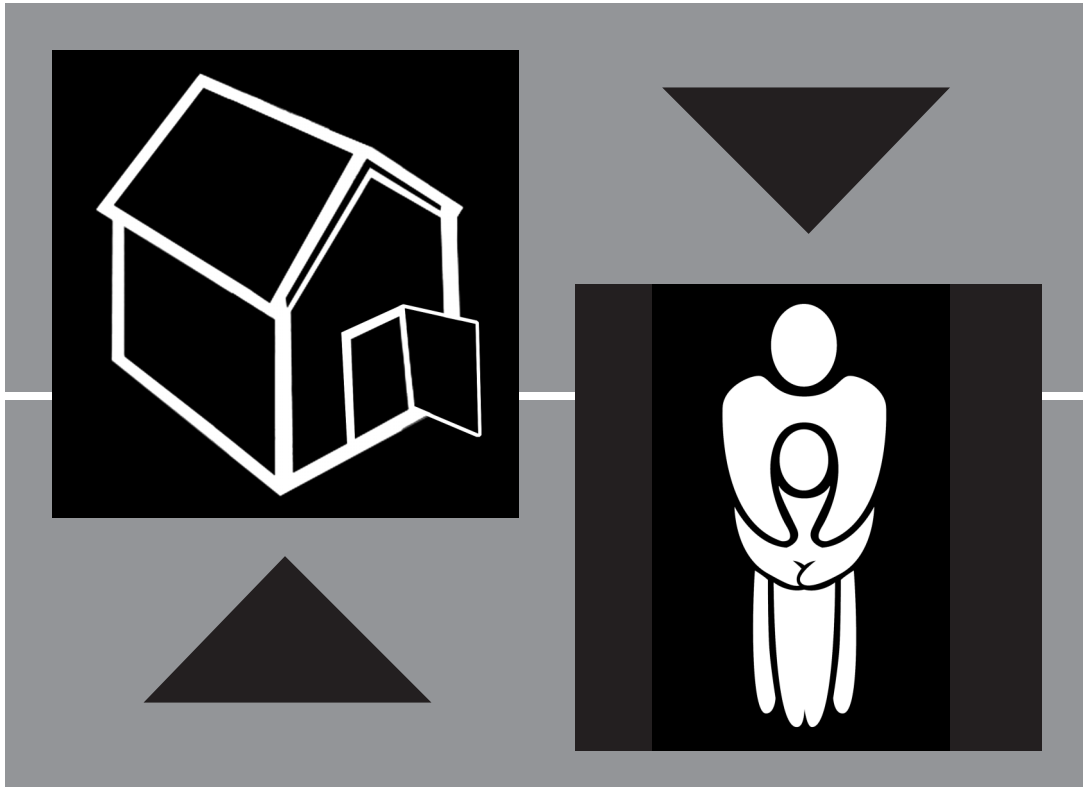


**RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS  
ON YOUTH PERMANENCE**



**BETWEEN ADOPTION AND FOSTER FAMILY AGENCIES  
AND CHILD WELFARE**

•

**Adoption and Foster Family Agencies  
and Child Welfare Partnership Work Group  
California Permanency for Youth Project**

**Prepared by Mardith J. Louisell**

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A basic project description.	

This work group convened out of a recognition that partnerships between counties and their foster family agencies (FFAs)/adoption agencies are essential for youth permanence success. These work group recommendations focus on how to improve permanency outcomes between these two groups by intentionally building collaborations.

The work group believes that the child welfare system should expect that, except in rare cases, long-term foster care is not an option and is, instead, a failure of the system.

The group sought ways that partnerships could function more effectively in the service of youth permanence, including legal permanency, which includes reunification, adoption, guardianship, and, where none of those is possible, an adult who makes a non-legal but formal life-long commitment to permanency.

