

Reaching Out

CURRENT ISSUES FOR CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

SPRING 2007 PART 1



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"Every child in California will live in a safe, stable, permanent home, nurtured by healthy families and strong communities"

By Susan Brooks, Director, Northern California Training Academy, The Center for Human Services, UC Davis Extension

This is the vision for child welfare in California as articulated by the California Child Welfare Services Stakeholders Group in 2003. This statement reflects a dedication to the principles of stability and permanency regarding children in the child welfare system. But, while this is the vision, the current reality for children in foster care shows us how far we have to go. Thirty-three percent of children in foster care will experience three or more placements in a 12-month period. Twenty-eight percent of children in foster care are in the system for three years or more. Sixty-eight percent of children in foster care have at least one sibling who is also in foster care. An average of 4,000 children in California will turn 18 years old in foster care each year and thus be emancipated. Of these 4,000 young people, 46 percent have not completed high school, half are unemployed and at least one in four will experience homelessness in the subsequent two years.*

For the approximately 86,000 children currently in foster care in California, being placed in out-of-home care because of abuse or neglect very often means losing the connections that literally help them maintain and nurture their identities and development as human beings. These connections are not only to family members, but also to schools, friends, tribes and communities.

This issue of Reaching Out addresses permanency and placement stability for children and youth in the child welfare system. Due to the abundance of critical information to communicate on this topic, we have decided to make this part one of two issues devoted to permanency. Along with statewide data on permanency and placement, there are a number of articles outlining practical strategies to help youth in child welfare find permanent connections and placements. Also included is information from organizations and practitioners who describe programs that work. In addition, this issue coincides with the Northern California Training Academy's annual Research to Practice symposium. The 2007 symposium is titled "Creating Permanency for Foster Youth." If you have the chance both to attend this event and read the articles in this newsletter, you will certainly feel a renewed commitment, the "fire of urgency" as Kevin Campbell calls it**, to help young people make the permanent family and community connections that will sustain them throughout their lives.

**Sources for statistics in this article come from Casey Family Foundation (www.casey.org), CDSS report "Child Welfare System Improvements in California, 2003-2005: Early Implementation of Key Reforms" and "CDSS Facts at a Glance" (2004 figures).*

***Campbell, K. (2005). "Lighting the fire of urgency: Families lost and found in America's child welfare system."*

Rural Counties Defined

The definitions of rural are different depending on who is doing the defining and why. We are using the definition of "rural" used by the nationally-renowned *Amie E. Casey Foundation* in its 2004 publication *City and Rural KIDS COUNT Data Book*. That definition is as follows:

"Rural areas are the sparsely settled areas and the small towns outside metropolitan areas. Like the previous definition, it is county-based: an entire county is either inside or outside a metropolitan area. A metropolitan area has an urban core of at least 50,000 residents... Any county that is not inside a metropolitan area can be referred to as non-metropolitan. All non-metropolitan counties are included as rural."



TERMINOLOGY 101:

Permanency

Permanency: The result of finding children in foster care permanent homes either through reunification, guardianship or adoption. The concept of permanency addresses the principle that every child, including those in the child welfare system, should have a life-time connection with a community of caring adults.

Placement stability: Two or fewer out-of-home placements for children in the child welfare system.

Permanency planning: the process of working with a youth in out-of-home care, his/her family and any other caring adults in the youth's life to maintain, find, establish and nurture permanent, lifelong connections including a home, family, school and community.

Out-of-home care: If the threat of abuse and neglect makes it impossible for children to remain safely with their families, out-of-home care must be used. The most common types of out-of-home care are family foster care, kinship care, therapeutic (or treatment) foster care and residential group care.

Team Decision Making (TDM): A process that is based on the belief that a child's well being is best served when the family, community and child welfare agency collaborate to make decisions about the child's placement.

Family participation in case planning: A case planning process that actively engages families in defining their strengths and identifying resources that will address the problems that resulted in the disruption of their family.

Youth inclusion in case planning: A case planning process in which social workers involve youth in addressing issues related to permanency and transition to adulthood at each interaction with them focusing on establishing reunification, adoption, guardianship or other permanent lifelong connections with a trusted, caring adult.

Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting

System (AFCARS): This computer-based system collects case-level information on all children in foster care for whom State child welfare agencies have responsibility for placement, care or supervision, and on children who are adopted under the auspices of the State's public child welfare agency.

Kinship care: Kinship care is the full-time care, nurturing, and protection of children by relatives, members of a child's tribe or clan, godparents, stepparents or any adult who has a kinship bond with a child.

