California Permanency for Youth Project

Project Evaluation
January 31, 2010

I.   CHALLENGES FACED BY EMANCIPATING FOSTER YOUTH

Each year approximately 4000 youth emancipate from California's child welfare system.[i] These are youth that did not leave the system through a reunification with their birth family, or through an adoption or guardianship with a *new* family, but are released from the system (usually at the age of 18) to fend for themselves. Without trusting reliable family relationships to support these youth, they face daunting odds to achieve success in an increasingly complex society. In fact, research shows that even children that have all of the advantages of growing up with their birth family did not obtain financial independence until well into their 20's. One study, looking at the cost of raising children, found that nearly one-fourth of the entire cost of raising children is incurred *after* the youth reached the age of 17. Furthermore, most young adults receive financial assistance from their parents into their early 20's and forty percent still receive some assistance in their late 20's.[ii]

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

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

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

A research paper recently published in the "Children and Youth Services Review" presented findings of a variety of research projects pertaining to youth aging out of foster care. In this paper[iv], the author (Rosemary Avery) states that "few young people in the U.S. are ready to assume the roles and live 'independently' before their mid-twenties." Furthermore she persuasively argues that the Independent Living Skills programs, which ostensibly exist to prepare older foster youth for "independence" not only appear to fall short of their stated goal, but they are somewhat misguided in that they "do not specifically address assisting youth with reconnection to birth family, kin, and (other significant) adults in their lives that will be the permanent safety net for them in the future." Ms. Avery states that "reestablishing these family connections for teens before they exit out of foster care, no matter what age they are, is the strongest and most positive youth development program the child welfare system can offer."

Most child welfare professionals would probably agree that a permanent connection to a caring adult (either through reunification, adoption, guardianship, or a less formal relationship) would benefit youth as they leave the foster care system. Why then, don't caseworkers focus on finding permanent connections for older foster youth? We have observed several reasons why permanent connections are not regularly found during our seven years of service provision to twenty California child welfare sites:

- o Many in the child welfare system are unaware of the research cited above, and other studies, documenting the fate of youth who age out of the system. The assumptions the system holds of preparing youth for "independent living" remain essentially unchallenged, with meetings, tasks and deadlines pointed towards meeting this nearly impossible standard that most American children are not required to or successfully meet.

- o Workers have traditionally focused on issues confronting youth while they are still in care. The urgency and focus to attain permanence often takes a back seat to attaining stability and maintaining safety.

- o When a child is removed from their birth family and the child welfare system makes the determination that the home environment is not appropriate, workers often don't re-visit the reunification option, even if with the passage of time the original problem may no longer exist, or if the placement might be viable with additional support. Additionally, if family members are unable, or ruled not suitable for placement, their contributions to and connections with the youth are ignored or discounted while the search for placement continues.

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

- o Many workers are unfamiliar with the "best practice" of finding and developing permanent relationships for older foster youth. When an older youth states that

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

o County workers and their systems have grown accustomed to working in isolation. No doubt in part due to the obligation of maintaining safety, these closed systems leave the county social worker with too many tasks to complete for too many children; thus the priorities remain with safety and stability. Inclusion of family members and loved ones as part of a focused team process to prioritize and achieve permanence is avoided in part due to worker discomfort and unfamiliarity with building and facilitating teams.

II. OVERVIEW OF PROJECT AND EVALUATION

History of CPYP

CPYP has worked with county administrators and staff to both change belief systems (show child welfare professionals that it is possible and imperative to find permanence for older foster youth) and to teach them the needed skills to do the work. CPYP worked with four pilot California counties starting in January 2003 (Alameda, Monterey, San Mateo and Stanislaus) and ten additional counties in 2006-2007 (Contra Costa, Fresno, Humboldt, Kern, Los Angeles, Orange, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Luis Obispo, and Sonoma). In 2008 CPYP began working with three new counties (Madera, San Bernardino, and Solano) and two sites within Los Angeles County (Pomona and Santa Clarita). In 2009 a sixth county (Riverside) was added to the project. This report documents the work with these six child welfare agency sites (the "project sites" or "sites") in 2008 and 2009.

Overview of the Evaluation

The primary goal of this evaluation is to determine how many of the Study Group youth (described below) have formed permanent connections[1] to caring adults and how these connections were located, formed and supported. The evaluation tracks the progress made with the Study Group, but does not attempt to describe or evaluate the work of the CPYP consultants with the project site staff. Specifically, Section III of this report describes the Study Group youth; Section IV details some of the permanency services provided by the project sites (which could be considered process steps or benchmarks); Section V provides an overview of project outcomes along with a closer look at what constitutes a "permanent connection"; Section VI is a site-by-site account of the particular contextual factors influencing each project site, along with outcomes achieved and policy and practice changes made by each project site; Section VII presents permanency work challenges and lessons learned taken verbatim from caseworker progress reports; and Section VIII offers some concluding thoughts.

The six project sites were given significant latitude in deciding how to select their target youth and how many youth to include in their pilot phase. All of the project sites focused on older youth (those at least 11 years old) and most considered criteria such as the length of time in care, the number of placement changes, current placement, etc. Most of the project sites focused their efforts in the pilot to those youth that lacked important relationships in their lives, i.e. the youth with the greatest need for the project.

Once they had determined their target youth population, each of the project sites was asked to identify twenty youth to be tracked in the evaluation (though one site, that did not commence their permanency efforts until 2009, decided to track ten youth). Information was gathered on these one hundred and ten youth (the "Study Group") through the collection of Intake forms (see Exhibit "A"), Progress Reports (Exhibit "B") and a Final Survey (Exhibit "C"). An Intake form (at the beginning of the project) and a Final Survey (at the end) were successfully collected on all one hundred and ten youth. The response rates on the progress reports were also high: 93% for

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[1] *An adult who consistently states and demonstrates that s/he has entered an unconditional life-long parent-like relationship with the youth. The youth agrees that the adult will play this role in his/her life.*
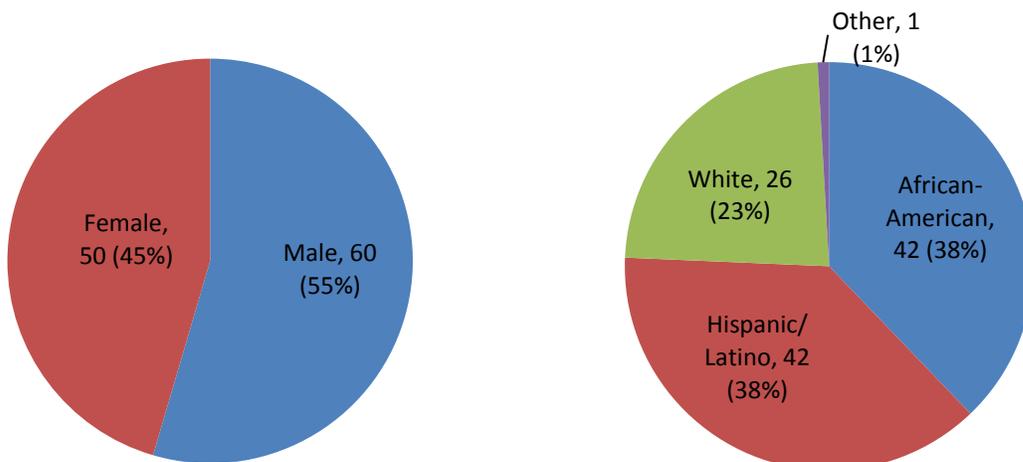
the December 2008 reporting round and 100% for the second round of reporting in May 2009. Sometimes the caseworkers filled out the data collection forms and in other instances either a supervisor or support staff person collected and provided the information. Since the original source of the data was typically the youth's assigned caseworker, in this report all responses pertaining to the Study Group youth are said to come from the "caseworker" or the "worker" regardless of who actually provided data. It also should be noted that information provided to CPYP and described in this report has been taken at face value. In most cases there was no way to double check on or verify the veracity of the information provided and much of the descriptive and outcome data is based solely upon caseworker responses.

III. DESCRIPTION OF STUDY GROUP YOUTH

The average age for the youth entering the project was relatively consistent across the six project sites. Three sites had an average age of fourteen years old (Madera, Pomona, Solano) and three sites had an average age of fifteen years old (San Bernardino, Santa Clarita, Riverside). The chart below shows the age of the one hundred and ten Study Group youth when they were assigned to the project (August 15th 2008 for the Madera, Pomona, San Bernardino, Santa Clarita and Solano youth and June 15th 2009 for the Riverside County youth).

Age of Study Group Youth at Beginning of Project
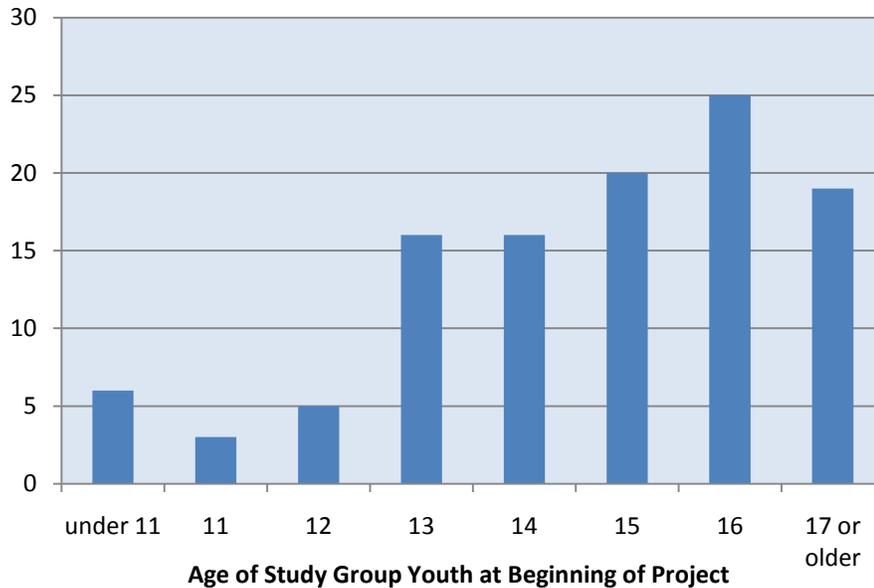
The two charts below indicate the gender and ethnic breakdown of the Study Group youth. Some of the youth have mixed ethnicities and fall under more than one category.