In addition to the above themes, other threads that run through the recommendations include:

- A collaborative approach to change
- A commitment to measurement of results and feedback
- An examination of how funding can support the achievement of youth permanence
- The assumption of a larger role for FFAs and adoption agencies in finding and supporting permanency

The work group developed the following steps for effective collaboration between child welfare and FFAs/adoption agencies on youth permanence.

The structure of collaboration is categorized according to (1) initial, (2) middle, and (3) final steps.

# 1. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROJECT INITIATION

**Create a commitment to youth permanence and to the partnership in both agencies.**

- **Identify key administrators in each agency to commit to youth permanence.**
- **Jointly develop a shared vision specifically for this partnership.**
- **Identify key stakeholders to develop and implement the strategy and plan.**
- **Clarify the hoped-for benefits and identify the extra work required.**
- **Identify what financial, staff, and other resources each partner will provide.**
- **Develop a Memo of Understanding (MOU) between partners.**
- **Identify how to keep data, track savings, and reinvest savings into permanency programs.**

## Examples to support recommendations for project initiation

**Identify key administrators in each agency to commit to achieving youth permanence, including those with authority over determining fiscal resources, such as:**

- Public Child Welfare Board of Directors/Supervisors
- Directors of all public welfare agencies involved, e.g., Mental Health, Child Welfare, and Probation
- Directors of involved FFAs/adoption agencies
- Key fiscal personnel

When an FFA/adoption agency wants to initiate a collaboration and cannot bring all county levels to the table, it can work with those who are available. They will champion the cause to the higher level administrators, gaining eventual buy-in.

**Jointly develop a shared vision specifically for this partnership.**

A vision will include:

- An agreed upon **definition** of youth permanence
- A **belief** in the possibility of achieving youth permanence
- A **commitment** to implement the changes necessary to achieve youth permanence, including challenging one's own and one's agency's assumptions about doing things differently, where appropriate
- A **determination** of how to address fairness and equity issues

### ◆ **Destination Family Youth Permanence Project**

This project is a collaboration between Sierra Adoption Services (SAS); the California Department of Social Services (CDSS); Sacramento, Nevada, and Placer Counties; and EMQ (Eastfield Ming Quong).

To begin the partnership, SAS invited all parties to a training by a youth permanence expert. After the training, Sierra invited a subgroup from that training to plan a project. To do so, participants envisioned what they wanted youth permanence to look like five years from the meeting and what it would take to get there. That vision became a project jointly developed for a federal grant. SAS is the lead agency. The project operates independently in each county, using the same core practices adjusted for regional differences.

**Identify key stakeholders who will develop and implement the strategy and plan.**

Include champions for youth permanence, administrators, supervisors from Independent Living, Mental Health, Probation, social workers, former foster youth, and training staff from each agency. Ensure that the stakeholders are representative of the client/consumer base. Decision-makers with authority must be present at decision-making meetings.

**Identify what financial, staff, and other resources each partner will provide.**

◆ **Kinship Center and Orange County**

Primarily with Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) funds, Kinship Center, Salinas, and Orange County developed an adoption mental health clinic to serve foster children in need of permanence or children in permanent adoptive or relative caretaker families.

◆ **Sacramento County and EMQ**

Sacramento County Department of Health and Human Services and EMQ Children & Family Services, Sacramento collaborated to develop services for Child Protective Services, Mental Health, or Probation children in or at risk of high level group care. To fund this, Sacramento, a Title IV-E and SB 163 county, uses foster care funding to support the child at home. Youth in high level group home care were referred to EMQ, which, as a wraparound provider, was responsible for finding a permanent family connection. Using flexible funding, EMQ developed FFA capacity to support quick movement from group care to foster families trained to foster the relationship between the youth and their family connection. As a participant in the California Wraparound Initiative (California Title IV-E Waiver and SB 163), the Sacramento County/EMQ partnership uses a braided funding stream. The foster care funding is equivalent to the Rate Classification Level (RCL) 13 rate minus any out-of-home placement cost which EMQ pools to flexibly serve the children and families; the partnership also uses public mental health funding for mental health eligible services provided, billed on a per minute basis.