Information from the Population Reference Bureau, Washington D.C., is based on 2000 U.S. Census data



Transitional Housing Placement Program (THPP): The THPP is a community-care, licensed placement opportunity for youth in foster care. The goal of THPP is to help participants emancipate successfully by providing a safe environment for youth to practice the skills learned in ILP. Participants may live alone (with departmental approval) or with roommates in apartments or single-family dwellings with regular support and supervision provided by THPP agency staff, county social workers and ILP coordinators.

Life skills: Life skills typically include both hard and soft skills that support a youth's ability to develop emotionally into an adult. Hard skill areas include meeting transportation needs, maintaining one's home, knowing legal rights and responsibilities, being aware of community resources, managing money and identifying healthcare needs. Soft skills include making decisions, solving problems, communicating effectively, developing meaningful relationships with others, developing a sense of one's self and cultural awareness.

Transition services: In the child welfare arena, transition is generally understood to be the time that a youth enters young adulthood. Transition services represent the array of services available to a youth or young adult who is aging out of the foster care system and moving toward adulthood.

Independent Living Program (ILP): These are programs that provide education and services for foster youth 16 years of age and older, based on an assessment of needs and designed to help youth transition successfully from foster care to living independently. ILP services include, but are not limited to, education, vocational training and work readiness, assistance to promote health and safety skills, referrals to available mentors and mentoring programs, daily living skills, financial resources, and housing information. "Independent living" is the term linked to federal funding for programs serving youth leaving care.

The definitions above come from the glossaries of various California Department of Social Services reports, as well as the Child Welfare League of America, Glossary of Terms (www.cwla.org).

A Model for Preparing Children for Permanency*

A new model presents an easy-to-remember method for preparing children in temporary out-of-home care for their transition to permanency of any type (reunification, kinship care, adoption or permanent legal guardianship). The "3-5-7 model" involves the exploration of three tasks and five questions, using seven critical skills by the child welfare worker. This method provides tools and language to help child welfare professionals and foster parents assess children's readiness for permanency and to help the children reconcile their past losses.

The completion of three tasks by the child is designed to show where the child is in the resolution process. The tasks are as follows:

- Clarification of what has happened
- Integration of events, especially family membership
- Actualization (self-understanding)

The completion of these tasks is aided by answering five questions:

- Who am I? (question related to identity)
- What happened to me? (question related to loss)
- Where am I going? (question related to attachment)
- How will I get there? (question related to relationships)
- When will I know I belong? (question related to claiming and safety)

The worker makes use of seven critical skills in preparing the child:

- Engaging the child
- Listening to the child
- Telling the truth
- Validating the child's life story
- Creating a safe space for the child
- Realizing that it is never too late to go back in time
- Embracing pain as part of the process

*The author, Darla L. Henry, stresses the importance of life books as a critical tool in this process. The life book assists the child, worker and families as they complete the tasks of clarification, integration and self-actualization. As different sections of the life book are completed, the worker and family can identify the progress of the child in the preparation process for permanency.

This is an excerpt from an article of the same title published in the February 2005 issue of Children's Bureaus Express, an online publication of the Administration for Children and Families. <http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov>

A Family, A Home, A Community: Permanency for Children in Foster Care



“Permanency would make all the difference in the experience of a youth’s life in the system because it’s stability. It provides a youth with the opportunity to really know what it’s like to be cared for, not just because you’re a foster child, but because you’re a person.” ¹

“I don’t know what I would do if I had to move around every two months or every six months like I hear people doing. I think what made me the person I am today is that I have so much stability in my life. That’s what really helped me get over the fact that I wasn’t with my real mother, being with someone who was there for me and always treated me like her real child.” ²

What is Permanency?

According to the Casey Family Services publication “A Call to Action: An Integrated Approach to Youth Permanency and Preparation for Adulthood”, achieving “permanency” means having an enduring family relationship that is:

- safe and meant to last a lifetime;
- offers the legal rights and social status of full family membership;
- provides for physical, emotional, social, cognitive and spiritual well being; and
- assures lifelong connections to extended family, siblings, other significant adults, family history and traditions, race and ethnic heritage, culture, religion and language. ³

Why permanency?

The quotes from youth above provide eloquent explanation, but in addition, research has shown that children grow up best in nurturing, stable families. These families: a) offer commitment and continuity—they survive life’s challenges intact, b) have legal status—parents have the legal right and responsibility to protect their children’s interests and welfare, and c) have members that share a common future—their fates are intertwined. ⁴

History of Permanency and Child Welfare ⁵

The history of foster care in child welfare in the first half of the 20th century is one of being the caretaker for children who were removed from abusive and neglectful homes. There was virtually no focus on the issues of finding permanent homes and adult connections for youth in foster care. Instead, many foster children spent their childhoods in state custody.