Female, 50 (45%)
Male, 60 (55%)

Other, 1 (1%)
White, 26 (23%)
African-American, 42 (38%)
Hispanic/Latino, 42 (38%)

The chart below shows the type of placement for the Study Group youth when they were assigned to the project.
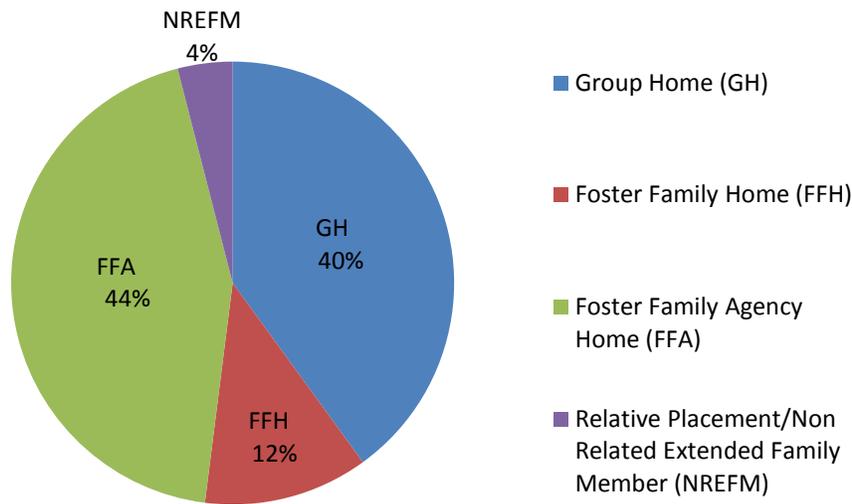
Placement History of Study Group Youth

Caseworkers were asked the total number of years that each youth had spent in out-of-home care and how many placements each youth had experienced prior to entering the project. Madera's youth had spent the least amount of time in the foster care system (an average of five years) while Pomona's youth had spent a little more than twice that amount of time (averaging more than ten years). The project sites also varied considerably in their average placement data with Solano's youth averaging under six placements and Riverside's youth averaging over a dozen placements each. Project-wide the Study Group youth averaged slightly less than eight years in out-of-home care and had experienced between eight and nine placements.

Level of Interest in Making Connections

Early and at the end of the study period caseworkers were asked to assess the extent to which each youth was interested in "reconnecting with important people in his/her life?" The caseworker was asked to characterize the youth's level of interest on a five point scale ranging from "very interested in reconnecting" to "not interested in reconnecting." In the December 2008 reporting period caseworkers (responding for seventy-four of the one hundred youth in the five 2008 project sites) indicated that forty-eight youth (65%) were either "very" or "somewhat" interested in making connections. (Note that many of the caseworkers that did not respond to this question, *on a different question* indicated that they had not yet had a conversation with the youth "about permanency, family search and engagement, or the people important to the youth to whom he/she might like to reconnect.") At the end of the project sixty-nine of ninety-seven youth (71%) were either "very" or "somewhat" interested in making connections (according to the caseworkers). At the beginning of the project caseworkers indicated that twelve (16%) of the seventy-four youth were either "reluctant" or "not interested" in making connections; while at

the end of the project seven (7%) of the ninety-seven youth were "reluctant" or "not interested" in making a connection. This information is presented to reveal the caseworker's opinions of the youth's attitudes at the beginning and end of the project, more than to attempt to show change over time (which isn't as meaningful due to the different number of respondents at the two time periods). Data specific to the project sites will be discussed in Section VI below.


IV. PROJECT SITE PERMANENCY ACTIVITIES

Five of the six project sites identified their Study Group youth and began providing project-related permanency services to their youth in 2008 – these five sites are referred to as the "2008 project sites." The evaluation tracked the extent to which permanency teams were formed for Study Group youth, how many caseworkers used a variety of family search and engagement methods to locate potential permanent connections and what methods were used to support these relationships. Each of these permanency services and activities are important process steps (or benchmarks) which contribute to positive outcomes for the project youth. The following information describes the extent to which permanency services were provided to the 2008 project site Study Group youth at two points in time: early in the project (December 2008) and at the end of the project (October 2009).
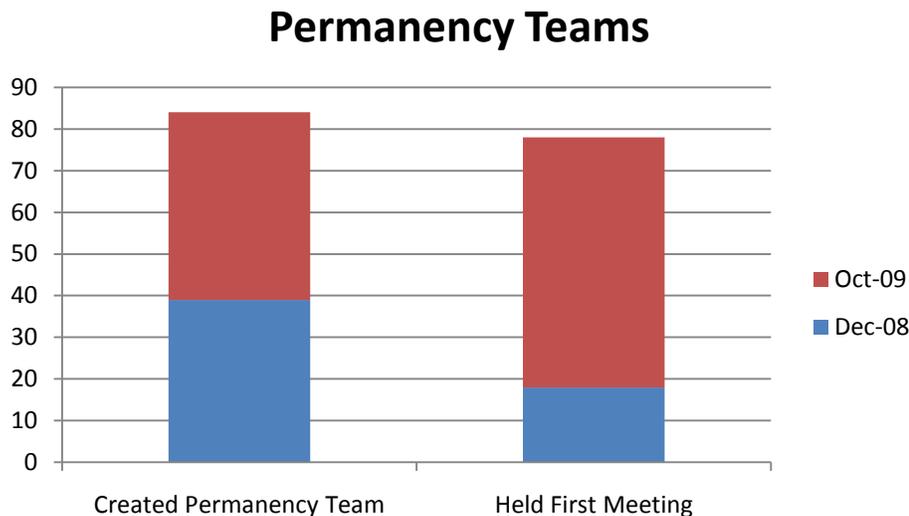
The above chart shows the extent to which the 2008 project sites created permanency teams and held their first permanency team meeting for Study Group youth. Early in the project (December 2008) caseworkers had created permanency teams for thirty-nine of the Study Group youth and had held a first permanency team meeting for eighteen of these youth. By the end of the study period (October 2009) caseworkers for eighty-seven of the youth had created a permanency team and meetings had been held for seventy-nine of the youth. Though the number of permanency teams created and meetings held by December 2008 were "over weighted" somewhat by two project sites that together accounted for thirty-one of the thirty-nine permanency teams (and fifteen of the eighteen meetings), by the end of the project, workers at all of the sites created at least sixteen permanency teams and held at least fourteen meetings (for their twenty Study Group
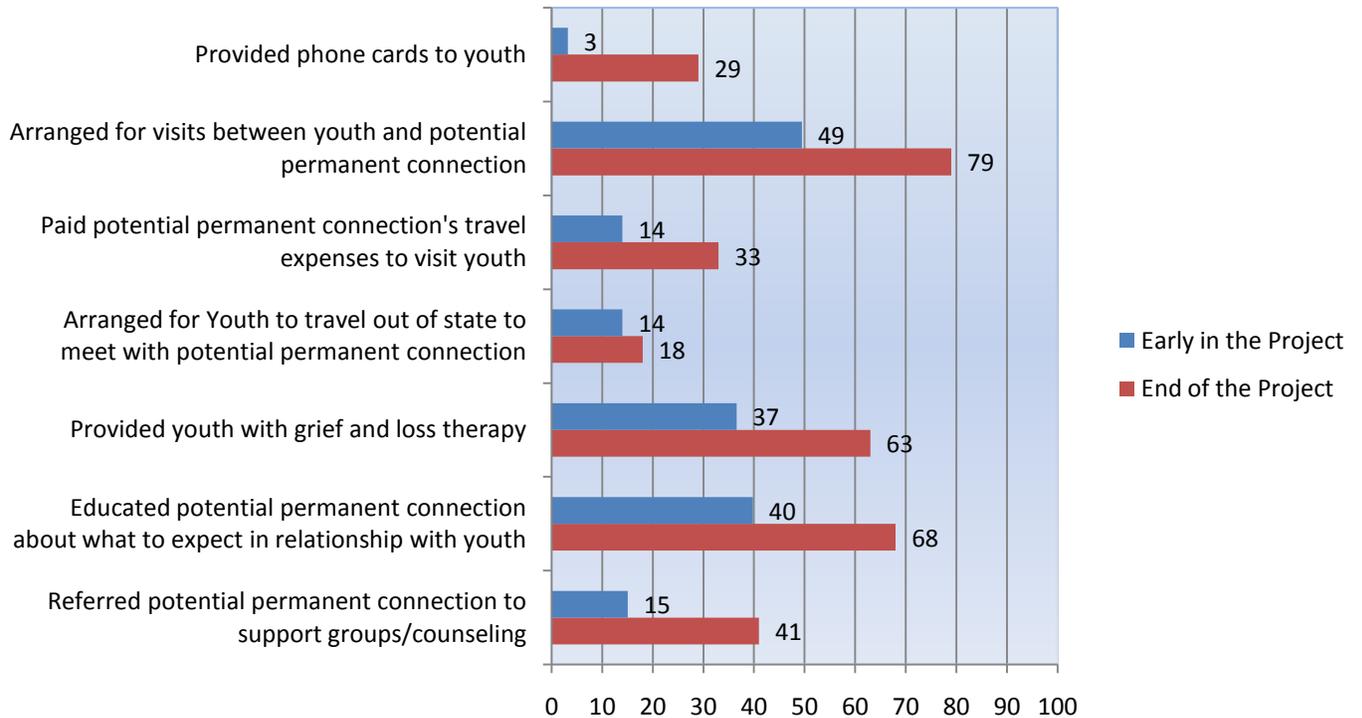
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youth). During the course of the project the evaluation also collected data on the composition of the permanency teams (i.e. who was on each team). CPYP consultants discussed any concerns with project site leadership and caseworkers.