◆ **Casey Family Programs in Alameda County**

Casey Family Programs contributed a social worker for the Alameda County StepUp Project and paid for a contract with the Internet provider.

**Develop a Memo of Understanding (MOU) between partners.**

Participants should define measurements of progress and success and use them in managing the project.

◆ **CCSWW and the State of Washington**

Catholic Community Services of Western Washington (CCSWW) and the State of Washington Divisions of Children and Family Services and Mental Health developed an MOU that included payment of deliverables and timelines for referrals from the state to CCSWW. Outcome data were tracked from the inception, strengthening the likelihood of continued funding and resulting in widespread support for the service.

◆ **Sacramento County**

Sacramento County finalized an MOU with community FFAs with a focus on clarifying everyone's role in service delivery, case planning, and permanency for youth placed out of home.

◆ **Dumisha Jamaa**

Not all MOUs are detailed. The MOU serving the collaboration between Family Builders by Adoption and Alameda County's Dumisha Jamaa Project is broad and thereby provides an opportunity for ongoing discussion and clarification.

**Identify how to keep data, track savings, and reinvest savings into permanency programs.**

- Use performance-based contracting. Under such contracts, public agencies are responsible for securing child permanence, while private partner agencies have a financial incentive to quickly find resource families. Michigan's Adoption Contract Management program has helped children leave foster care for adoption at about twice the rate of many other states. The best contracting programs: (1) pay higher fees for permanence achieved soon after termination of parental rights (TPR) and for permanence for more difficult-to-place youth; (2) encourage collaboration among agencies; and (3) include accountability and evaluation by the public agency (Fall 2005 *Adoptalk*, North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC)).

- Develop a written reinvestment strategy. In writing the federal grant for Destination Family, partner counties included the following language: “. . . partner county child welfare agencies intend to request permission (of their boards) to reinvest savings resulting from reduced foster care caseloads to allow the continuation of the project.” The grant was awarded and now partner agencies will advocate with their boards to achieve authorization to reinvest savings by the end of the grant.

◆ **Intensive Relative Search Project**

This project, a partnership among Sacramento County, EMQ, River Oaks Center for Children, Stanford Home, and the Sacramento Children’s Home, trained staff from all partner agencies. The training was sponsored by Sacramento County and paid for by EMQ through a negotiated reinvestment of achieved savings from pooled funding in the region after the close of the prior fiscal year.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

**Design the project jointly and formally according to best youth permanence practice.**

- **Form a youth permanence team.**
- **Review what strengths the public and private agencies each bring. Review the previous history between the two agencies.**
- **Assure that each agency understands the other’s role, responsibilities, etc.**
- **Jointly create best practice in which youth are central to finding their own permanency.**
- **Hire staff who are champions for youth permanence.**
- **Co-locate partnership staff.**
- **Reduce role duplication.**
- **Jointly determine funding sources and payment processes.**
- **Implement a tracking system to identify the target population of youth who need permanency.**
- **Develop written accountability guidelines.**
- **Implement training according to best training practices.**
- **Include evaluation in the project design.**
- **Assure that project meetings are efficient and effective.**
- **Hold joint learning sessions for project staff to share cases and address problems.**
- **Reaffirm publicly the commitment of both agencies at all levels.**
- **Develop incentives for agencies and individuals that reward achieving permanency for youth.**

### Examples to support recommendations for project implementation

**Form a youth permanence team.**

- The team should include: (1) staff from each agency with collaboration skills and content expertise, training staff, and evaluators; (2) current or former foster youth, some of whom have achieved permanency, kin, and foster families; and (3) public health nurses, schools, substance abuse programs, Mental Health, and First Five. Involve the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) to focus on support for families. The team should be representative of the diverse clients served and include former foster youth. Decision-makers with authority must be present at decision-making meetings.
- Determine what issues the group will tackle. Examples might be open adoption policies for youth; policies that prevent professional staff from making a permanent commitment to a youth; procedures for selecting a placement in an after-hours emergency; and developing all foster family homes as safe placements for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth.