This changed in the 1970s as a result of research showing that spending years in foster care was a predictor for poor adult outcomes such as incarceration and serious mental health problems. The groundbreaking Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 reconceptualized foster care as a temporary service.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997 furthered the aims of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 by strengthening time limits within which children in foster care should be placed with permanent families.

Permanency and California Child Welfare

The commitment to permanency is now a principle around which some of the new reforms to the California child welfare system were designed. The California Department of Social Services has piloted several strategies to help improve permanency efforts in the state and is tracking factors that look at how successful these strategies are.

While the primary focus for child welfare is on permanent connections with caring adults, permanency also encompasses relationships with birth parents and siblings, stability of school placement and maintaining a connection to a child’s community.

The California legislature has passed a number of bills in the last five years addressing the issue of permanency:

- SB 218 in 2005 facilitates adoption by relatives and other caregivers
- SB 169 in 2003 protects sibling relationships in adoption
- AB 490 in 2003 requires that children who are removed from home or who change placements be allowed to remain in their original school
- AB 408 in 2003 requires the court to determine whether the placing agency has made reasonable efforts to maintain relationships with individuals who are important to a child in care who is age 10 years or older and help foster youth preparing for independence maintain relationships with important adults

In the end, Casey Family Services’ report “A Call to Action,” most eloquently articulates the state’s responsibility to provide permanency for children and youth in foster care:

“Regardless of age, race or cultural background, special need or complex circumstances, all youth need and deserve a family to count on for a lifetime, and all youth need and deserve to be adequately prepared to face the adult world. For youth growing up in family foster care or congregate care settings, it is the moral responsibility, ethical obligation and legal mandate of the child welfare system to make sure they have both.” ⁶

1. *California Permanency for Youth Project; “Youth Perspectives on Permanency.” 2004. www.cpyyp.org*

2. *see citation #1*

3. *Casey Family Services publication “A Call to Action: An Integrated Approach to Youth Permanency and Preparation for Adulthood.” April 2005. www.caseyfamilyservices.org/news_index.html*

4. *Excerpt from the Child Welfare Information Gateway Web site “Permanency.” www.childwelfare.gov*

5. *see citation #1*

6. *Casey Family Services publication “A Call to Action: An Integrated Approach to Youth Permanency and Preparation for Adulthood.” April 2005. www.caseyfamilyservices.org/news_index.html*

California Permanency for Youth Project

"One of the biggest obstacles we had to face was struggling to keep our close bond and stay together. There were times I thought I might never see her again. I had to fight the system's recommendations that I should be adopted without my sister...I feel that the foster care system tries, but often fails."

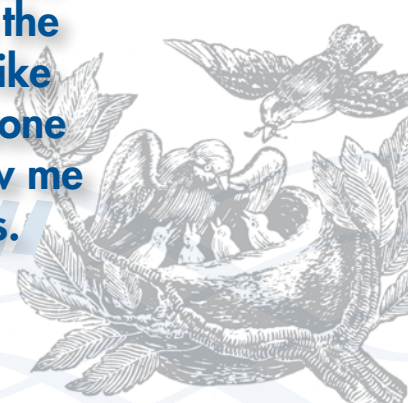
Berisha Black, now an adult, tells her story of growing up in the foster care system in the video "Telling It Like It Is: Foster Youth and Their Struggle for Permanency," created by the California Permanency for Youth Project. Through this organization, Black was able to find a woman she now calls her grandmother, even though Black had already emancipated from the foster system.

"This was the first time I really understood what unconditional love meant, and for the first time I felt like there was someone who actually saw me for who I was," she said. After years of feeling isolated and antagonistic toward the adults in her life, Black was finally able to find a permanent connection.

Every youth leaving the child welfare system in California should have a permanent lasting connection to at least one caring adult. This concept is the guiding principle behind the California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) that seeks to solve problems of homelessness, unemployment and disconnection that often plague former foster children.

The CPYP works with children ages 12 and older who can often have a hard time finding a permanent family through the foster system. About 4,000 of these children "age out" of the system each year in California, and many of them have no relationships with adults who are not professionally required to help them. CPYP asserts that, just as children in the general population need permanent connections to adults or families, these youth have the same right to "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," as stated in CPYP's Declaration of Commitment to Permanent Lifelong Connections for Foster Youth.

This was the first time I really understood what unconditional love meant, and for the first time I felt like there was someone who actually saw me for who I was.



