the success of the program in its current back-end position, it is recommended that the program be expanded and the number of P3 workers on the back end increased to help locate/identify potential permanent connections for both younger and older youth in the system.
- Mentoring Programs for Parents Given the positive outcomes from the PIP program, it is recommended that more resources and attention be given to this effort to help improve reunification efforts for our families.
- Mentoring Programs for Youth Although limited outcome data are available on the referral of system youth to these programs, multiple studies have shown the benefits of long-term mentoring programs. In addition, as mentioned previously, the youth who participated in our forums expressed their desire for mentors—especially those whose interests align with theirs. Before youth exit care, workers should facilitate connections with long-term caring and trusted adults to provide support and guidance in moments of crisis to help youth achieve emotional permanency. These permanent adult connections may include the youth's social worker, but they also need to include other dedicated adults.
- Non-Minor Dependent Adoptions Several of the youth and workers from our focus groups were not aware of the option for non-minor dependent adoptions. Perhaps the Alliance for Children's Rights could partner with DCFS to provide training on non-minor dependent adoptions. There needs to be more emphasis on this program option, as the search for permanency should never end.

In addition, outcomes for the following programs should be monitored to determine if they should be expanded:

- Youth Permanency Units
- Permanency Child and Family Teams

Increase Post-Permanency Services

The DCFS post-adoption services unit should conduct a review of its services, with caregiver input and data about dissolved permanent placements, to determine whether the services provided meet the needs of the families. DCFS should also explore what services can be leveraged with programs such as the Prevention & Aftercare (P&A) networks, and whether the ability exists to expand these supports for youth in legal guardianships and APPLA, as well as for families who have reunified with their children.

Community Referrals

One of the seven key strategies to the County's prevention plan, *Paving the Road to Safety for Our Children*, was to increase the capacity of the P&A networks; this expansion is now occurring. In addition to the work the P&A agencies do in primary prevention, they also target supports and services for DCFS-referred children and families who are receiving family reunification services, and those who have exited the public child-welfare system and need supports to prevent subsequent child maltreatment or DCFS involvement. These supports and services could help to increase and maintain permanency, and efforts to increase referrals to these agencies should be considered.

Target Youth Who Have Been in the System Three or More Years and Specialized Populations (Those with Mental Health Issues, LGBTQ Youth, Dual-Status Youth, etc.) to Increase Permanency

Youth, including non-minor dependents, who have been in the system three years or more are entitled to specialized permanency services.³³ These services may include medically necessary mental health services for youth, permanency-support core services to achieve, stabilize, and sustain the youth in a permanent family, as well as services designed to help the identified permanent family meet the youth's needs.³⁴ The County needs an expanded capacity to link families to currently available services.

An example of this kind of success is the ongoing pilot project to reduce the number of youth with multiple overstays at transitional shelter care locations. Through a partnership between DCFS' Accelerated Placement Team (APT) and the Department of Mental Health's Intensive Field-Capable Clinical Services Team, this pilot has helped stabilize placements for youth who have been in the system for multiple years and experienced multiple placement disruptions. In addition, campaigns should be targeted to Probation foster youth to help destigmatize this population and help potential families understand the trauma that these youth have experienced.

Strengthen Processes to Increase Stability

Placement

As mentioned previously, youth found the seven-day termination process disrespectful and discouraging and a barrier to creating connections with caregivers. Youth

³³ AB 1006 Foster Youth. (2017). Retrieved from https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=201720180AB1006

³⁴ Ibid.

participating in the forums suggested that when a foster parent feels the need to terminate a placement, a meeting should be called with the caregiver, the children's social worker, and the youth to see if the dispute can be resolved. This suggestion by the youth is standard practice for DCFS' APT, which calls a CFT meeting upon receipt of a seven-day notice in an attempt to stabilize the placement. The APT model's approach is "whatever it takes," and many of its best practices should be reviewed to see what can be expanded Countywide.

Increase Visitation with Parents and Siblings

Most placements within the County are located an average of 20 to 30 miles from the home of the child's parent. To decrease the negative impacts of youth being placed far from their communities of origin, and to improve reunification options, DCFS should continue to explore all travel options, including private vendors, to help facilitate visitation for families, particularly while they are receiving reunification services.

Benefits Training

Trainings on the available benefits to foster youth, as well as their eligibility criteria, should be increased to broaden the knowledge base of youth, caregivers, social workers, and other stakeholders to help support the youth's permanency needs.

Culture Change

Permanency should be achieved not just by a lucky few, but should be the endgame for every foster youth. Although it often takes a back seat to immediate issues of safety and well-being, permanency must become a priority at a systemic level so that youth can successfully exit the system in a better position to become self-sufficient. Permanency should be discussed at every Child and Family Team meeting, and workers, lawyers, and judges should collaborate to discuss permanency at every six-month court review hearing. In addition, the timely completion of the CPA tool for all children as the WIC 366.21e hearing approaches will help establish viable permanency alternatives for children on a consistent basis.

Youth should be included in all decisions about their permanency plans and play an active role in determining the connections that will best help them become self-sufficient. Even if a youth does not express an interest in permanency, or says no the first time, conversations around permanency should be ongoing.