Family Search and Engagement Methods
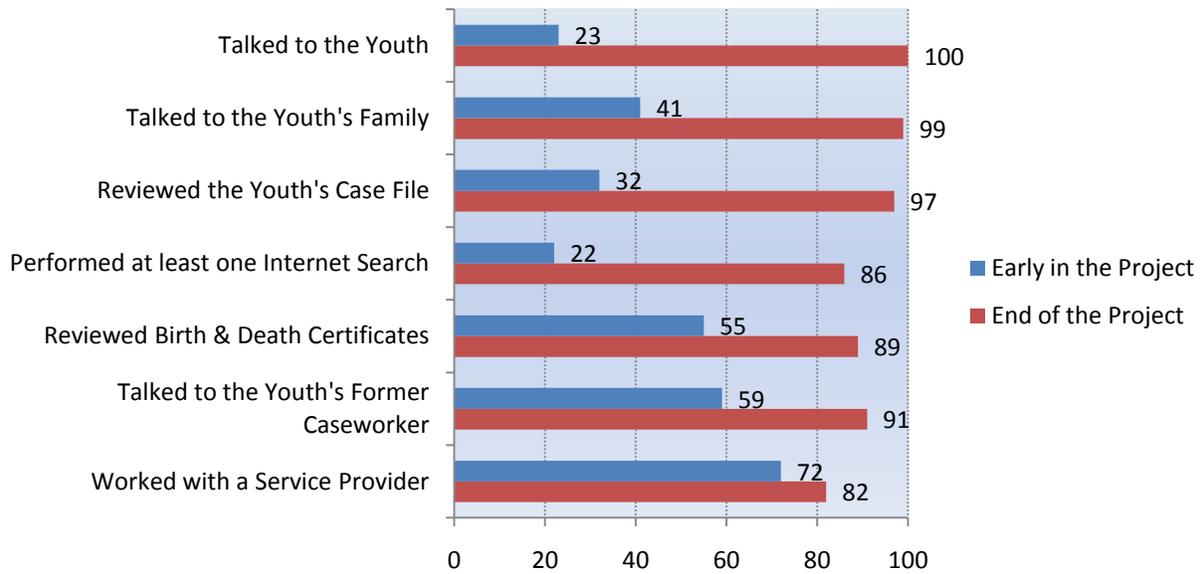
Prior to the beginning of the project, CPYP consultants worked with the evaluator to develop a list of strategies (on which the caseworkers would be trained) to locate relatives and potential connections for the project youth. Of course much of the training involves *how* the methods listed above are used, however in the evaluation we only track whether or not they were used. The above chart indicates the number of youth for whom the caseworker used the identified family search and engagement methods early in the project (December 2008) and by the end of the project (October 2009). As was the case with the preceding permanency team data and the methods used to support potential permanent connection (discussed below) the December 2008 data is disproportionately comprised of data from counties that entered the project with relatively more experience with CPYP or started the project activities earlier than other sites.   (The differences between the project sites are discussed in Section VI below.) As the data reveals, though, by the end of the project caseworkers at all project sites had used most of the methods listed above.

Methods used to Support Potential Permanent Connections

Provided phone cards to youth: Early in the Project 3, End of the Project 29

Arranged for visits between youth and potential permanent connection: Early in the Project 49, End of the Project 79

Paid potential permanent connection's travel expenses to visit youth: Early in the Project 14, End of the Project 33

Arranged for Youth to travel out of state to meet with potential permanent connection: Early in the Project 14, End of the Project 18

Provided youth with grief and loss therapy: Early in the Project 37, End of the Project 63

Educated potential permanent connection about what to expect in relationship with youth: Early in the Project 40, End of the Project 68

Referred potential permanent connection to support groups/counseling: Early in the Project 15, End of the Project 41

Once a relative and/or potential permanent connection had been located, project site staff utilized the training they had received from CPYP consultants on how to: bring the youth and adult together, nurture the nascent relationship, avoid or work through the challenges, and move the youth and adult towards developing a lifelong relationship. The above chart indicates the percentage of Study Group youth for whom the above methods were used to support potential permanent connections early in the project (December 2008) and by the end of the project (October 2009). Note that, unlike with the preceding family search and engagement methods (which are generally appropriate to use for most youth), the above "support" methods are used more selectively. Some of the methods (arrange for visits between youth and potential permanent connections) might be appropriate in most if not all cases, however other methods (phone cards, arranging for out of state travel, etc) are clearly only necessary on a case by case basis. A "low" score for the above support methods, therefore, does not necessarily indicate that the project sites aren't providing the appropriate services to the Study Group youth.

V. OUTCOMES FOR STUDY GROUP YOUTH

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

- Reunification/adoption/guardianship has been finalized

- This youth did form a permanent connection to a caring adult and is pursuing reunification, adoption or a guardianship

- This youth did form a permanent connection to a caring adult however reunification/ adoption/guardianship is not being sought at this time (or was not sought prior to the youth leaving the project)

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

| Legal Permanence (reunification, adoption, guardianship)	Permanent Connection (pursuing legal permanence)	Permanent Connection (not pursuing legal permanence)	No Permanent Connection
20	18	40	32

As indicated above (in the three shaded regions), ***seventy-eight of the one hundred and ten project youth (71%) formed a permanent connection before the end of the project.*** It should be noted that at the outset of the project caseworkers were asked if the Study Group youth had a permanent connection before entering the project and they responded that fifteen youth **did** have a connection, ninety youth **did not** have a permanent connection and they "didn't know" for the remaining five youth. Those youth that already had a permanent connection were included in the project either to strengthen the existing connection or to develop a back-up permanency plan. Since staff at some of the project sites were in the early stages of their understanding of CPYP's definition of a permanent connection, this information is presented to provide the caseworker's impressions at the beginning of the project, but the data are not used as "baseline" figures to measure change over the course of the project. (In other words, as some caseworkers received CPYP training their perspective changed and their opinion of what did and did not constitute a permanent connection relationship sometimes changed.)

- The twenty youth that achieved legal permanence included thirteen reunifications, two adoptions and five legal guardianships.

- The eighteen youth pursuing legal permanence include six youth pursuing reunification, four pursuing adoption and eight pursuing legal guardianship.

- Caseworkers indicated that seventeen of the thirty-two youth that ended the project without a permanent connection did have a *potential* permanent connection and twelve youth did not have a potential permanent connection at the conclusion of the project. (Three caseworkers did not respond.)

- Caseworkers for forty-one of the seventy-eight youth (53%) that formed a permanent connection indicated that the connection "probably occurred because of our work with CPYP," while caseworkers for the remaining thirty-seven said that the connections "probably would have occurred anyway." Two project sites accounted for the majority of the cases in which the caseworkers did not attribute permanent connections to CPYP – this finding will be discussed in Section VI below. It should be noted that post-project interviews revealed that some of the respondents did not attribute the permanent connection to CPYP if the connecting adult was known to the agency prior to the beginning of the project. Furthermore, if CPYP's involvement made the connection happen more quickly or strengthened the permanent connection relationship – possibly by encouraging grief and loss therapy for the youth or training on how to prepare the adult for the relationship, the caseworker could accurately indicate that the connection "probably would have occurred anyway" and the connection would therefore not be attributed to the project. Unfortunately this question did not uncover the information that would more accurately reflect CPYP's full impact on the development of permanent connections for the project youth.
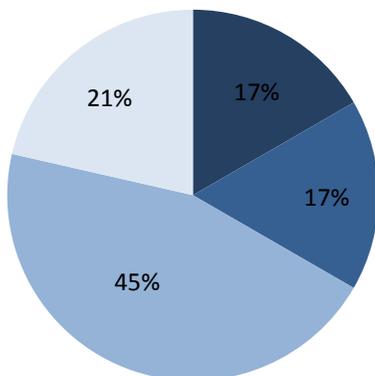
Outcomes by Gender
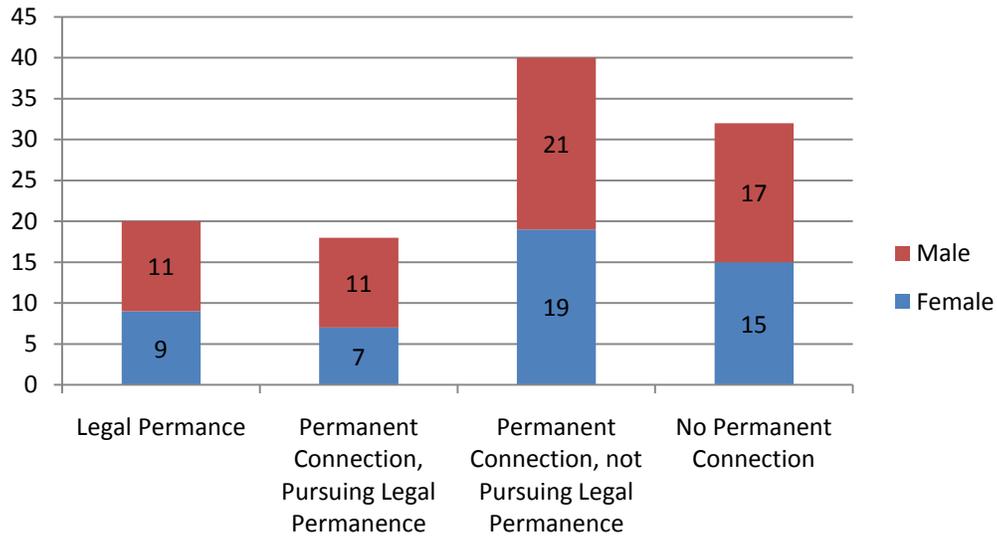
The outcomes for the sixty males and fifty females in the Study Group are shown above. Both genders had roughly equal success achieving legal permanence (both at approximately 18%), forming a permanent connection but not achieving legal permanency (53% of the males and 52% of the females), and they were roughly equally likely to not form a permanent connection (28% for the males and 30% for the females). Overall, forty-three of the sixty males (72%) and thirty-five of the fifty females (70%) formed a permanent connection to a caring adult.
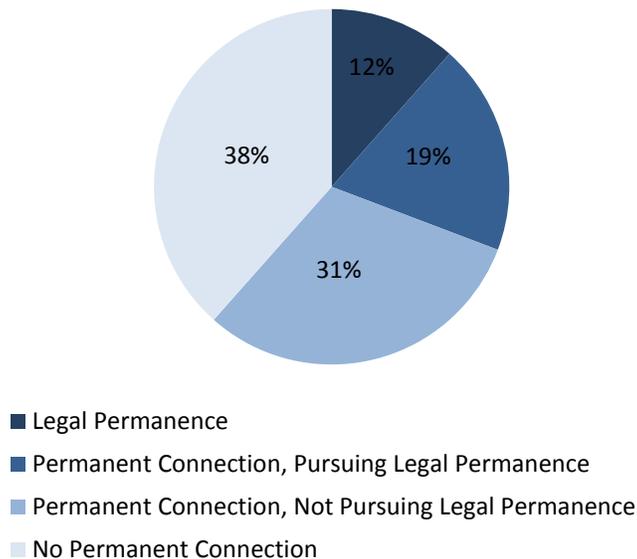
African American

