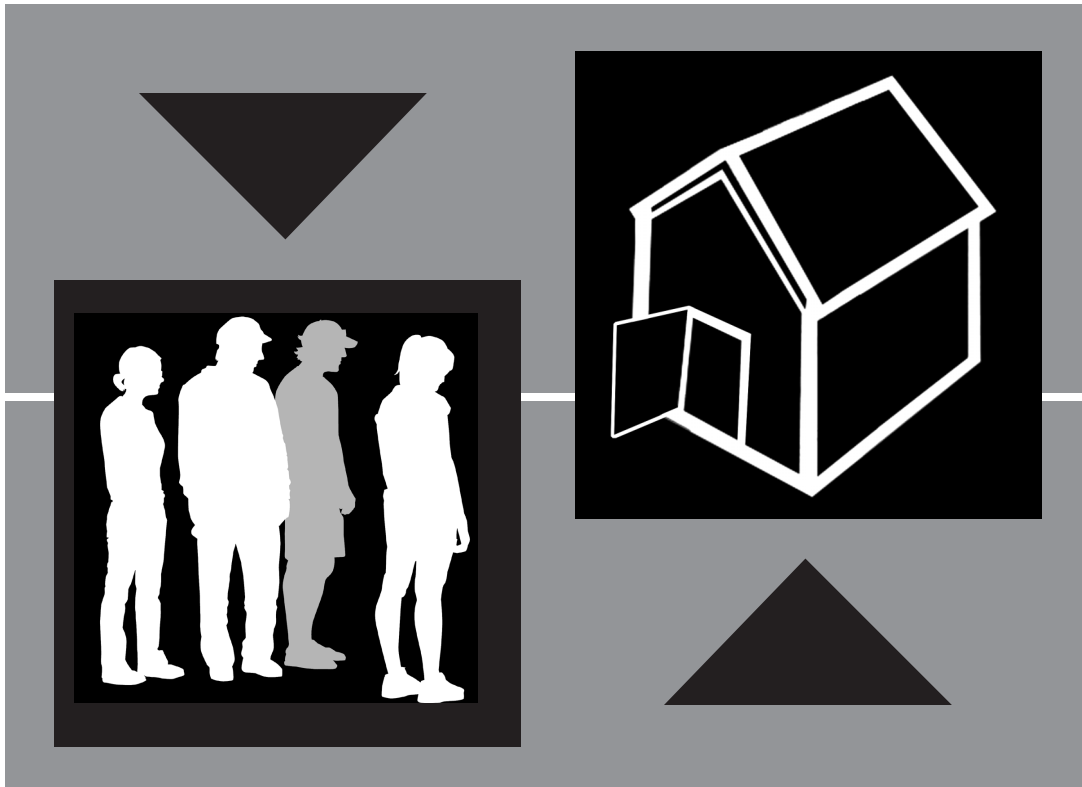


**RECOMMENDATIONS  
FOR EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS  
ON YOUTH PERMANENCE**



**BETWEEN GROUP HOMES  
AND CHILD WELFARE**



**Group Homes and  
Child Welfare Partnership Work Group  
California Permanency for Youth Project**

**Prepared by Mardith J. Louisell**

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This work group articulated recommendations for a partnership between child welfare and group homes to achieve permanency for all youth, including legal permanency. Legal permanency 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.

Threads that run through the recommendations include:

- A collaborative approach to change
- A commitment to measurement of results and feedback
- Assumption of a larger role for group homes in assuring permanency
- Examination of pre-existing child welfare and group home practice, including attitudes to reunification with families that may be detrimental to permanence

The work group developed the following eight recommendations for establishing and supporting permanency for all children and youth. The recommendations focus on actions that group homes, child welfare, and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) can take to improve outcomes in youth permanency.

## **RECOMMENDATION 1**

**Create youth permanence values and attitudes in group homes and child welfare agencies.**

### **Action Steps for Child Welfare and Group Homes**

#### **Vision**

- Develop a vision statement emphasizing youth permanency. Involve all stakeholders, especially youth, in the process of developing and implementing the vision.
- Educate child welfare and group home leadership on youth permanency philosophy by demonstrating that youth permanency is doable:
  - Provide access to youth voices through in-person presentations by youth, digital stories, movies, and books.
  - Use concrete data and cost analysis to show that other institutions have succeeded.
  - Use county statistics on the negative results of youth emancipation from foster care to convey urgency.