◆ **Destination Family**

When Destination Family received its grant, the project team created several teams, including a steering committee of CDSS and Sacramento County senior managers and an operations committee composed of line supervisors and direct care staff. The operations committee meets every other week and reports to the steering committee; the steering committee removes barriers and communicates back to operations, which then carries out the work. Every two weeks both groups met. Two and a half years later, both teams are still meeting.

**Review what strengths the public and private agencies each bring. Review the previous history between the two agencies.**

- Review together what has not worked in the past to identify barriers to collaboration. County staff may say, “Our staff think that you [the FFA/adoption agency] interfere and don’t understand the public child welfare mandate,” or “we gave you a contract a few years ago and you didn’t deliver.” The FFA/adoption agency may say, “You [the county] don’t respect our expertise, you don’t return our phone calls, you earn more money than we do, or you didn’t pay us on time for the services we delivered.” Self-reflect on what in one’s own organization keeps it from partnering effectively. Once the problems are identified, each organization considers how it will take steps to rectify its own problems.
- Partnership meeting facilitators can review successful partnership models.

◆ **Adopt Cuyahoga’s Kids (Cuyahoga County, Ohio)**

This program included a permanency champion mentor role for youth at high risk of aging out. Someone to whom the child is connected becomes a mentor and also gets involved in case conferences, planning for the future, and recruiting an adoptive family. To find mentors, partnerships with Big Brothers, Big Sisters, One Church One Child, and adoption agencies were established.

**Assure that each agency understands the other’s role, responsibilities, chain of command, accountability, expectations, constraints and regulations, and interaction with other systems.**

Provide a concrete task as a tool for understanding the other’s role, such as examining how FFAs and child welfare services could join in matching a child for adoption.

◆ **Dumisha Jamaa Project**

The Dumisha Jamaa Project (Family Builders by Adoption and Alameda County) wrote down the roles of each agency’s social workers. Primary social work is the county social worker’s job and the FFA social worker concentrates on permanency. For example, if the FFA social worker saw a youth prostituting who is living with a grandmother in senior housing, the FFA staff would alert the county social worker but would not become involved, keeping his or her focus on permanency.

◆ **EMQ and Sacramento County**

Sacramento County Child Protective Services (CPS) agreed to make the child’s file available for EMQ to review within twenty-four hours of referral or the next business day. Sacramento CPS and EMQ share responsibility for the case to the greatest extent possible given regulatory requirements. EMQ is responsible for creating a safety and service plan that integrates the wrap, CPS, and any other treatment plan with the signatures of all parties. The plan includes specific responsibilities and time frames.

◆ **CCSWW and the State of Washington**

Clear directives are important. From the start of the CCSWW/Washington State partnership, Region V Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Pierce County Mental Health sent a message to all stakeholders: “Our current approach with youth in crisis is not as effective as we need it to be, so we are trying something new. The [Family Assessment and Stabilization Team] FAST team and the family will have the responsibility and authority over intervention decisions and will involve others through family team meetings.”



Included in the message to stakeholders was information pertaining to what could be expected during a FAST intervention, as well as intended outcomes. Roles for various professional participants were initially defined and then refined as the approach evolved. In the first year, state administrative involvement was needed to facilitate FAST staff's immediate access to information. The Regional Administrator (DCFS) resolved the issue by directing her staff to make the full case record available for FAST staff within twenty-four hours of the referral or the next business day.

### **Hire staff who are champions for youth permanence and who are good at interfacing.**

Handpick early innovators. Pick staff who are comfortable taking risks and support their early success.