Hispanic/Latino

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White

- ■ Legal Permanence
- ■ Permanent Connection, Pursuing Legal Permanence
- ■ Permanent Connection, Not Pursuing Legal Permanence
- ■ No Permanent Connection
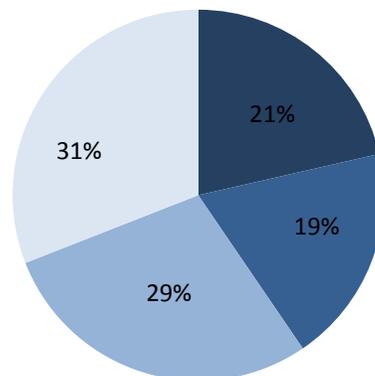
The above charts show the outcomes by ethnicity for the Study Group youth. The darkest shaded region in each pie chart represents the percentage of youth of each of the three ethnicities that achieved legal permanence (17% of the African-American youth in the Study Group, 21% of the Hispanic/Latino youth, and 12% of the White youth). Overall seventy-nine percent (79%) of the African-American youth formed permanent connections while the success rates for the Hispanic/Latino and White youth were somewhat lower (69% and 62% respectively).

Validity and Reliability of Outcome Data

Probably the most challenging and important aspect of the evaluation was creating a process in which we could be confident of the validity of the permanent connection data; i.e. when a caseworker reports that a youth has a permanent connection, we want to have confidence that the relationship does indeed meet the standard set by the project. Since the concept of a "permanent connection" was new to some caseworkers and this "outcome" was something that none of the project sites had tracked prior to their involvement with CPYP, we knew that getting valid, reliable data was going to be a challenge. It should be noted that two caseworkers, diligently following CPYP's training and attempting to adhere precisely to the project's definition of a permanent connection could review the same information on a case and disagree on whether or not a permanent connection exists. In the end it is a "judgment call" left to the caseworkers and supervisors. Following are the steps put in place in an effort to generate the most valid, reliable permanent connection data from which to base this evaluation: (Note that each item below is new to the evaluation.   These steps were not taken in earlier phases of the project, though the definition of "permanent connection" was developed during the most recent phase.)

- *Definition of Permanent Connection:* While working with ten counties in 2006 and 2007 (prior to beginning the work with the project sites) CPYP held a series of meetings with county staff involved with implementing the project. During these meeting CPYP and

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county staff developed the definition of "permanent connection" that was used with the current project sites. By establishing a definition at the outset of the project and consistently using it with the project sites, we believe we have brought greater uniformity to what is considered to be a permanent connection.

- *What it Means to be a Permanent Connection document:* About mid-way through the project, as the project sites were beginning to indicate that permanent connection were being formed, we created a one-page information sheet which described to the project site staff what is, and is not, considered a permanent connection (see Exhibit "D"). We asked the caseworkers and supervisors to consider this information when providing data for the evaluation concerning whether or not individual youth had formed a permanent connection. The document was widely and frequently distributed to project site staff and was intended to improve both the validity and reliability of the data.

- *Supervisor's Approval Required:* In order for a permanent connection to "count" in the evaluation, we required that a supervisor approve the connection and provide us with the approval date for the connection. The approval date was also used to calculate how long it took for the project sites to make a permanent connection for their youth.

- *Project Sites Maintained Data:* In keeping with the adage "what gets measured gets done" we worked with staff at the project sites to maintain lists of which youth did have, and did not have, permanent connections.

- *Random Check of Permanent Connection Data:* Since within the scope of this evaluation there was no way to independently verify each permanent connection, the evaluator randomly selected three youth in each project site who had been designated as having a permanent connection (but not legal permanence) for review. CPYP consultants discussed these cases with staff at the project sites to determine if the connection met the standard of the project and the evaluation. CPYP consultants were able to verify that seventeen of the eighteen youth did indeed have permanent connections; while one youth's connection did not meet the standards for the project. (It appears that this eighteenth youth might exemplify the "judgment call" nature of the work – the caseworker believes the youth's relationship is a permanent connection and the CPYP consultant does not believe it fits the definition of a permanent connection.)

- *Questions about the Relationship:* In order to both provide evidence supporting the validity of the permanent connection data and to offer insight into these relationships several questions were added to the Final Survey and targeted to youth based upon the "outcome" indicated by the caseworker:

For the seventy-eight youth that formed permanent connections:

	Yes	No	Don't Know
A. Does the youth live with the Permanent Connection?	45 (58%)	33 (42%)	0

   B. If "No," does the youth plan to live with the Permanent

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	Yes	No	Don't Know
Connection in the future?	16 (48%)	3 (9%)	14 (42%)

C. If "No" or "Don't Know" is the Permanent Connection's home an "emergency place to stay" for the youth?

	Yes	No	Don't Know
	10 (59%)	1 (6%)	6 (35%)

The above three questions indicate that over half of the youth (58%) with permanent connections live with their connection. Of the thirty-three youth that don't currently live with their connection, sixteen *plan* to live with the connection in the future and ten consider the connection's home an "emergency place to stay." The caseworker for only one of these seventy-eight youth indicated that the connection's home was not a place to live at now or in the future even under "emergency" circumstances (though six additional caseworkers responded they "didn't know" on this series of questions).

For the fifty-eight youth that formed a permanent connection, but didn't achieve legal permanence:

	Yes	No	Don't Know
D. Does the youth agree that this adult will be a Permanent Connection in his/her life?	57 (98%)	0	1 (2%)

	Never	Sometimes	Always	Don't Know
E. To what extent is the youth included in the Permanent Connection's family activities such as family vacations, visits to relatives, and holiday celebrations.	0	13 (22%)	38 (66%)	7 (12%)

The above two question reveal that, according to the caseworkers, all of the youth with permanent connections agreed that the adult would play this role in their life (though one caseworker responded "don't know"), thirty-eight (66%) of these youth are always included in family activities, and fifteen (22%) are sometimes included.

For the forty youth that formed a permanent connection, but are not pursuing legal permanence at this time:

	Yes	No	Don't Know
F. Does the youth want to pursue some form of legal permanence (with the Permanent Connection) in the future?	8 (20%)	25 (63%)	7 (18%)

From the last question in this series we learn that, according to the caseworkers, eight of the forty youth (20%) who are not currently pursuing legal permanence would like to do so in the future. We recognize that this is a developmental process and that youth often change their mind over time as relationships deepen.

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Strengthening Sibling Connections

When youth enter the foster care system they often lose contact with their brothers and sisters, who might or might not enter care simultaneously, and may or may not end up in the same placement. Connecting (or reconnecting) a youth to a sibling not only provides the youth with a supportive person for the future, but also with a connection to the youth's past. For a youth transitioning to adulthood and independence while possibly struggling with identity issues, a relationship with a brother or sister can be extremely important. Though the focus of the project was to either establish legal permanency for the youth or to at least locate a "parent-like" figure with whom the youth could have a life-long relationship, strengthening the youth's sibling connections was also an area of emphasis. In an attempt to assess the project's impact on sibling connections, caseworkers were asked if the Study Group youth "strengthened his/her relationship with one or more sibling(s) *because of the youth's involvement in the project?"* The caseworkers indicated that *sibling connections were strengthened because of the project for sixty-seven (61%) of the Study Group youth.*

> *When "M" was assigned to the project he was almost sixteen and a half years old, had been in the system for over six years and was in his eighth placement. While searching for past relatives a county supervisor noticed that when the youth's mother (now deceased) was living with her children, she had a roommate who also had children. The supervisor did an internet search on the roommate's name, found her contact information, and called her. This former roommate had contact information for M's younger half-sister whom he hadn't seen in over a decade. M was reintroduced to his younger sister, now thirteen, and according to the caseworker "they talk several times per week on the phone." His half-sister's family "are a very loving and inclusive family and they have many memories and photos of the youth when he was young." The youth had a week-long visit with the family and likes them very much. Though the ultimate outcome is unknown (as of the date of this report) the caseworker reported that "it is likely that they will stay connected and the department will continue to pursue more formalized permanency with them."*

Support Network for Study Group Youth

Although this evaluation is focused on measuring the extent to which the Study Group youth achieved legal permanence or a permanent connection with at least one adult, we realize that permanency work involves creating a network of support people (relatives, friends, mentors, etc.) for the youth. While these support people do not meet the definition or standard set by the project of a "permanent connection", they are important to the youth. To help us understand the extent to which each youth's network of support has changed over the course of the project, at the end of the project we asked the caseworkers to estimate the number of support people for each youth at the beginning and end of the project. Two project sites estimated that their Study Group youth began the project with, on average, only one support person, whereas one site indicated that their youth had approximately nine support people each. Every site indicated that the overall support network had (on average) increased for their Study Group youth. Information particular to the individual project sites will be provided in Section VI below.

Information on Study Group Youth that did not Form a Permanent Connection

For the thirty-two youth that didn't form a permanent connection, caseworkers were asked to identify factors that contributed to their lack of success on behalf of these youth. Caseworkers identified the following reasons to explain their lack of success from the choices offered on the Final Survey form. (Caseworkers were free to choose multiple factors and the total number of responses therefore exceeds the number of youth that didn't form a permanent connection.) It is important to note that the expectation between CPYP and all county sites is that the work to locate a permanent connection for each youth in care would continue beyond the evaluation and consultation period.