At the county level, CPYP works actively to provide technical assistance in establishing youth permanency practices. The plan for each county includes information on administrative practices, permanency practice, identification of target groups, staff development, partnerships, involvement of youth in finding their own permanency, and integration with other initiatives. CPYP has been working with the northern counties of Humboldt, Sacramento and Sonoma since the spring of 2005, and all three counties have begun to find permanent connections for their identified youth.

The Project also provides a training curriculum, "Preparing Youth for Permanence," developed for California counties and available to all public child welfare agencies and their partners. Social workers interested in the training materials can contact their local Child Welfare Training Academies for information.

For more information, or to order a free copy of the video "Telling It Like It Is," call CPYP at (510) 268-0038, or visit the Web site at cpyp.org. You can also get involved by reviewing and signing the Declaration of Commitment to Permanent Lifelong Connections for Foster Youth, available online at www.cpyp.org/commitment.html.





California Youth Connection

Too often, foster children have little say in their own lives. California Youth Connection (CYC) is working to empower foster youth throughout the state by giving them the tools, experience and confidence they need to advocate for change.

Rather than creating more bureaucracy to speak on behalf of foster youth, CYC recognizes that children who have firsthand experience in the child welfare system are the leading experts in the field and that their voices must be heard. The advocacy organization is made up of current and former foster youth, ages 14 to 24, who control all aspects of CYC's leadership and decision-making processes. Local chapters, organized by county, advocate for foster youth in debates on child welfare policy and seek to educate the surrounding community about issues affecting foster youth.

Executive director Janet Knipe says that CYC adopted permanency as a guiding concept several years ago, and its chapters have been working ever since to educate the community about this concept and to create policy changes to encourage it.

"Permanency does not mean 'adoption' to us," she says. "We want to help people to see a broad definition of permanency, to see it as we see it. That requires a great deal of education, and after that education process, we can begin to look at policy changes."

To educate the community about permanency, CYC foster youth speak with legislators, participate in focus groups and present their views at conferences and workshops.

"We want to engage youth on a local level," says Knipe. "That is how we would like to be involved."

Keeping with the organization's goal of letting the true experts—the youth who have gone through the child welfare system—speak for themselves, CYC members are available to sit in on policy committees or give presentations any time foster care is being discussed.

"We'd love to talk about why permanency is so important to us," concludes Knipe.

To learn more about CYC, visit calyouthconn.org or call (415) 442-5060.

Destination Family: Teen Adoption Program Showcases the Success of Public-Private Collaboration

Ten years ago, it was unusual for a child over the age of eight to be adopted—leaving hundreds of thousands of older youth in the foster care system with little hope of finding a permanent "family" connection.

What began nearly five years ago as the idealistic brain child of Sierra Adoption Services has blossomed into a pioneering program proving that teen adoption is not only possible, but necessary. The California Department of Social Services, Sacramento County Department of Health and Human Services, Nevada County Human Services Agency, Placer County Children's System of Care and EMQ agreed to collaborate with Sierra Adoption Services to form a unique, multi-county, public-private partnership.

Known as "Destination Family," this youth permanence project received federal funding in 2003. The goal of Destination Family is to ensure that no youth from the participating counties ages out of the foster care system without a permanent connection that is legally, emotionally and physically secure. The project focuses on youth ages 11-18 who are placed in out-of-home care and do not have a current plan for adoption. The project works on removing barriers and using best-practice tools to assist youth in finding and maintaining permanent relationships with families.

"Most adoption agencies do not have specific programs for teens," explains Bob Herne, program director for Sierra Adoption Services. "But there is a strong movement occurring to provide permanency for teens with The California Permanency for Youth Project, the California Youth Connection and others spearheading the campaign." Currently, 14 California counties are working in public-private partnerships to develop services for youth permanence.



According to Herne, the more foster homes children live in, the less likely they are to find permanence. The statistics are worse for youth living in group homes. This accounts for most of the youth that Destination Family works with. "Some of the youth that we deal with have been in care since they were infants," Herne says.

Who is adopting teens? Sometimes it's foster parents. Sometimes it's previously important people in the lives of these youth—people who likely didn't even realize they made an impact on the child.

At the onset of the Destination Family project, a newspaper article was written about a 17 year-old boy in foster care who wanted to be adopted. Shortly after the article ran in the local newspaper, Sierra Adoption Services received inquiries from more than 100 families who stated they were interested in adopting this youth. He was able to choose his family and was adopted prior to his 18th birthday. While the circumstances of this adoption were unusual, Destination Family strives to make what was once "impossible," possible.

But it's not just the social workers who are taking an active role in finding adoptive parents—the teens themselves are highly involved in their own planning process for permanency.