#### ◆ **Adopt Cuyahoga's Kids**

Adopt Cuyahoga's Kids hired Adoption Navigators, experienced adoptive parents who help parents navigate the system and help identify barriers with a special emphasis on teens. Adoption Navigators have a set place and time they spend at the county site. They help social workers whenever possible and, as a result of this relationship building, social workers have come to see the navigators as a valuable aid.

Hire the most charming person you can to interface on the project. Adopt Cuyahoga's Kids hired a well-regarded county administrator to work in the county, which helped ease issues of territoriality. Even so, much relationship building was required.

### **Co-locate partnership staff.**

#### ◆ **Los Angeles County**

In Los Angeles County, staff from the Permanency Partners Program (P3) were co-located in the county offices, thus providing easy access for social workers and greater knowledge of each other's roles for both parties.

#### ◆ **You Gotta Believe!**

You Gotta Believe! (YGB), an adoption agency in New York City, collaborated with NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and fourteen NYC group treatment centers. YGB outstations three Family Permanency Advocates and two Teen Permanence Advocates in treatment centers to meet with youth and follow up leads for permanency. Because the staff are located at the facilities, youth can talk to the advocates about connections on site when youth are in the right mood.

#### ◆ **Dumisha Jamaa**

At the beginning of the Dumisha Jamaa Project, Family Builders had access only to reading Alameda County files. As the county grew accustomed to Family Builders, space became available for co-location. As the county became increasingly comfortable, it gave Family Builders access to reading the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). To help build the relationship, Family Builders supports county staff in any way they can, for example, by providing transportation.

#### ◆ **Destination Family**

In the Destination Family project, Placer County believed that the work was a shared process and that it was vital for county staff to see what the FFA worker was doing. Therefore, Placer County insisted that the FFA worker spend part of the time on site at the county building.

### **Reduce role duplication.**

Examine whether staff assignments are duplicative. If so, consider restructuring. For example, in counties in which every youth has a social worker and an FFA worker, consider reducing the number to one.

### **Jointly determine funding sources and payment processes.**

Despite many meetings and discussions, sometimes both agencies still lack understanding of each other's funding sources and rules. This is a constant process of educating each other. If payments will be made from the public agency to the private, determine how often and through what channels payments will be made.

◆ **CCSWW and the State of Washington**

A collaboration between CCSWW and the State of Washington Child Welfare and Mental Health agencies in Region VI blended funding sources. Together, all three developed a centralized program using an intergovernmental arrangement where one agency (Child Welfare) contracted with the other (Mental Health). Child Welfare, Mental Health, and CCSWW jointly developed a treatment model based on the total number of youth in placement, the number projected to need mental health services, and the length of time projected for services. Mental Health paid half of the rate for a youth, Child Welfare paid the other half through the contract with Mental Health. The rate structure developed was built as a waiver site based on capitated care. (For a full description of the program, see Mardith J. Louisell, *Model Programs for Youth Permanency*, California Permanency for Youth Project, 2004, available at [www.cpyp.org](http://www.cpyp.org))

◆ **Adopt Cuyahoga's Kids**

Two different payment models exist from which the fourteen participating agencies select one:

- (A) The agency receives \$52,500 for a full-time staff member for salary and overhead. In this case the agency receives 80% at the start and the 20% bonus when they succeed. After a certain goal is met, the agency receives bonuses for each additional youth placed. Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services and four other agencies have chosen this model.
- (B) The agency receives one third of the money at each of the following three points: (1) completion of initial assessment, (2) placement, and (3) finalization. Payments depend on the age of the oldest child in any group of children. If the oldest is a seventeen year old, the agency gets paid at a much higher rate than if it places an eight year old.