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

The youth was/is unwilling to pursue a permanent connection 14

There were a lack of resources to support a permanent connection 4

I encountered language/cultural barriers in working with the youth
          (or the youth's family) which hindered permanency efforts 0

I encountered other barriers to the permanency efforts I was pursuing 11

I was not able to spend sufficient time on permanency work due to my high
                              workload and other responsibilities 2

The youth left the project (transferred to probation, moved from the
                    county, etc.) before a connection was formed 4

The youth was willing, and I did the work, however we were not able to
                              find a connection for this youth 2

VI. PROJECT SITE REVIEWS

As mentioned above five of the six project sites began their CPYP-related permanency efforts in 2008. However some of the sites had significant exposure to CPYP prior to 2008 and others were relatively new to the project. One of these "2008 sites" didn't receive approval for the project for several months and wasn't fully staffed and funded until 2009. Furthermore the sixth site covered in this report didn't even select their Study Group youth until 2009 and decided to work with ten instead of twenty youth in their pilot group. The sites also differed considerably in the way they implemented the project; one site concentrated their efforts on one supervisor and two caseworkers while another site tried to launch the project with all family reunification and permanent placement caseworkers at the same time. Likewise the sites operated in different fiscal environments, received differing levels of support from county leadership, had to integrate the project by varying degrees into different initiatives, had diverse experiences with collaborators, judges, unions, etc. Lastly, the youth they chose for their Study Groups were different based upon their demographics, placement histories, and other characteristics. Clearly, any attempt to compare the experiences and outcomes of the six sites should take into account the widely diverse environments in which they operated.

Following is a site-by-site review of the six project sites containing some of the contextual factors that impacted their implementation of the project, along with the outcomes for their Study Group youth and some project-related practice and policy changes each site has adopted.

Madera County

Contextual Factors Impacting Implementation

With a population of around 150,000, Madera is a small county with limited opportunities to partner with local service providers. Madera established a CPYP committee in 2006 and county staff attended CPYP conferences, multi-county meetings and other permanency trainings prior to being chosen as a "CPYP county" for this project. The county's permanency efforts were well underway when the project started in 2008.

Like other counties in the state, Madera worked within a tight fiscal environment throughout the eighteen months of the project. A hiring freeze resulted in high caseloads for some permanency workers. When the Director left and the Assistant Director was promoted as his replacement, the Assistant Director position was left unfilled. In mid-2009 only half of the Program Manager positions were filled. Additionally, at one point during the project, four of the six supervisors were out on medical leave.

Madera randomly selected youth for their pilot project, as opposed to identifying youth with the greatest need as was done in the other project sites. Their Study Group youth differed from those of other project sites in several ways:

- Early in the project caseworkers reported that all Madera Study Group youth were "indifferent," "reluctant" or "not interested" in reconnecting with important people in their lives. In every other project site at least half of the Study Group youth at this same point in time were either "somewhat" or "very interested" in reconnecting with important people in their lives. It should be noted that over the course of the project nine Madera youth later indicated that they were either "somewhat" or "very interested" in reconnecting with important people in their lives.

- Early in the project over half of Madera's Study Group youth rated "low" on a three-point loneliness scale (indicating that the youth already had several loving or meaningful relationships). This was in contrast to all of the other project sites, for whom a majority of the youth rated either "medium" (few loving or meaningful relationships) or "high" (no loving or meaningful relationships) on the loneliness scale at roughly the same time.

- At the time of entering the project, Madera's Study Group youth, on average, had spent less time in out-of-home care than the youth of any other project sites and had experienced fewer placement changes than four out of five of the 2008 project sites. Madera's youth had averaged five years in out-of-home care (versus a project-wide average of just under eight years) and had under seven placement changes (versus a project average of over eight placement changes).

- Caseworkers indicated that eighteen out of twenty (90%) of Madera's youth are Hispanic/Latino, whereas the five other counties combined had twenty-seven percent of their youth listed as Hispanic/Latino. Madera was also the only county with no youth living in a group home at the outset of the project. Three project sites indicated that at least half of their Study Group youth were in group homes and the other two sites had approximately a third of their youth in this type of placement.

Outcomes for Study Group Youth

Legal Permanence (reunification, adoption, guardianship)	Permanent Connection (pursuing legal permanence)	Permanent Connection (not pursuing legal permanence)	No Permanent Connection
3	4	10	3

- Of the seventeen youth that formed permanent connections (the shaded regions above), caseworkers indicated that fourteen of these connections "probably would have occurred anyway" and only three connections "probably occurred because of our work with CPYP."   Madera was one of only two project sites that did not attribute at least half of their permanent connections to the project. The CPYP consultant who worked with this

county suggests that the county's early start date and decision to randomly select their Study Group youth led to youth in the project that already had some form of a connection with a caring adult (a view which has been expressed by some caseworkers and is supported by the loneliness scale data). It should also be noted that some of these connections, though not occurring during the time frame of the project, might have been influenced by the county's earlier exposure to CPYP.

- For the seventeen youth that formed permanent connections, the average time from when a youth was assigned to the project until a supervisor approved the permanent connection was just over eleven months. Of course this statistic does not include data for the three youth for whom permanent connections were not found.

- Caseworkers indicated that over course of project sibling relationships were strengthened "because of the project" for eight Study Group youth.

- The support network for Madera's Study Group youth increased from ninety-seven people to one-hundred and five people. The fact that this was the smallest increase in the study can probably be attributed to the factors discussed above.

Policy & Practice Changes related to CPYP

Because of their involvement with CPYP in the years preceding becoming an official CPYP county, Madera looked for ways to institutionalize their permanency practice in January 2009. Over the latter half of 2009 they successfully implemented family finding and engagement at the front end of services.

At the time of detention in emergency response, workers are now required to complete three forms: a "Connections Survey"; a "Family Information Tree"; and a "Child Placed by Agency" form. The forms are used to document all available historical information on the family along with legal, medical and educational information on the child and siblings.

In another indication that some aspects of the project is being institutionalized, the CPYP committee was renamed the MCPP (Madera County Providing Permanency) committee and the decision has been made to continue the practice started in early 2009 to hold two meetings per month. One meeting a month is held for committee planning and a second centers on case consultation. At this second meeting success stories are shared, barriers (and potential solutions) are discussed and the permanency teams discuss the plans for individual youth.

Los Angeles County – Pomona

Contextual Factors Impacting Implementation

CPYP began working with Los Angeles County in 2005. Using lessons learned from CPYP's work with the county, in 2007 Pomona hired a permanency supervisor and four permanency caseworkers and began implementing aspects of the project in the city. Direct CPYP consultations with the staff in Pomona began in early 2008 and the data shows that in the early stages of the project they were clearly ahead of the other project sites in providing the permanency services that we were tracking in the evaluation.

- By December 2008 permanency teams had been created for all Pomona Study Group youth and eleven youth had already had their first permanency team meeting. The other four project sites active in 2008 (with a combined eighty youth in the Study Group) had by this time created a total of nineteen permanency teams and held a total of seven permanency team meetings.

- By December 2008 Pomona had used each of the seven family search and engagement methods (described earlier) for, on average, seventeen of their twenty Study Group youth. No other project site had used the seven methods for, on average, more than half of their Study Group youth.

- By December 2008 Pomona had "facilitated an *initial* connection or reconnection (through a phone call, a letter, or a meeting) between a potential permanent connection and the youth" for nineteen of their twenty Study Group youth; whereas the other four project sites active in 2008 (with a combined eighty youth in the Study Group) by this time had facilitated a total of twenty-two such initial contacts with potential permanent connections.

Outcomes for Study Group Youth

Legal Permanence (reunification, adoption, guardianship)	Permanent Connection (pursuing legal permanence)	Permanent Connection (not pursuing legal permanence)	No Permanent Connection
6	4	5	5

- Pomona caseworkers indicated that twelve of the fifteen permanent connections "probably occurred because of our work with CPYP." This was the highest number of permanent connections attributed to the project from any project site.

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- Pomona caseworkers indicated that five Study Group youth already had a permanent connection at the beginning of the project. The other ten permanent connections in Pomona took approximately nine months from the time the youth entered the project until the connection was approved by a supervisor.

- At the end of the project all five of the youth that had not yet formed a permanent connection did have a potential permanent connection.

- Caseworkers indicated that over the course of the project sibling relationships were strengthened "because of the project" for seventeen Study Group youth, including four of the five youth for whom a permanent connection was not formed.

- The support network for Pomona's Study Group youth (combined) increased from one hundred and fifty-one to one hundred and seventy-four people.

- The Pomona project site added nine youth to the project (beyond the twenty in the Study Group) and according to the caseworkers all nine formed permanent connections.

Policy & Practice Changes related to CPYP

As described above CPYP was involved with Los Angeles County prior to the designation of Pomona as a project site. This early work led to the creation of the County's Youth Permanency Units. The County's Permanency Committee (which was also influenced by CPYP's early work with Los Angeles County) is actively promoting permanency policy and practice throughout the department.

The Board of Supervisors approved and fully funded six positions in Pomona's Youth Permanence Unit and all positions were filled early in the project.

The Permanency Unit now tracks all "collateral contacts" in Child Welfare Services Case Management System and all connections in the County's internal COGNOS database.

"R" came back into the foster care system when his adoption was set aside by the state of California. His adoptive mother claimed that the youth had mental health issues which were not disclosed by the county. R was subsequently labeled a seriously unstable youth that would probably need to live in an institutional setting. When the youth was assigned to the project the caseworker immediately scheduled a meeting for the youth, and the psychiatrist and psychologist at his new placement. The two mental health professionals determined that the youth probably only suffered from depression. At this time the youth requested that the caseworker find his biological family. With the help of a permanency worker, R's adult sister, maternal aunt and maternal cousins were found. The caseworker contacted the sister and aunt, explained what had happened to R and the relatives made arrangements that same day to visit with R. In order to pursue permanency for R, the caseworker had to file a request in dependency court for a 730 evaluation to be conducted on R by an independent psychiatrist. With a new diagnosis, the court ordered the County to liberalize the visitation with the biological aunt to allow for weekend overnight visits. R was placed in his aunt's home in June 2008 and guardianship was granted to the aunt at the end of the year. The aunt told the caseworker that she had allowed R to be taken from the family once but she will never allow that to happen again. County staff indicated that CPYP training "really made us focus on the important issues which were finding a permanent connection for this youth and fighting for this youth to be returned to his family of origin."