Today, new models show that many of these youth have made at least a few healthy, important connections with adults in the past. Sometimes it's simply a matter of going through case files and tracking down these individuals.

"Educating social workers has been an important part of the project," Herne explains. "Having tools that social workers can use to work effectively with teens has made a major difference."

But it's not just the social workers who are taking an active role in finding adoptive parents—the teens themselves are highly involved in their own planning process for permanency.

First, teens have to agree to participate in the Destination Family project. A youth permanency worker gets to know the teen before they work jointly to develop a plan. The youth is offered various tools such as family- and people-finding techniques, how to develop a recruitment plan, Family Bound classes, a "practice family" and a support group.

"The teens are involved in every step," says Herne. To date, the Destination Family youth permanence project has helped more than 100 youth discover the importance of a permanent place to call home.

For more information about Destination Family, visit the Web site at www.sierraadoption.org, or call (916) 368-5114 (Sacramento County office) or (530) 478-0911 (Nevada County office).

Colt's Story: A Better Life through Teen Adoption

Colt, a 13 year-old boy living in Marysville, knows firsthand what it's like to feel unsafe in his own home.



With a convicted felon mother who was heavily abusing drugs, spending as much time as possible at friends' houses seemed the only refuge for Colt. When CPS removed him and placed him in a foster home at age 10, he actually felt relieved.

"My mom told me that foster care was a horrible place. But she was wrong. I was lucky to be taken there," he says. At the time, Colt never could have guessed how "lucky" this foster care placement would turn out to be.

"When I met Colt, he was just a kid who lived with my friend," explains Shawn Marmon. Marmon, also a foster parent, was busy providing a home for three older teenage boys when the idea of adoption was brought to his attention, but the boys in his care were too close to 18, so he believed it was "too late in the game to begin an adoption process." However, after spending time getting to know Colt, Marmon began to give the idea of adoption serious thought.

"I saw this rambunctious 11 year-old, who—with his inquisitive, creative nature and slightly ornery side—became completely endearing to me, the more I got to know him."

Marmon worked with Sierra Adoption Services to get Colt placed in his (foster) care and then begin the process of adoption. "There were peaks and valleys throughout the process, so I just had to hang in there," Marmon recalls. Last August, after one year of foster parenting this youth, Marmon was finally able to call Colt his son.

Colt Carroll-Marmon, now 13 and in seventh grade, enjoys snowboarding, bowling and just hanging out with his new dad. "Shawn is a really great guy," Colt says. When asked how his life has changed as a result of the adoption, Colt replied: "I see my life as stable...away from all of the bad things." With a loving, safe and permanent family life, Colt can now turn his attention toward typical teenage boy things like school, friends, girls and computer games.

If only other foster teens could be so lucky.



Database Research Compares Foster Care Exits in Rural vs. Urban California Counties

How does the issue of permanency differ among California's rural and non-rural counties? Are adoption rates higher in metropolitan areas? Are reunification rates higher in rural counties? Are rural or urban counties more likely to adopt teens out of foster care? This article provides an analytical overview and comparison of exits from child welfare supervised foster care in all 58 California counties during the last fiscal year. Page 2 of this newsletter provides a map and definitions of rural versus non-rural counties.

The information and tables provided here were generated from database research from the Child Welfare Services Reports for California, the Center for Social Services Research at UC Berkeley*. The time period analyzed and described is for July 1, 2005-June 30, 2006. The number of exiting children per year and the type of exit (e.g., reunification, adoption, etc.) are provided based on the last known placement type before exit. The analysis examines all child welfare supervised spells that had a duration of at least five days, and only one exit per child was counted. (If a child experienced multiple exits during the year, only the last exit occurring in the year was counted.)

Here are the research highlights:

36,107 children exited the foster care system in California last fiscal year. See Table 1 for breakdown by exit type

Table 1

Children exiting foster care in California

Exit Type	# of Children	Percent
Reunification	19,887	55.1
Adoption	7,085	19.6
Kin-GAP	1,085	3.0
Other Guardianship	1,659	4.6
Emancipation	4,323	12.0
Other**	2,068	5.7
Total	36,107	100.0

Foster care children in rural counties are less likely to be adopted and less likely to exit through kin guardianship than foster care children in non-rural counties. See Tables 2 and 3

For children exiting foster care, the counties with the highest adoption rates were all non-rural:

- Stanislaus (35 percent)
- Yuba (31.6 percent)
- Shasta (31.3 percent)
- Santa Barbara (31 percent)
- Fresno (30.9 percent)

For children exiting foster care, the counties with the lowest adoption rates were all rural:

- Mariposa (3.8 percent)
- Siskiyou (4.4 percent)
- Glenn (8.3 percent)
- Tehama (8.6 percent)
- Lassen (9.1 percent)
- Alpine, Colusa, Inyo, Mono, Plumas and Sierra Counties had no adoptions during the year
- Note: Many of the rural counties had either no or few children going through the adoption process during the time period examined.