**Implement a tracking system to identify the target population of youth who need permanency.**

- Determine how many youth need permanency and where they are placed currently. This can be a difficult part of the collaboration because state and county data systems are not set up to track specific youth permanency issues. In one county/FFA partnership, it was only after five years that CPS was able to produce a complete list of all children in all levels of group care. It took the integration of three different databases and even then, it was difficult to assure accuracy.
- Assure fairness and equity in the target population. Some examples:
  1. When staff perceive African American males as difficult to place, they sometimes exclude them from special youth permanency projects.
  2. Sometimes LGBTQ youths' issues are considered too problematic for permanency.
  3. If Spanish-speaking staff are unavailable, agency staff may not search for relatives and connections for Spanish-speaking youth.
  4. Assure that the project hasn't inadvertently excluded certain groups. For example, one could identify only those in foster homes as eligible for the project but if foster homes were unavailable for certain youths, those youths would have been placed in group homes.

**Jointly determine how youth will be involved in planning their own permanence.**

◆ **EMQ and Sacramento County**

In the wrap collaboration between EMQ and Sacramento, youth are the primary informants in identifying known family and in the completion of a "connectedness diagram" (genogram) that includes fictive kin.

◆ **Adopt Cuyahoga's Kids**

Adopt Cuyahoga's Kids includes a permanency champion mentor role for youth at high risk of aging out. Someone to whom the child is connected becomes a mentor and also gets involved in case conferences, planning for the future, and recruiting an adoptive family. To find mentors, partnerships with Big Brothers, Big Sisters, One Church One Child, and adoption agencies were established.

### **Develop written accountability guidelines.**

Partnerships often fail when members of one agency do not follow through and are not held accountable. Develop a written document to define responsibilities, accountability, and outcomes so both agencies will know when they have achieved the goals. Assure that it is signed by the administrator with authority for the details. Clarify to all participants who is accountable for what and what steps to take if a task isn't being done. Make the reporting system transparent and visible and share results.

#### ◆ **Adopt Cuyahoga's Kids**

Adopt Cuyahoga's Kids' contract with fourteen private adoption agencies and Cuyahoga County states clearly that agencies:

1. Read the record and complete an assessment within the first 90 days of referral.
2. Establish a permanent planning team and hold a team meeting to begin engaging the team members in recruiting for this child.
3. Conform to tight, strict time frames and do data tracking and reporting on a monthly and quarterly basis.

Results are shared and payments are contingent upon work quality.

### **Implement training according to best training practices.**

1. Use a collaborative process to plan training, e.g., jointly assess training needs and jointly plan training.
2. Use public and private trainers to co-train. This will create a cadre of champions who will learn how to work together as they plan the training. That unity will provide a partnership role model to trainees.
3. Include current or former foster youth as trainers.
4. Provide training on how to participate in a partnership, making it specific to youth permanence. Such partnership training would include funding, role clarification, how to determine who has authority for what, and working across disciplines.
5. Train all levels of personnel: administrators, supervisors, staff, support staff, evaluators, quality assurance, etc., each in the appropriate format. Incorporate case studies illustrating how to participate in partnerships.
6. Do "On the Job Training" (OJT). Trade workers for short periods: have a public social worker do private work, and vice versa. In ride-alongs, public and FFA/adoption staff learn what the other does and develop the personal relationship critical to partnership success.
7. Provide cross-training, have leaders attend, and mandate as appropriate.
8. Locate training at different sites, sometimes at the FFA/adoption agency, other times at the county, and sometimes in an external stakeholder's site, such as a courtroom or Mental Health office.
9. Invite partners that may contribute fiscal resources to training, e.g., HUD, TANE, and Transitional Housing (TH).
10. Clarify what the added value of the collaboration is to each partner.

#### ◆ **Dumisha Jamaa**

In the Dumisha Jamaa project, county staff brought the FFA a five-page glossary of abbreviations that the county uses, a resource that has been invaluable.

#### ◆ **CCSWW and the State of Washington**

A few early misunderstandings arose between the State of Washington DCFS and CCSWW around court order content and dependency court strategies. CCSWW staff did not always receive court orders from DCFS social workers in a timely manner and at times didn't understand the orders, creating difficulties for DCFS social workers in court. CCSWW didn't always maintain frequent communication with DCFS. Both the court order issue and the communication issue were resolved through additional training.