Casey Family Programs has provided a permanency-values training to some DCFS offices already, and that type of training could be expanded Countywide to help catalyze this culture change.

Increase Permanency for Older TAY

Benefits Knowledge

While becoming self-sufficient is usually the focus for TAY, permanency plays an important role in their achieving self-sufficiency and resiliency. Youth, caregivers, DCFS, and Probation need to be better informed of the existing incentives for obtaining permanency for these youth.

- Extended adoption and guardianship subsidies (42 U.S.C. 675 (8)(B)) for youth until age 21, if the youth entered into an adoption or guardianship at age 16 or older
- Independent-student status for the purposes of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for youth who were in foster care at age 13 or older, or in a guardianship arrangement before reaching the age of majority (20 U.S.C. 1087vv(d)(1))
- Medi-Cal to age 26 for youth with a suitable placement order on their 18th birthday; youth who were adopted or in legal guardianships may receive Medi-Cal until they are 21 years old
- Independent Living Program (ILP) benefits if a relative guardianship is established for a youth age 16 or older, or age 8 and older for guardianships with non-relatives

TAY have access to all of the permanency options that younger youth in foster care do. In fact, California AB 12 and AB 1712 require that DCFS and Probation increase the youth's voice and involvement in their own permanency, and continue to provide permanency planning options to the court for youth in extended foster care. TAY can access a number of different permanency options, including non-minor dependent adoptions, that leave them still eligible for AAP and ILP benefits.

TAY should be informed of these options, their benefits, and all self-sufficiency resources. Information should be readily available electronically, through DCFS's Youth Development Services (YDS) workers, and in other ways identified by youth.

Expand Capacity in Probation

Probation foster youth, who tend to be older, should also be targeted for permanency services where appropriate. While they are often reunified with their families, over 400 young people are currently probation foster youth. Probation's permanency unit serves only 47 of these, and receives cases only by referral. Probation should explore educating and cross-training deputy probation officers to expand their understanding of the importance of permanency for probation youth and to increase the number of referrals to this unit. Probation should also evaluate whether its permanency unit needs expanding to take on more cases.

Monitor Outcomes for Foster Youth Post-Permanency

To determine how effective County and community permanency programs are, research needs to be conducted on how youth fare after they exit the system with permanency. DCFS, Probation, the OCP, and the Center for Strategic Public-Private Partnerships should explore public-private partnership opportunities to conduct longitudinal studies on these youth and the various permanency services they receive to provide a clearer picture of the service gaps and needs for these youth and the effectiveness of permanency efforts.

Increase Communication Around the Various Permanency Efforts

As mentioned, not everyone is aware of all the permanency efforts occurring in the County. Communication efforts should be increased to eliminate duplicative efforts and to coordinate care. Cross-training to increase awareness about permanency's importance may also be helpful.

Leverage Existing Successful Permanency Models

In addition to some of the permanency practices being conducted in Los Angeles County, the County should explore leveraging other evidence-based models.

New York City: Social-Capital Building

New York City implemented a successful "social-capital building model" to achieve permanency for older youth who were unconnected to permanent families. The program model, based on the assumption that the best social capital for a vulnerable youth is a family through adoption or other permanent commitment, took three approaches: 1) child-specific recruitment through Permanency Action Recruitment Teams (PART), similar to our PCFTs, where a family-permanency advocate, a teen advocate, and the youth lead a meeting with relatives and other adults to help connect the youth with permanency resources; 2) 30 hours of parent education and training from a grantee agency, *You Gotta Believe*, to help prepare parents for a teen placement in their home (these trainings were available to anyone in the community and provided on a rotating basis); and 3) post-placement services that included an experienced adoptive parent being assigned to check in on the new family and provide them with guidance and parent support groups. An evaluation of this model found that by the end of the project period (four years), almost 50% of the youth (98 out of 198 referred teens) were placed in permanent homes.

Michigan: Family Reunification Program

In 1992, Michigan pilot-tested a family reunification program to reduce the number of children in out-of-home care and also reduce costs to the agency. The pilot provided four to eight months of services that included assessment, case management, transportation (24-hour service availability), flexible funds, in-home services, and two staff for each family. Families were required to participate in the assessment, family or individual therapy, and workshops on parenting. The evaluation showed that, 12 months after exiting the program, 73% of the 813 children in the treatment group returned home and remained safely with their families, compared with 69% of the comparison group. At 24 months after reunification, 81% of the treated families remained reunified versus 60% of the comparison group. Since the pilot, Michigan has expanded this program to 26 counties throughout the state, which account for 85% of all the foster children in Michigan.

Given the successful outcomes of these models, the County should explore possibly piloting these or other successful models.

NEXT STEPS

We recommend that the Board of Supervisors direct the OCP, in collaboration with DCFS, Probation, the Department of Mental Health, the Juvenile Court, and other key stakeholders, to develop a comprehensive plan to enhance permanency for system-involved youth, designed to, among other things, reduce the number of youth who age out of the system, and report back to the Board on its progress in 180 days.