In most California counties, the majority (more than half) of the children who exited foster care were reunified with their parents. Reunification rates were slightly higher among rural counties. See Tables 2 and 3

Counties with the highest rates of reunification (in counties with a minimum of 10 reunifications during the year):

- Plumas (all but one exit was through reunification; 96.8 percent)
- Colusa (93 percent)
- San Benito (75 percent)
- El Dorado (72 percent)

Counties with the lowest reunification rates:

- Fresno (37 percent)
- Sonoma (39 percent)
- San Francisco (40 percent)
- Lake (46 percent)

Table 2

Children exiting foster care in rural counties

Exit Type	# of Children	Percent
Reunification	646	58.3
Adoption	149	13.4
Kin-GAP	12	1.1
Other Guardianship	92	8.3
Emancipation	136	12.3
Other**	74	6.7
Total	1,108	100.1



Finishing Sylvia

In 1999, when she was 58 years old, unmarried and childless, Dona Rose probably couldn't have imagined that she'd be expecting her first grandchild this spring. But that was before she heard an adoption outreach program on a Bay Area radio station and before she stumbled across an adoption fair in Oakland.

Less than a year later, Dona became the mother of 14-year-old Sylvia who had been in the foster care system since she was 11. Sylvia is now married, will soon turn 21, and is expecting a baby with her husband, Justin.

Dona Rose had always wanted children of her own, but her career as an auditor kept her busy traveling across the country. However, when she heard the radio program, she thought: "I can do this!"

For five months, Dona attended classes through the foster/adoption program of Oakland-based Family Builders. She saw many prospective adoptive parents drop out of the program, but Dona grew more and more excited as she got closer to being certified. "I kept pinching myself and saying, 'This is really going to happen,'" she said. "This must be how pregnant women feel."

After reading Sylvia's bio, Dona traveled to Marin County to meet the girl. They began several weeks of Saturday visitations then gradually moved on to overnight visits. Sylvia moved in with Dona in October of 1999. Three days later, she attended her first high school dance.

It's no secret that many adoptive parents choose to bring younger children into their lives, and that the older kids often get short shrift. When asked what made her choose to adopt a teenager, Dona got reflective. "It fit with where I was in my life," she said. "The other thing is, when kids age out, they have no place to go. I always had a family I could go home to, and I wanted her to have that, too. The teenage years—those are the hard years. They need the most help then."

Still, Dona admits that the transition from being childless to being the mother of a high school freshman was sometimes challenging. "We struggled a bit with some of the teenage issues. We had our moments," she said. "But I had a feeling about how things should be done, and school was always the most important thing."

Even when challenges presented themselves, Dona says she never had to face the problem alone. "There are so many resources if you run into problems," she explained. "The social workers, the therapists—there are a lot of people out there who can really help. With their help, I just devoted my life to what I call 'Finishing Sylvia.'"

Dona has no regrets about the adoption and is looking forward to life as a doting grandmother. "It's the most amazing experience I could have had," she said. "It's been the best thing in my life. She has completed me."

"Everyone should do it," Dona added.



Table 3

Children exiting foster care in non-rural counties

Exit Type	# of Children	Percent
Reunification	19,238	55.0
Adoption	6,918	19.8
Kin-GAP	1,073	3.1
Other Guardianship	1,565	4.5
Emancipation	4,186	12.0
Other**	1,981	5.7

Of the 7,085 exits from foster care into adoption last fiscal year in California, 1,023 were by youth aged 11-17 (14 percent).

Rural counties were nearly three times more likely than non-rural counties to place foster care youth (ages 11-17) in adoptive homes. See Table 4

Table 4

Placement of foster care youth (ages 11-17) in adoptive homes

# of children	% of all adoption exits	
All California counties	1,023	14
Non-rural counties	989	9.7
Rural counties	34	28

The results of this research reveal interesting distinctions (and open the door for further examination) between rural and non-rural counties regarding permanency for children in foster care. For example, generally speaking, foster care children in rural counties were less likely to be adopted than their counterparts in non-rural counties; however, families in rural counties were much more likely to adopt older children out of foster care than non-rural families. This finding suggests that rural counties may be paving the way toward permanency for foster youth.

*Database reports can be found at:
<http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>.