#### ◆ **California Alliance of Child and Family Services**

This organization has training standards for FFA/adoption agencies.

**Include evaluation in the project design.**

Jointly determine what will be evaluated and how, including fiscal costs, staff time, and other resources.

**Assure that project meetings are efficient and effective.**

- **Co-facilitation:** Assign staff from each partnership agency to co-facilitate, using facilitators who are skilled in both action steps and process. Address process issues such as trust, which is a reflection of how well each partner understands the other's culture.
- **Attendance:** Limit the number of persons who must meet on the same issue. The more who must attend, the less likely they will all be present and the less likely consensus will be achieved.
- **Content:** Use regular joint meetings to examine successes, challenges, and data.

**◆ Destination Family**

Destination Family developed a protocol to guide respectful partnerships, which included Concepts Key to Success, Developing the Collaboration, Belief Systems Work, Service Delivery Components, Marketing, and Addressing Broader System Barriers.

**◆ Dumisha Jamaa**

The Dumisha Jamaa project team, which consists of an evaluator, project coordinator, county program manager, county supervisors, and the FFA director, meets monthly. The practice team meets weekly and FFA staff attend county unit meetings, which keeps them in the loop and provides FFA staff with additional knowledge of county work.

**Hold joint learning sessions for project staff to share cases and address problems.****◆ Adopt Cuyahoga's Kids**

Adopt Cuyahoga's Kids created a learning community where project staff attend a monthly meeting to problem solve cases and share successes. At these meetings, for the first time, private agencies are sharing families with each other and many youth get placed.

**Reaffirm publicly the commitment of both agencies at all levels.**

- Develop concrete signposts to show that leadership is fully committed to permanency for youth, including director's letters, media announcements, project updates, policy directives, and project logos.
- Maintain a visible tracking system; for instance, store data on the computer with access to all project participants. Or, use a visual record, such as a tree to which are added different colored leaves for each type of connection found.
- Speak about the youth permanence project at unit, regional, agency-wide, and community meetings. Regularly inform and update provider associations such as the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA).
- Publicize results. Use the media, as well as youth voices and social workers from both agencies, to speak.
- Formally integrate youth permanence into current partnerships such as Family to Family.

**Develop incentives for agencies and individuals that reward achieving permanency for youth.**

- Develop performance-based contracting.
- Develop incentives for FFA/adoption agencies to achieve youth permanence.
- Develop incentives for the staff in each agency to achieve youth permanence.

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROJECT CLOSURE

#### **Create a plan for sustainability.**

- **Institutionalize partnerships.**
- **Publicize and celebrate results.**
- **Complete succession planning.**

#### **Examples to support recommendations for project closure**

##### **Institutionalize partnerships.**

Examine what worked, what didn't, and what, if any, issue the partnership should continue to address. Provide a brief list of steps that members should keep in mind to institutionalize the partnership.

##### **Publicize and celebrate results.**

- Include updates and results at provider associations.
- Give credit to all who participated, regardless of how much one partner did in comparison with the other. Top leaders in both agencies should have a role in the celebration.
- One private agency provided regular occasions for celebration and appreciation of county support, at which the private agency talked about successes and gave kudos to the county and county staff. Use families to tell their stories to administrators and staff.

##### **Complete succession planning.**

A project is only as good as its succession planning. Give champions the opportunity to move on.

## CONTACT INFORMATION FOR EXAMPLES TO SUPPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

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## **California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP)**

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### **Project Vision**

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

### **Project Objectives**

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

### **Project Activities**

- The California Permanency for Youth Task Force
- Technical and practice assistance to fourteen California counties
- Emancipated Youth Connections Project (EYCP)
- Training
- Website: the project website is [www.cypyp.org](http://www.cypyp.org)