### **Examples to Support Recommendation 1**

#### **Vision**

- In 2004, Five Acres, a multipurpose agency, established a vision that “within 2 years, we will have a permanent and involved family member for all children we serve.”

#### **County Expectations**

- Alameda County’s StepUp Project used technical assistance provided by the California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) to train county social workers on finding permanency for youth in group homes. In the case of one youth, group home staff didn’t want to reunify her because of lack of improvement in her behavior and because she would have to change schools. The project insisted on reunification and the youth is now with her father.

#### **Staff**

- If group home personnel believe that permanency is important and doable, their attitudes, beliefs and values are transmitted to youth as well as to other stakeholders. Staff then feel comfortable about raising the subject of permanence with youth, families and other stakeholders, such as therapists and probation officers.

#### **Youth Involvement**

- Five Acres supports a speakers’ team of group home youth who address its board, administrators, foster parents, and staff and who also train outside the agency at high schools and social work schools. The speakers are employed by Five Acres.
- Youth Advisory Committees: Stanislaus County created a youth advisory panel that makes recommendations to child welfare on youth permanence and other issues. Stanislaus County found: (1) youth groups have better representation if caregivers support the youth’s participation; (2) to get input on a specific issue, provide youth with an outline of the ideas and issues to which they can respond; and (3) follow up with a discussion with youth about which ideas the county has integrated into the plan and why others could not be integrated.

## RECOMMENDATION 2

### **Improve child welfare's and group homes' joint ownership of youth permanency outcomes.**

Without ownership by both county and group homes, barriers will remain.

#### **Action Steps for Child Welfare and Group Homes**

##### **Memos of Understanding (MOU)**

- Jointly develop a binding agreement of intent that holds group homes, county child welfare agencies, and other identified agencies to a partnership focused on achieving youth permanency:
  - Measure baseline statistics, set objectives and timelines, and measure outcomes.
  - Establish mutual expectations and outcomes for all administrative and staff levels in group homes and child welfare. Set practical case standards (how time is spent, what services are provided, etc.) and hold staff accountable for these standards. For example, *who* (county or group home staff) is going to do *what* (case mining) for youth permanency *when*?
- Jointly develop a plan for funding the financial resources necessary to accomplish youth permanence work in group homes and child welfare, including advocating for additional resources for group homes to do family finding, assessment, and engaging of families.
- Discuss resource sharing on youth permanence and develop a concrete plan as to how this will happen. In a county contract with a group home, for instance, the county could state that the budget for training on youth permanence will be shared among all providers.
- Use performance-based contracting with vendors to provide incentives for permanence.

##### **Conflict Resolution**

- Identify resources and processes to establish trust, resolve conflict, and minimize operational barriers.
  - Routinely refer to the developed MOU (see above).
  - Schedule regular meetings to discuss progress and challenges. Decide which levels of staff must be present at such meetings to quickly resolve conflict and delays.
  - Provide a clear chain of command to address barriers so staff know to whom a problem should be referred.
  - Use group decision-making models to develop consensus on plans for permanence.

##### **Practice**

- Jointly target a particular youth population, such as youth who move frequently, and determine together how to address permanency with these youth.
- Jointly plan for the permanence and the unique placement and safety needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth.

#### **Action Steps for State, Counties, and Provider Organizations**

- Share technical assistance and resources, including Title IV-E training, to support group homes in improving their youth permanency outcomes.
- Enlist outside stakeholders, such as the Juvenile Justice Commission Subcommittee on Group Homes, to include youth permanence in their criteria when examining providers.

## Examples to Support Recommendation 2

### **Bring group homes on board**

- When a county changes its placement philosophy, it is crucial to discuss the departmental direction with group home providers to help staff understand the change in attitudes and practices. Cottage supervisors and managers are key because they influence and create program design (from Alameda County StepUp Project).

