

DECLARATION OF COMMITMENT TO PERMANENT LIFELONG CONNECTIONS FOR FOSTER YOUTH

As members of the Child Welfare community in California, we recognize the crisis that exists for youth in foster care, particularly those between the ages of 11-18, who lack a permanent connection with an adult or family. We hereby declare our commitment to support and achieve permanent lifelong connections (permanency) for all children and youth, and that:

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

Youth in foster care need the same permanent connections to a committed adult or family as youth in the general population; and

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

Many foster youth have no relationships with adults other than the professionals who assist them in foster care and many leave care without a single lasting relationship or connection with any adult; and

Approximately 4,000 foster youth "age out" of the foster care system each year in California when they turn 18 to face daunting odds including high rates of homelessness, school drop-out and unemployment; and

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

Former foster youth repeatedly state that a lifelong connection and a relationship with a supportive and committed adult, related by blood or not, is one of the key factors associated with their resilience and the single greatest impact on their ability to navigate the transition to adulthood; and

We commend the innovative work of many in the child welfare community who are adopting and implementing new practices to secure permanent connections for foster children including involvement of the youth as key participants in the process of defining and securing permanent relationships; and

We acknowledge that public and private child welfare professionals must work in partnership with the youth in defining lifelong connections that are permanent, secure and healthy; and

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fortify our common commitment to the permanence of foster youth as an obligation of the entire child welfare and human community to the children in our foster care system.

Signed by

Signature

Printed Name

Title

Organization

Date