***"Other" exit type includes CWS/CMS termination reason types such as "child ran away from placement," "other non-CWS agency has jurisdiction" or "incarcerated."

Education and Permanency

Permanency and placement stability means more for children in out-of-home care than just finding a stable home with caring adults. It also means continuity in a child's education. Ideally, when a child is placed in out-of-home care, he or she should be able to continue to attend the same school. But in many cases, children who are placed in out-of-home care change schools or even school districts. Often, children's school records don't follow them to the new school in a timely manner or at all. And, if a child has special educational needs, the individualized education plan (IEP)—the concrete, specific plan detailing how a child will reach his/her educational goals—can get lost in the shuffle. These are just some of the educational issues faced by children in out-of-home care.

According to Casey Family Programs*, "for youth in out-of-home care, education has the potential to be a positive counterweight to abuse, neglect, separation and impermanence. Positive school experiences enhance their well-being, help them make more successful transitions to adulthood, and increase their chances for personal fulfillment and economic self-sufficiency, as well as their ability to contribute to society. School also provides the opportunity for youth to form lasting connections with adults and to experience the benefits of participation in extracurricular activities."



The Casey Family Programs report, "A Road Map for Learning: Improving Educational Outcomes in Out-of-Home Care," outlines 11 educational objectives for children in out-of-home care with the goal of improving their educational outcomes:

1. Provide school placement stability. Changing schools is not only stressful for children—new teachers, new friends, new school culture and expectations—but multiple changes in schools is a predictor of school failure. Changes in placement may mean a disruption in both academics and school-based services (counseling, special education, extracurricular activities). School placement stability should be a core value in child welfare and a vital factor when considering where to place a child in out-of-home care.

2. Secure and maintain accurate and accessible school records. Knowing what a child has been doing in school is vital to ensure educational continuity. Barriers to maintaining accurate and accessible school records can be legal—confidentiality requirements—or logistical—systems that are incompatible. Lack of school records can lead to the new school denying or delaying enrollment, and lack of records can result in discontinuity or inadequacies in school programming.

3. Facilitate collaboration and training among all involved systems including child welfare, education and the judiciary. Effective collaboration means working together to maintain school placement stability, share information and records and ensure a youth's timely enrollment.

4. Train caregivers to be education advocates at school and at home. This includes both making sure that caregivers know a child's education/school history and capabilities and ensuring that caregivers feel comfortable and capable of being effective educational advocates in the school setting.

5. Provide education advocates and education specialists. Professionals or trained volunteers should be available to provide education case management, facilitate assessments and services for children's academic needs; communicate with schools about the children's needs and progress; collaborate with schools on behavior and academic plans; and assist youth with postsecondary planning.

6. Give youth access to supplemental education supports and services. Because many children in out-of-home care are at an increased risk for education failure, they often need considerable supplemental educational services such as mental health services, counseling and advisory support, tutoring, mentoring, access to remedial and enrichment offerings, and career assessment and counseling.

7. Address special education needs as appropriate to the youth. This means making sure that: a) any child in out-of-home care has the appropriate assessments to determine if he or she has any special education needs, b) these assessments are regularly and appropriately updated, c) there is a concrete plan on how the school will address and accommodate any special education needs the child has, and d) that these assessments and IEPs (Individualized Education Plans) follow the child in the event of a school change.

8. Decrease disparate outcomes for youth of color. As in the child welfare system itself, racism, cultural bias and deficient cross-cultural expertise toward children of color are realities in the education system. Both systems must work together and address the issues head-on.

9. Ensure that youth are literate, acquire basic skills and have extracurricular opportunities. Children in out-of-home care should get early and accurate assessments of their basic academic skills. The school and caregivers should then follow up to create a plan to address any needs the assessments reveal.

10. Prepare youth to achieve their postsecondary education, training and career goals. Completion of a postsecondary degree or certificate is an important ingredient in achieving most career goals. Currently, only 15 percent of youth in out-of-home care are in college-prep classes in high school. Look at ways to support foster youth's postsecondary support needs.

11. Promote public policies that support education during and after care. Help develop awareness of the significant issues regarding education for youth in out-of-home care, and then collaborate with policy makers.

**The information in this article comes from the manual "A Roadmap for Learning: Improving Educational Outcomes in Foster Care" by Casey Family Programs. You can access the complete manual online at www.casey.org under "Tools and Resources."*

Resources

Annie E. Casey Foundation

410-547-6600

www.aecf.org

Source site for Family-to-Family program. Good publications on permanency and youth transition. Great youth life skills assessment tools.

California Department of Social Services

www.dss.cahwnet.gov

Source for child welfare redesign reports, state regulations and county quarterly reports on child welfare outcomes.