### **Allow staff as a permanent connection**

- Previously, staff at Five Acres had not been allowed to have a special relationship with a youth; now if a staff member is interested in foster/adopting a youth, there is a process to follow.
- In Alameda County, a group home staff member who wanted to provide permanence to a resident eventually became licensed by a neighboring county and the young woman has since joined the staff member's family.

### **Partnering:**

#### **Key principles**

- “The key to successful partnering is for the county to provide an atmosphere where the group home agencies feel safe.” (Alameda County Program Manager) Alameda County created an atmosphere in which county social workers asked group home staff what the county could do to help them support the youth. What services did the group home need?

#### **Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)**

- Los Angeles County and Five Acres worked to remove the red tape in an ICPC contract, which allowed one youth to leave group care for permanency with a relative in Florida.

#### **Funding**

- Five Acres does permanency work by interviewing the children, mining the files and investigating resource persons to become permanent persons/placements for children, reaching out to them, traveling cross-country as needed, and engaging them in the child's treatment. But Five Acres has many resources including private foundation grants and can afford this additional staff time, training, etc. Many group homes do not have these resources and additional funding would be needed for them to do the same work.

## **RECOMMENDATION 3**

**Develop concrete signposts to show that group home and child welfare leadership are fully committed to permanency for youth.**

### Action Steps for Child Welfare and Group Homes

#### **Organizational Change**

- Integrate youth permanence into each organization's strategic plan, program design, internal accountability, and budgeting process.

#### **Resources**

- Develop *clinical expertise* in youth permanence. Develop a roster of clinical experts, including mental health practitioners, to work effectively with youth and their connections to build and sustain permanency.
- Identify and secure resources needed to support best staff practices on youth permanence. Support staff may be needed for fee-based Internet searching.

#### **Youth Involvement**

- Institute a process of youth evaluation of group homes that includes permanency-related issues. (See text box on page 14.)

### **Action Steps for Child Welfare**

- Mandate inclusion of permanence in Team Decision Making (TDM) and other family group meetings.
- Fully include group home staff in development of the permanency plan. Develop partnerships with group home staff, attorneys, and Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) volunteers to plan and carry out the permanency plan.
- Include youth permanence in orientation and core training of staff. Expect transfer of learning follow-up from supervisors.

### **Action Steps for Group Homes**

- Develop a process and procedure for keeping track *in hard copy* of persons who are important to a youth.
- Include permanency in orientation training for group home staff. Expect transfer of learning follow-up from supervisors.
- Expand house rules to support youth permanence; for example, don't prohibit visits with connections as a consequence of a youth's bad behavior.
- Develop practice that insures that an appropriate permanent family and community-based care support will be available for each youth upon discharge.

### **Examples to Support Recommendation 3**

#### **Administrators**

- Providing data helps get management on board. Alameda County's StepUp Project tracked all connections and provided periodic progress reports to senior management. They also tracked costs, savings, and projected net savings and showed that projected long-term savings far outweighed short-term costs.

#### **Fiscal Data**

- Project Uplift, State of Colorado (see Mardith J. Louisell, *Model Programs for Youth Permanency*, California Permanency for Youth Project, 2004) provides hard data on success, time required, and cost savings, as did Alameda County's StepUp Project (see above bullet).

#### **Strategic Plan**

- What is measured gets attention. According to a scale that Five Acres developed, a low percentage of its children have a realistic permanency plan for discharge within twelve months of entry. The agency set an outcome objective to raise the percentage to 50 percent by October 2006. This has been incorporated into the strategic plan, is reviewed three times a year by the research department, and reported to the board. (To obtain the scale, contact Five Acres, see below.)

#### **Program Design**

- The "Get a Life" Program at Five Acres provides youth with increased access to normal everyday activities outside the group home – prom, after school, church, athletics. The expectation is that youth will "get a life" outside of the group home.

#### **Shared Resources**

- The Intensive Relative Search Project, a private-public partnership among Sacramento County, EMQ, River Oaks Center for Children, Stanford Home, and the Sacramento Children's Home, searches intensively for extended family or friends for youth. The training for staff from all partner agencies was sponsored by Sacramento County and paid from a negotiated reinvestment of achieved savings from pooled funding in the region (after the close of the prior fiscal year).