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San Bernardino County

Contextual Factors Impacting Implementation

San Bernardino faced some unique implementation challenges in that their county is geographically large and several of their Study Group youth were placed in out-of-state group homes. For the entire Study Group out-of-state travel (to support potential permanent connection relationships) was paid for by a project site eighteen times – ten of those were for San Bernardino County youth.

Like other project sites, San Bernardino operated under a tight fiscal environment. The county had limited funds available for relative searches and requests for travel funds were closely scrutinized (which was especially problematic for this site given their size and the distant locations of their Study Group youth).

Though they began implementing the project around the same time or later than most of the other project sites, once San Bernardino was underway they were as focused and dedicated as any site. The project, and county, suffered a major setback though, when the primary champion of the implementation died unexpectedly in 2009.

At the outset of the project, San Bernardino County had more Study Group youth residing in a group home (eleven) than any other project site. Six of these youth lived in out-of-state facilities and these six youth experienced on average more than fourteen placements prior to entering the project.

Outcomes for Study Group Youth

Legal Permanence (reunification, adoption, guardianship)	Permanent Connection (pursuing legal permanence)	Permanent Connection (not pursuing legal permanence)	No Permanent Connection
8	1	7	4

- San Bernardino County had the highest number of Study Group youth that achieved legal permanence. All eight cases were reunifications.

- Caseworkers indicated that nine of their sixteen permanent connection "probably occurred because of our work with CPYP" including six of the eight youth that achieved legal permanence.

- San Bernardino caseworkers indicated that four Study Group youth already had a permanent connection at the beginning of the project. The other twelve permanent

connections took approximately eleven months from the time the youth entered the project until the connection was approved by a supervisor.

- Caseworkers indicated that over the course of the project sibling relationships were strengthened "because of the project" for seventeen of the twenty Study Group youth.

- The support network for San Bernardino County's Study Group youth (combined) increased from one hundred and seventy-seven to two hundred and thirty-four people (an average increase for each youth of from nine to twelve support people).

- The San Bernardino County project site added twenty-eight youth to the project (beyond the twenty in the Study Group) and according to the caseworkers twenty-one of the twenty-eight (75%) formed permanent connections.

Policy & Practice Changes related to CPYP

San Bernardino County extensively revised their permanency policies due to the project, including the roles and activities related to family search and engagement work with collaborative partners. Policies that were developed for the pilot project (and approved in October 2009) lay the groundwork for expansion and integration of project activities. Permanency policy and practice has been affected both at the front and back end of services and CPYP has influenced the county's System Improvement Plan.

The project has encouraged San Bernardino County to broaden their use of WRAP services and they have significantly increased the involvement of community partners and continue their efforts to integrate the project into other initiatives.

San Bernardino County stood out from the other project sites in their efforts pertaining to data collection and evaluation. Dovetailing on the pilot project, San Bernardino County developed its own evaluation which tracks both process steps and outcomes with the pilot youth and a comparison group. They have created their own internal data collection forms related to this effort. They also created a tool kit to assist the social workers with their permanency work. Changes were made to the overall staffing structure as a unit was created to focus on permanency.

Los Angeles County – Santa Clarita

Contextual Factors Impacting Implementation

Unlike the other project sites that began the project in 2008, who either were already implementing aspect of the project prior to formally starting with CPYP, or, once they started quickly got underway, Santa Clarita's implementation went very slowly. A new Permanency Unit was created in 2008 with three caseworkers and a Youth Permanency Supervisor, however the three caseworkers (for union reasons) couldn't truly begin permanency work and the unit

could not be fully staffed until the County Board of Supervisors approved the relevant items. This approval didn't come until February 2009. Finally, in May 2009 the unit was fully funded and staffed (with six caseworkers and one clerk) and the pilot cases (half of which were in other units) were transferred into the unit. Of course, this very slow start was reflected in the data: In December 2008 only one permanency team had been formed and not one of the seven family search and engagement methods had been used with more than two Study Group youth.

With ten youth living in a group home, Santa Clarita was one of three project sites with at least half of their Study Group youth in that placement at the outset of the project.

In May 2009 nine of Santa Clarita's Study Group youth rated "high" on the three-point loneliness scale (indicating that the youth had no loving or meaningful relationships), eleven rated "medium" (few loving or meaningful relationships) and none of the youth rated "low" (several loving or meaningful relationships). Santa Clarita had the highest number of youth with "no loving or meaningful relationships" and was the only 2008 project site that didn't have any youth with "several loving or meaningful relationships." Santa Clarita also was one of three project sites that indicated that none of their Study Group youth had a permanent connection at the outset of the project.

Outcomes for Study Group Youth

Legal Permanence (reunification, adoption, guardianship)	Permanent Connection (pursuing legal permanence)	Permanent Connection (not pursuing legal permanence)	No Permanent Connection
2	3	3	12

- Eight of Santa Clarita's Study Group youth formed a permanent connection by the end of the project, about half the number achieved by the other 2008 sites (all of whom ended the project with between fifteen and eighteen permanent connections each). Furthermore of the twelve youth who did not end the project with a permanent connection, only three had a *potential* permanent connection. In fact, Santa Clarita's forty percent success rate (eight out of twenty youth) is much closer to the 50% success rate experienced by the one project site that didn't start until mid-2009. It also appears from the data that Santa Clarita's youth might have been especially challenging given that (according to the caseworkers) they rated the highest on the loneliness scale and began the project without any permanent connections.

- Santa Clarita's caseworkers indicated that all eight of their permanent connections "probably occurred because of our work with CPYP." They were the only project site to attribute all of their successes to the project.

- Santa Clarita caseworkers indicated the eight permanent connections took, on average, between eight and nine months from the time the youth entered the project until the connection was approved by a supervisor.

- Caseworkers indicated that over the course of the project sibling relationships were strengthened "because of the project" for eight Study Group youth.

- The support network for Santa Clarita's Study Group youth increased from sixteen people to sixty-two people over the course of the project. Based upon the data from the caseworkers, at the outset of the project, Santa Clarita's Study Group youth had by far the lowest number of support people of any of the 2008 project sites (the next lowest total was sixty-eight people) which could further support the contention that the Santa Clarita caseworkers were working with a challenging group of youth. (The one project site that began the project in 2009 had a total of twelve support people for the ten youth in their Study Group.)

Policy & Practice Changes related to CPYP

As was the case with the other project site located in Los Angeles County (Pomona), Santa Clarita was impacted by CPYP's earlier work with the county. A new policy and procedures guide was released in April 2008 which called for three Permanency Units (Santa Clarita was schedule to be the third site following the other Los Angeles County project site covered in this report).

As mentioned above Santa Clarita did (eventually) create a Permanency Unit in 2009 staffed by a Youth Permanency Supervisor, six caseworkers and one clerk. One of the goals for the youth in the unit is: "Youth maintain a relationship with at least one committed adult who is a safe, stable and secure parenting resource capable of providing love, unconditional commitment, and a lifelong connection." Areas of practice change within the unit include a focus on youth-driven plans, greater use of family finding and engagement strategies, and providing grief and loss therapy for youth in the unit.

Solano County

Contextual Factors Impacting Implementation

Solano County's decision at the outset to implement the project with all Family Reunification and Permanent Placement caseworkers at the same time resulted in a rocky first several months. Some staff, who knew little about the project, complained about the extra work and it was unclear what funding was available for the project. Since some supervisors were not yet fully committed to the project and the person designated as the CPYP liaison had insufficient authority and no support staff, the leadership structure was not in place to compel the caseworkers to do the work.

These issues were exacerbated by significant fiscal cutbacks and the resulting downsizing of the staff. During the course of the project as people retired or were let go, positions often were not refilled. They reported that their staff decreased by 27% from the prior fiscal year. The caseworkers assigned to the Study Group youth frequently changed, sometimes resulting in a "new" worker who was much less familiar with the project and was certainly less familiar with

the particular youth. At the time of the second progress report (May 2009) thirteen of the twenty Study Group youth had a different assigned caseworkers than they had for the December 2008 reporting period.

Solano County, at the time of the May 2009 progress report, trailed the other project sites in the implementation of the permanency services and activities we tracked in the evaluation:

- By May 2009 Solano caseworkers had only held four permanency team meetings (whereas the next lowest total for a 2008 project site was eight meetings).

- At this same time Solano caseworkers lagged behind the other project site caseworkers in the number of youth for whom they used both the family search and engagement methods and the methods to support potential permanent connections.

Though the county continued to struggle with budget shortfall and staffing reductions throughout the project, they were able to overcome these challenges and make impressive strides forward in the latter half of 2009. By the end of the project (October 2009) they had held fifteen permanency team meetings (as many or more than all but one other project site) and had also caught up to most of the other sites in providing the family search and engagement services and the methods supporting potential permanent connections. They have also implemented a number of permanency policy and practice changes as noted below.

Outcomes for Study Group Youth

Legal Permanence (reunification, adoption, guardianship)	Permanent Connection (pursuing legal permanence)	Permanent Connection (not pursuing legal permanence)	No Permanent Connection
1	6	10	3

- Solano County had as many permanent connections as any project site (seventeen), though they had the lowest number of youth that achieved legal permanence (one) of any of the 2008 project sites.

- Caseworkers indicated that six of Solano County's Study Group youth began the project with a permanent connection (the most of any project site) which may partially account for the fact that they were one of two project sites that indicated that most of their permanent connections "probably would have occurred anyway." They attributed only six of their seventeen permanent connections to the project.