#### **Publicize**

- The StepUp Project moved six returning child welfare workers to review youth who were ready to "step up and out of group home care" to permanence. When group home providers heard about the project, attendance at Alameda's regular group home provider meeting rose from thirty-five providers to sixty.



## Expectations

- Create expectations for permanent, not temporary, homes. Alameda County made a concerted effort to move youth out of congregate care to family settings. The county met several times with group home providers to discuss permanency efforts and to outline expectations for how group homes will work with Alameda to meet these goals. As a policy stance, Alameda put a hold on providing support letters for opening new group homes, the only exception being if a provider can meet a specialized unmet need, such as serving minors engaged in prostitution or LGBTQ populations. Partially in response to these permanency efforts, there is a decreased need for lower level group home placements and a number of these have closed in Alameda County in the past few years.

## Staff and Job Descriptions

- Harlem Dowling's Adoption Options for Teens, New York City, has an adoption mentoring program in which the mentors are all adult adoptees.
- The task of helping children develop and maintain permanent connections was added to the primary duties of the rehabilitation specialist's job description at Five Acres.

## RECOMMENDATION 4

### **Engage youth and their families and connections, including paternal relatives, in working to achieve permanency outcomes.**

When possible, reunification is always preferable. Solicit and consider the families' opinions. Of particular concern is the historical lack of attention paid to paternal relatives. Youth frequently know with whom they want a permanent connection, but are rarely asked because the youth is not considered ready for permanency or because it is assumed the youth's preference would be unacceptable.

### **Action Steps for Child Welfare and Group Homes**

#### **Practice**

- Hold a permanency team meeting prior to, or immediately after, group home admission and thereafter quarterly. Include the youth, family, group home and county staff, potential connections, and other parties.
  - Make the meetings youth-centered and prepare the youth for each meeting. Consult the youth to identify potential permanent connections.
  - Provide youth- and family-friendly scheduling.
  - Employ parents as partners and advocates in the process of finding permanent connections.
  - Find not one but several possible permanent connections for a youth.
- Prepare youth for the idea of permanency and family, tailoring the discussion to each youth, some of whom may want to be in their group home and feel resistance to being in a family home.  
*(See text box on page 14.)*

#### **Resources**

- Invest resources in, and identify partners to contribute funding for, family-finding, including online search capabilities and funds for youth to travel to potential connections or vice versa.

## **Examples to Support Recommendation 4**

### **Reunification**

- Through a heavy emphasis on permanency versus congregate bed care, Marion County (Indianapolis, Indiana) significantly reduced the number of children in group homes. Staff hired by the court traveled around the state speaking with youth, case workers, and group home staff about group homes. Information they gained led to the Intensive Family Reunification program (IFR), which serves child welfare and probation cases and is dedicated to removing the barriers preventing youth from returning home. Contracted private agencies provide the services for IFR, which is part of a joint project between child welfare and the juvenile court. In 2006, the project was expanded to each of the state's eighteen regions.

### **Formal Commitment to Remain Connected**

- The *Intention to Maintain Contact Form* can be used to formalize how often and in what way each connection will maintain contact with the youth.

### **Youth Involvement**

- Regarding teams: Massachusetts Families for Kids helped a youth create a team for himself to help the youth write a permanence plan and monitor progress.
- On involving youth: "Because TDMs (Team Decision-Making meetings) can be intimidating to youth, time must be taken to bring the youth on board and help them understand the process and players." (Youth spokesperson)

### **Family Involvement**

- Treatment: Four Oaks Regional Treatment Center in Iowa uses a family-centered model to reduce the length of stay for youth in high level care. This includes open visits for family, involvement of parents in on-unit activities, family events at the treatment center, and a consumer involvement group to design policies and procedures in a family-focused way.
- Graham Windham's Project Impact, New York City, includes families in the initial intake. Project staff make a home visit within three days of the initial intake and immediately discuss the youth's potential discharge to family. Family members are integral to planning and decision-making and are invited to the facility to create the discharge service plan, which addresses service needs of youth and parents. To be effective, the project requires wraparound services, caseloads smaller than twenty, and therapists who will visit the home.

### **Programming**

- To meet an outcome goal of increased family involvement, Five Acres: (1) hired a parent who has had a child involved in the system as a Parent Support Liaison; (2) started a parent support group; and (3) invited a parent panel to give feedback at its strategic planning retreat.

## **RECOMMENDATION 5**

### **Identify actions and resources to sustain permanency outcomes for youth and to support their transition to adulthood.**

Without post-permanency support, the roller coaster of normal adolescent behavior makes permanence difficult to maintain. Also, grief and loss issues may surface once the youth has a secure setting and feels safe enough to process them.

## **Action Steps for Child Welfare and Group Homes**

### **Post-Permanence Support**

- Advocate for resources to ensure post-permanency services to youth and their connections. Create effective post-permanency services as indicated by research on what families want.
- Engage community partners, stakeholders, and permanent connections to share responsibility for youth's transition to adulthood, using TDM and family group conferencing formats.
- Partner with mental health agencies.
  - Provide training to therapists on permanency issues.
  - Refer to permanency-friendly therapists.
  - Enable youth to maintain the same therapist after permanence is achieved.

### **Youth Development**

- Provide opportunities for youth in group homes to develop age-appropriate lives, as well as social skills and decision-making skills. (See "Get a Life" program, **Examples to Support Recommendation 3** on page 8.)
- Find venues where youth can meet adults who may serve as connections and make time for youth to spend there with them.
- Partner with schools.

## **Examples to Support Recommendation 5**

### **Contracts with Group Homes**

- Counties can request that a plan for post-permanence services be included in Requests for Proposals (RFPs) from group homes.

### **Continuing Services Post-Discharge Care**

- The California Alliance recommends that each residential based service (RBS) offers or contracts for continuing services to support and maintain post-discharge care arrangements for the youth and family for at least six months after the youth has been discharged.
- Five Acres supports post-permanence through aftercare programs, Therapeutic Behavioral Services (TBS), adoption promotion support, and, as a Medi-Cal provider, provides services as long as the youth is on Medi-Cal. Support is available to post-twenty-one year olds through private dollars. Private funds are tailored to the needs of the individual. In some cases, they are used for living costs in the permanent home; in others, for tuition.

### **Clinical Training on Permanence**

- Adoption Clinical Training (ACT), developed by Kinship Center, Salinas, CA, is an eight-session, intensive curriculum on clinical adoption training for mental health professionals.

### **Funding Aftercare Services**

- Aftercare services for children and youth can be funded through mental health and Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT), a combination of home-based and therapeutic behavioral health services. County EPSDT cost is 5 percent. Moving youth from residential treatment to family can justify TBS for twenty to thirty hours per week for several months if needed. TBS/MH services can continue as long as the case is open and the child is Medi-Cal eligible.

### **Philosophy**

- "Post-permanency services should connect to the child rather than to the arrangement. Thus, post-permanency services are not dependent on the nature of the family arrangement, but rather are the responsibility of child welfare agencies to all children who have entered foster care and exited to the care of families who are committed to them." (Freundlich and Wright, *Post-Permanency Services*, 2003. See also for research on what families want in post-permanency services.) Let program follow need. First discover connections, then identify and develop a plan for services and fiscal needs.

## RECOMMENDATION 6

**Provide training to support the above recommendations.**

### Action Steps for Child Welfare and Group Homes

#### **Training Content**

- Through state, county, and group home training resources, provide training to social and group home workers on how to talk with youth about permanence, how to reassess attitudes to maternal and paternal families, how to make contact with out-of-touch families, how to begin a process that disrupts the status quo for a youth, how to assess youth's safety in a potential connection, and how to address staff fears about disappointing youth if permanence isn't successful.

#### **Youth Involvement**

- Incorporate youth input into developing the training, thus helping staff achieve "Youth Cultural Competence."
- Bring youth and family voices into training, the most effective way to convey that permanency matters.