- Not counting the six youth that started the project with a permanent connection and one youth for whom there was insufficient data, Solano caseworkers indicated that their permanent connections took approximately ten months from the time the youth entered the project until the connection was approved by a supervisor.

Policy & Practice Changes related to CPYP

Solano's division management has tried to maintain their focus on permanency during the ongoing budget and staffing reductions. They have had some success integrating project activities into their other permanency related projects and initiatives (Family to Family, Team Decision Meetings, Concurrent Planning, Differential Response) which often had similar goals but nonetheless caused competition for staff time and sometimes confusion. They have successfully shifted one of their System Improvement Plan goals from "stability" to "permanency."

Evidence of practice change include the requirement that family trees must be done for all youth as part of any transfer summary (effective January 1, 2010). They have further demonstrated their commitment to permanency by hiring their CPYP consultant to work three days a month on permanency in 2010.

When asked whether or not the project is institutionalized in Solano two program manager estimated that the "culture shift" has gone about 70 or 80 percent of the way.

Riverside County

Contextual Factors Impacting Implementation

There are three factors one should take into account when assessing Riverside County's implementation of this project. The first is the fact that this site didn't begin the project until mid-2009. Throughout 2008, CPYP was in contact with Riverside County, however, county leadership were unable to finalize the decision about who should be responsible for the project (in fact they assigned three project leads within the first nine months of the project). They were also uncertain how many (and which) youth to include in the pilot and how they would coordinate the implementation along with other projects and initiatives. For much of 2008 the project did not appear to be a high priority for Riverside County.

A second factor, budget shortfalls, impacted all of the project sites; however the fiscal crisis appeared especially acute in Riverside County. The County mandated a hard hiring freeze and an all division staff furlough, inclusive of closing all offices every Friday.

The last factor to consider if one wished to compare Riverside County's outcomes to that of the other project sites is that Riverside County appeared to be working with very challenging cases. Riverside County decided to implement their pilot project in a group home unit with ten youth (as opposed to twenty youth in each of the other project sites). At the time of the first progress report (about two months after the youth were assigned to the project) seven youth were in group homes, one was in juvenile hall, one was AWOL, and the tenth youth also spent time in a group home prior to the end of the project. Though a few youth spent some time in and out of residential placements, Riverside County was the only project site that focused exclusively on group home youth. Later it was revealed that the supervisor reviewed all three hundred cases in

the group home unit and selected, in consultation with her supervisor, the ten most troubled and least connected youth.

Riverside County was the only project site whose Study Group youth averaged over a dozen placements before entering the project and they were one of three sites that indicated their youth didn't have any permanent connections at the outset of the project. Riverside County was also one of only two project sites in which (according to the caseworkers) all of their youth rated either "high" (indicating that the youth had no loving or meaningful relationships) or "medium" (few loving or meaningful relationships) on the three-point loneliness scale.

Study Group Outcome Data

Legal Permanence (reunification, adoption, guardianship)	Permanent Connection (pursuing legal permanence)	Permanent Connection (not pursuing legal permanence)	No Permanent Connection
0	0	5	5

- Riverside County was the only project site in which no youth achieved legal permanence and the only site with no youth pursuing legal permanence. However, given Riverside County's late start date, their difficult fiscal environment, and their challenging Study Group caseload one could easily make the case that the fifty percent success rate is impressive. (In fact the one project site that also didn't fully commence implementation until mid-2009, found permanent connections for less than half their youth).

- Riverside's caseworkers indicated that all five of their permanent connections "probably occurred because of our work with CPYP" and that four of the five youth that didn't form a permanent connection did end the project with a potential permanent connection.

- Caseworkers indicated that over the course of the project sibling relationships were strengthened "because of the project" for four of the ten Study Group youth.

- According to caseworkers, the support network for Riverside's Study Group youth increased from twelve people to thirty-two people over the course of the project. The project site was one of two that started the project with an average of one support person per youth (the other four sites all had an average of at least three support people for each youth at the outset of the project).

Policy & Practice Changes related to CPYP

Due primarily to the financial landscape they are currently operating under, less incorporation of lessons learned/expansion to all practice is presently planned in Riverside County. At the same time, those who have directly participated or led the work have vowed to continue with this practice and a number of other supervisors and program managers are interested in how they can

take successful pieces of the process and apply it to their area of domain. In addition to supervisors, staff and managers who champion the work, one deputy director is pushing to carry lessons learned forward. She has approved for the Steering Committee to continue to meet to allow the work to continue in the Group Home Region in an effort to reduce the number of youth in group home placements by one hundred youth in eighteen months (from 225 to 125 youth).

"N" entered foster care when he was eight years old. When he entered the project he was thirteen, living in a group home and both the group home staff and N's social worker believed that he would probably be living in group homes until he aged out of foster care when he turned eighteen. N told his Family Finding Specialist that he wanted a family and asked her to find "anybody." The Specialist first located N's father, who had experienced a psychotic break, was institutionalized for a year, but was anxious to get back in contact with his son. The Specialist thought it was important for N to make a reconnection with his father before he left foster care so that N would have support while he worked through the emotional trauma of the reconnection. After laying the groundwork with his therapist, N, his CASA and his therapist visited his dad. After the meeting and a significant amount of work with his therapist, N realized that: 1. His fear that his dad had abandoned him and was now living with another family were untrue, 2. He was actually more functional than his dad, and 3. His dad couldn't parent him. The Family Finding Specialist also found N's mom, who had cleaned up her life, was now off drugs, and also wanted to meet with N. N didn't want to speak with her, however he did allow her to write him letters in which she apologized for hurting him in the past and told him that she would love him forever. To date N hasn't responded to her letters but he did tell the Specialist that he wanted his mom to keep writing to him. The Specialist also found two younger siblings (on his mom's side) who were living with their father (N's mom's ex-husband). N met with them and has stayed in contact, however he decided he didn't want to pursue living with them. With information from N's dad, using an internet search, the Specialist next found N's sister on his dad's side, who was living in another state with her mom (i.e. N's dad's ex-wife) and her husband. With support from N's CASA and therapist, they initiated first phone contact, then a visit from the family, and then N visited the family at their home. The therapist accompanied N on this first out-of-state visit, also staying at the family's home. N now lives with this family (who were granted legal guardianship) and attends public school, getting mostly B's. It should be noted that the County made a significant financial and time commitment to make this connection happen: they had to work out an arrangement whereby they would share the cost of N missing days at his group home school so that he could visit the family (since the group home would not be paid for any missed days); The County has contracted with an out-of-state FFA to supervise the placement and also sends a social worker to visit once a month since the FFA visits do not meet California regulations; when it was determined N was ineligible for Medicaid, the County purchased a short term policy for him until he could obtain Medicaid coverage, which he now has.

Monterey County

Monterey County partnered with CPYP from 2003-05 at the beginning stage of the project. Monterey worked with CPYP consultant Mardi Louisell and received Family Finding training from Kevin Campbell. Following   Monterey continued to participate in National Permanency Convenings, CPYP annual conferences, quarterly regional meeting, collaborative calls and on the Youth Permanency Task Force. When the opportunity arose during the third cohort of training (2008-09) to include one of the original counties, Monterey agreed to partner with CPYP to enhance their teamwork, re-energize their family finding, and incorporate grief/loss work into their permanency model. CPYP consultant Cheryl Jacobson worked with Monterey in these areas, and Monterey contracted with Kevin Campbell and Darla Henry to improve their practice.

Monterey Program Manager Christine Lerable headed a meeting with Cheryl Jacobson, Director Bob Friend and many members of Monterey's leadership team to assess the progress Monterey had made during the service period. Among Monterey's accomplishments were:
- Policy Directive to require a meeting between caregivers and birth parents within the first week of placement to promote partnership
- Development of an internal review process of any youth recommended to Long Term Foster Care prior to transfer
- Reduction of caseloads by 50%, in part due to increased permanency rates and reduced intake
- Active monitoring from the Juvenile Court to direct county work to focus on creating permanent connections for older youth
- The creation of a family team meeting within ninety days of entry into the Family Reunification unit to focus on visitation and concurrent planning
- Increased inclusion of CASA, including greater focus on runaway youth

VII. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM CASEWORKES

The caseworkers and supervisors that were responsible for the family finding and engagement efforts on behalf of the Study Group youth are of course an important source for information. They know better than anyone how the permanent connections were formed, what challenges were encountered, and what lessons can be learned from working on this project. In the "Challenges" and "Lessons Learned" sections below, verbatim quotes were taken directly from the progress reports submitted by the caseworkers. Note that for the sake of clarity some of the statements have been revised slightly (to correct spelling errors, typos, etc.).

Challenges

- ➢ The barrier is that since the youth has not been in a family setting for so long, he is having difficulty connecting and understanding what a family is.

- ➢ It was a constant battle with the court to allow us to (do) our job.

- ➢ The youth was adamant that he did not want services from DCFS.

- The family rejected (the youth).

- The large volume of cases and work makes it difficult.

- Inability to locate families . . . . Phone numbers have been disconnected.

- The family lacked trust in (the department).

- The most challenging obstacle was management's lack of awareness of what I was trying to accomplish and the lack of support (from management).

- The child's attorney was not initially supportive of reinstating parental rights.

- The youth became overwhelmed by the process of meeting many family members for the first time and began to act out in ways that alienated his family.

- Family members did not attend meetings.

- Minor does not wish to participate and wants nothing to do with family.

- Foster parents and biological parent clash.

- Youth's AWOL status greatly hindered permanency efforts.

- The youth's biological mother was completely unwilling to accept any responsibility and this made it difficult for the youth to gain clarification as to what her mother's role is at the present.

- (A lack of) funding and a lack of time has hindered my success.

- Funding issues with the county to facilitate out-of-state visits.

- Youth's incarceration has hindered my efforts to achieve permanency.

- At times there have been language barriers.

- The Family did not respond to letters and calls.

Lessons Learned

- Do not totally rely on the information written in a case file and if you find a discrepancy, fight to get the information corrected.

- Continue to be supportive of the youth and persistent in trying to establish that permanent connection.

- Just because legal permanence is achieved, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done in order to keep the placement stable.