#### **Cross-Training**

- Institute cross-training between group homes and county staff. Persons learning the same language to talk about a specific practice will establish relationships and partner well.
- Train child welfare and group home staff on how to use TDMs or other group conferencing methods to achieve permanence.

### Action Steps for Child Welfare

- Include group home staff in all Title IV-E and child welfare social worker core training.

### Action Steps for Group Homes

- Invite child welfare staff to group home staff training.

### Examples to Support Recommendation 6

#### **Youth Voices**

- Youth Offering Unique Tangible Help (Y.O.U.T.H.) provides training developed and presented by current and former foster youth. Topics include permanence and how to work with youth on achieving permanence. (Contact: Jamie Lee Evans, Y.O.U.T.H., Bay Area Academy, jle@sfsu.edu).
- Incorporating "Voices of Youth" tapes into Family to Family (F2F) training for all staff including maintenance and clerical was found effective by Five Acres.

#### **Fiscal**

- Through Community College Title IV-E Training, Monterey County hired a foster family agency with knowledge and skill in youth permanence to provide training to group homes.

#### **Training**

- Alameda County contracts with Seneca Children's Center to provide training to group home providers and offers CEUs.
- Joint Training: In a partnership with Los Angeles County, Five Acres funds a permanence expert to train its staff and Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services staff in family finding.
- State child welfare training academies have included permanence in core child welfare training.
- Youth Permanence Curriculum: The Bay Area Academy and CPYP have developed a one-day youth permanence training that is available to all academies and counties.
- Format - use visual and text aids in training: (1) films: *Antwoine Fisher*, *White Oleander*; (2) digital stories; (3) books; and (4) posters.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CDSS

### RECOMMENDATION 7

**CDSS, as the licensing arm for group homes, must take responsibility for achieving youth permanency in its training, regulations, and monitoring of group homes in California counties.**

#### **Performance-Based Contracting**

- Recommend that counties use performance-based contracting with group homes. Establish for county use best practice expectations and outcomes for group homes relative to youth permanency.

#### **Training**

- Integrate permanency into the curriculum provided by Community Care Licensing (CCL), CDSS. Ensure proper training of group homes and child welfare agency staff on youth permanency, including CA AB 408.

#### **Youth Engagement**

- Provide and enforce guidelines for what constitutes youth engagement in the process of achieving youth permanence.

#### **Evaluation**

- Community Care Licensing must expand the youth evaluation process to all group homes in the state.

#### **Partnerships**

- Take the lead in developing a partnership with mental health and juvenile probation on permanency and post-permanency support.

#### **Funding**

- Allocate funds to support family finding techniques and training on family finding and youth permanence.

#### **Advocacy**

- Invite foster youth to help policymakers understand why permanence is critical.

#### **Examples to Support Recommendation 7**

- Invite foster youth to help policymakers understand why permanence is critical. In 1998, Massachusetts Families for Kids' Youth Speak Out Team explained the benefits of family to a State House Committee debating the use of institutional care.

### RECOMMENDATION 8

**CDSS must take a leadership role in assuring increased uniformity of Independent Living Program (ILP) services that support permanency *across all counties*.**

- Publicize and disburse creative and best practices of permanency-related ILP services *among* California counties.

## WAYS TO INVOLVE YOUTH

### **In His or Her Own Permanency**

- After discussing the concept of permanency with a youth, it is important to involve the youth in finding his or her own permanency.
- Examples include asking the youth with whom he or she feels connected; asking the youth what involvement means to him/her; discussing the timing of contacting a potential connection; reviewing the setting in which the youth would feel comfortable meeting the connection, etc.

### **In County and Group Home Advisory Committees**

- Youth groups have better representation if caregivers support the youth's participation.
- To get input on a specific issue, provide youth with an outline of the ideas and issues to which they can respond.
- Follow up with a discussion with youth about which ideas the county has integrated into the plan and why others could not be integrated.
- Consider paying youth an honorarium for work that contributes to agency policy, vision, and mission statements.

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## CONTACT INFORMATION FOR EXAMPLES TO SUPPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

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The California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP), a project of the Public Health Institute, is primarily funded by the Stuart Foundation.

### **Project Vision**

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

### **Project Objectives**

- 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)