- In this case, if I did not do a life book with this youth, I would not have found out about the foster family that he connected with.

- Don't give up. When one door closes, go to the next door and try to open it.

- It's important to make sure that all caring adults in the youth's life stay in his/her life.

- I learned how empty children's lives are when they do not have a connection.

- (Permanency) needs to be done at the front end of the case; we need to locate family members from the beginning.

- I now have more awareness of resources out there

- I learned people can change and it is never too late to explore reconnecting.

- Begin conversations about what will happen after age 18.

- Discuss permanency earlier.

- I have learned to not take an initial (or several) refusals from the youth as the last word. I am learning to keep the conversation alive with the youth and the relatives even if it seems nothing is happening.

- This project has taught me the importance of searching for connections from early in the case so that the relationships are strong even when the child is in foster care.

- Foster parents being trained to be permanent connections, not long term foster care providers.

- (You should) included more community and group home partners to assist with the permanency work.

- Talk to the family again about family (once a relationship is formed) as they usually know more than they initially tell you up front.

- A better understanding of how important it is to have permanent connections.

- Talk to the youth and listen to what they are saying (and sometimes to what they are NOT saying.)

- I now ask the child "who is important to you" rather than, "who are family members". . . I now look beyond the family, and attempt to seek others of importance to the child.

- Start seeking family and other important connections in the beginning stages of detainment.

- Knowing about the different search engines to try to locate family and others has been a great help.

- Permanency is very difficult work and takes a lot of time and patience, but is worth it in the end.

- When you find one family member, many more are around the corner.

- I believe it is important to form a team around the youth and get the input from many different people.

- Permanency work is the most important work that can ever be done for a youth.

- Even if the youth states that they are not interested in having a permanent connection, they truly want a home and want to feel loved.

- I now believe that you should never overlook anyone as a permanent connection.

- CPYP has allowed me to see that permanency work is ongoing and cannot be completed in a set amount of time.

- Initial resistance from a parent once they are located is a very normal reaction and all part of the process of clarifying what their roles will be in the youth's life in the future.

- Allow the youth to guide you in creating a support network for them.

- I learned about the importance of a connection and that a supportive adult in their life does not always mean a placement.

- Be persistent.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Every year thousands of youth emancipate from California's foster care system rather than exit the system through reunification, guardianship or adoption. Many of these youth spend large parts of their lives "in the system" and too often lose contact with their parents, brothers and sisters, extended relatives and other loved one. After exiting foster care often these youth don't complete high school, don't attended college and too many end up homeless or incarcerated. Tragically, many of these youth are damaged by the system that exists to protect them. After losing contact with their family and friends, and moving from placement to placement many youth "learn" that they have no one that they can count on. These youth are leaving the system, often on their eighteenth birthday, with no safe, reliable family or lifelong parent-like relationships. This is the profile of youth that Pat Reynolds-Harris, as Senior Program Officer with the Stuart Foundation (and ultimately CPYP) was most determined to serve.

With a grant from the Stuart Foundation (and later on from many other foundations), Pat began the California Permanency for Youth Project with the conviction that no child should leave the foster care system without a permanent lifelong connection to a caring adult. CPYP began working with four California counties in 2003 and worked with ten new counties in 2006 and 2007. Over that last two years the project has provided permanency training and technical assistance to six additional sites. Key findings from the evaluations are:
- Concentrating efforts to find family and loved ones, engaging those located who are safe to enter or re-enter the youth's life and supporting the development of those relationships can create permanency (legal and/or relational) for even the most troubled and difficult youth in care at rates far greater than practice which focuses on stability and safety alone.
- Sibling relationships (in 2008 and 2010 evaluations) can also be strengthened through this process.
- Utilizing family finding processes can also result in the establishment of greater networks of support for youth that last beyond the exit of relationships borne from the child welfare system (2010 evaluation).

Additionally, the core CPYP observations of the seven year course of serving and supporting twenty CA county child welfare sites are:
- Excellent practice training in permanency (family finding, engagement, support, grief/loss, communicating with youth, teaming) are necessary, but not sufficient, steps to create enduring practice in child welfare sites. Culture change which involves greater collaboration with community partners, removal of disincentives and barriers, policy review and changes, coaching of practice changes, establishment of supervision standards and expectations, increased support for those doing the work, along with a fierce determination and the development of a growing collection of champions are needed ingredients in order to create sustaining social work practice that achieves permanency on a consistent basis.
- Leadership vacuums, while sometimes unavoidable in public child welfare settings, must be attended to thoughtfully and swiftly in order to maintain the momentum needed to fully grow and integrate this work. Leadership not only includes key point people, but permanency champions at all levels of the organization. Change requires authority, but also enthusiasm from those who perform and believe in the work.

- Assisting youth and families to more successfully grapple with the trauma/loss/grief they have suffered over the years is a critical factor impacting the likelihood of success during the engagement and support stages of permanency work.
- Almost to a person, when children's cases have been case-mined to find potential family contacts, Social Workers have lamented that this work should have been done much sooner. While attention to the youth leaving the system is paramount to help them avoid the negative likely outcomes awaiting them, in order to truly transform the child welfare system front end work to keep families and loved ones connect to children and youth who may or have entered the system must occur.

Over the years some aspects of the project have evolved. Strengthening sibling relationships has become a focus of the training as has the importance of providing the project youth with grief and loss therapy. Legal permanence was reemphasized when it was determined that some workers were not pursuing it on every case, regardless of the youth's age or initial indifference. Other features of the project have remained the same: from the start the work has been youth-centered, and the importance of a team approach (both within the department and using outside collaborators) is usually an essential ingredient of a successful outcome. Results from these evaluations in concert with the observations of CPYP consultants confirm that, regardless of the project site, the perceived difficulty of the youth, the tight budgets or ever-changing county staff, *finding and forming permanent connections for older foster youth is achievable and imperative to their success*. In each phase of the project lifelong connections have been achieved for over seventy percent of the project youth. For the most recent group of youth over three-quarters of the youth live with, or plan to live with their connection and all of them agree that the adult will play a parent-like role in their lives. Since its inception the project has worked directly with over seven hundred and fifty youth (750) in eighteen California Counties. In almost all instances counties selected their most challenging cases for the project; those youth who were lacking important adult relationships and were in danger of aging out of the foster care system without a network of support. For the pilot youth in each phase of the project, permanent connections were consistently found for over seventy percent (70%) of these youth.

Recently studies were completed on one of the subject project sites and three past CPYP sites which both confirm the success of family finding and engagement efforts and provide additional insight into permanency work with older foster youth. San Bernardino County recently completed an internal evaluation which tracked their twenty Study Group youth along with the twenty-eight additional youth they added to the project. Not surprisingly, their report (ATTACHMENT K) showed a similar success rate for the project youth as was shown in our evaluation (we actually showed one less permanent connection than they did); however they also were able to compare the project activities and outcomes to those of a comparison group. Their report showed that caseworkers in the CPYP project received more training related to the project than the "comparison" social workers: all nine of the CPYP caseworkers received family search and engagement training and eight of nine (89%) received grief and loss training; whereas none of the thirty caseworkers for the comparison group received family search and engagement training and just over half (seventeen of the thirty, or 57%) received grief and loss training. Additionally CPYP youth received more services than the youth in the control group. According to the report "CPYP youth were more likely to have Wraparound, a CASA, a Lifebook, a Family Tree, Grief and Loss counseling, and family search and engagement." Lastly, the primary

outcome tracked in *this report* (number of youth that form a permanent connection) was significantly better for the CPYP youth than for the comparison youth. According to their report, "seventy-five percent of CPYP youth had an *established permanent connection* by the end of the pilot, compared to only four percent of the comparison youth." San Bernardino County's "California Permanency for Youth Project Evaluation" was prepared by Sandra Wakcher, Statistical Analyst, Human Services, Legislation and Research Unit, San Bernardino County.

Family Builders, an agency located in Oakland, CA that provides adoption and foster care services to youth and families focusing on permanency, has tracked three hundred and forty-four youth in Alameda and San Francisco Counties (two prior CPYP sites) over the last three to five years. Family Builders operates permanency units in these two counties and much of their permanency practice including their family finding and engagement services were modeled after CPYP. Family Builders' data is especially interesting in that they not only track whether or not permanent connections are formed but also study how long it takes for the outcome to be achieved (in both counties) and the impact that the outcomes have on the county's budget (in Alameda County only since cost data for San Francisco was not available). Based upon data on three-hundred and forty-four youth in the two counties tracked for over three years, they conclude that "a permanency project can expect to achieve a 50 to 60 success rate in about a year . . ." Note that Family Builders' success rate cannot easily be compared to the seventy-one percent (71%) overall success rate of this evaluation since the Family Builders projects, though similar, are not identical to CPYP's efforts and the number of months the project sites worked with the Study Group youth described in this evaluation varied considerably from site to site. Following is a summary of the cost analysis down by Family Builders for the one hundred and eighty-eight youth they worked with in Alameda County. By looking at "the youth that had moved out of foster or group home care into a placement brokered by the project" the Family Builders study calculated the board and social worker cost of the youth before and after the placement change and "then took this monthly change in cost and projected it to the youth's 18th birthday." After totaling the "cost savings for all of the youth and subtracting from this the grant costs to date" they arrived at a total cost savings by 11/30/2009 for Alameda County of $1,768,805 and a projected net savings of over $2,200,000 by 6/30/2010.

The California Permanency for Youth Project completed its funding cycle as of January 2010, and merged with the Center for Family Finding and Youth Connectedness (CFFYC), operated through Seneca Center in San Leandro California as of February 1, 2010. With the assistance of a bridge grant from the Stuart Foundation, CFFYC looks to combine the best work of CPYP with that of Kevin Campbell who founded the Center and contracts nationally with Child Welfare Agencies and partners to teach his Family Finding model and help promote the need for and improve the attainment of permanency for foster youth. CFFYC will broaden its work to assist sites, in California and nationally, to attend to the permanency needs of older foster youth while also focusing on creating practice models for front end work to prevent or repair disconnections between children/youth and their loved ones in a fiscally sustainable model.

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