California Permanency for Youth Project

(510) 268.0038

www.cpyyp.org

Dedicated to assuring that no youth will leave the California child welfare system without a permanent lifelong connection to a caring adult. Great information and resources. This organization also provides technical assistance to counties on issues of permanency for foster youth and youth transition to adulthood.

California Youth Connection

(800) 397-8236

www.calyouthissues.org

CYC promotes the participation of foster youth in policy development and legislative change to improve the foster care system, and strives to improve social work practice and child welfare policy. Online newsletter available. Chapters in individual counties.

Casey Family Programs

(206) 282.7300

www.casey.org

Casey Family Programs' mission is to provide and improve—and ultimately to prevent the need for—foster care. Good source for current information on foster care in the U.S.

Center for Social Services Research, University of California, Berkeley

(510) 642-1899

<http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>

Contractor for data collection for statewide outcome indicators for child welfare including indicators measuring permanency, placement stability and youth transition to adulthood.

Center for Public Policy Research, University of California, Davis

(530) 757-8661

<http://cprr.ucdavis.edu>

The Center for Public Policy Research (CPPR) at the University of California, Davis serves state government and academic institutions by providing research services to support social policy and practice development in such areas as poverty, child abuse, welfare, mental health, child development, public health, and substance abuse in California.

Child Welfare Information Gateway, Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families

www.childwelfare.gov

Formerly the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information and the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, Child Welfare Information Gateway provides access to information and resources to help protect children and strengthen families including federal legislative information and national data.

The California Evidence-Based, Clearinghouse for Child Welfare

www.cachildwelfareclearinghouse.org

The clearinghouse was created to help keep state and county agencies, public and private organizations, and individuals informed of current best practices by implementing a systematic evaluation of child welfare programs.

Northern California Training Academy, The Center for Human Services UC Davis Extension

(530) 757-8643

www.humanservices.ucdavis.edu

Part of The Center for Human Services at UC Davis Extension, the Northern California Training Academy provides training, technical assistance and consultation to 33 counties in Northern California.

Youth Transition Funders Group

www.ytfg.org

Funders interested in investing to make sure that all youth are connected by age 25.

Web sites for youth who are currently in, or have graduated from, foster care

www.calyouthissues.org Web site for statewide organization of former and current foster youth.

www.caseyfamilyservices.org Web site for Casey family Services. Site includes a section for youth in foster care.

www.chafee.csac.ca.gov Web site for the California Chafee Grant, a program that gives money to foster youth and former foster youth to use for career and technical training or college courses.

www.fosterclub.com/index.cfm National network for youth in foster care.

www.fyi3.com/fyi3/index.cfm This is Foster Club's Web site for youth who are getting ready to emancipate.

www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov State Web site of the Foster Care Ombudsman. Toll-free phone number: (877) 846-1602.

www.youthcomm.org Web site for a national organization. Site includes an "e-zine" for youth in foster care.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Upcoming Symposium...

Research to Practice: Creating Permanency for Foster Youth

March 20-21, 2007, Redding

March 21-22, 2007, UC Davis

Offered by the Northern California Training Academy with support from the California Permanency for Youth Project, this two-day symposium presents the latest research on the importance of permanent lifelong connections as well as how to foster and support youth in successfully transitioning to adulthood.

Keynote presentations:

"You're All Grown Up Now: Terminating the Foster Care Experience"

Rosemary Avery

This presentation on emerging adulthood will examine the social, emotional and cognitive capabilities of youth aged 15-25 years, and it will tie empirically-based research results to the types of functional expectations state's put on youth aging out of care.

"The Transition to Adulthood for Foster Youth: Outcomes at 19"

Mark Courtney

This presentation will cover results of comparisons of outcomes for 282 youth still in care at age 19 with 321 youth who had already been discharged. Results suggest that youth who remain in care past their 18th birthday fare better with services that prepare them for independent living, education, access to health and mental health services.

"No More Children at Risk: Children at Promise"

Mervlyn Kitashima

Mervlyn Kitashima, a participant in Emmy Werner's groundbreaking "Kauai Longitudinal Study on Resilience" will share a very personal account of the factors that contributed to her ability to overcome the odds. Emphasis will be on the possibilities, potential and promise possessed by every child, even in the face of adversity.

"Permanent Parents for Teens"

Pat O'Brien

Pat O'Brien is the founder and executive director of You Gotta Believe! The Older Child Adoption and Permanency Movement, Inc. He will deliver an inspiration message on finding permanent homes and connections for older foster youth.

"Placement Change and Permanency"

Peter Pecora

This presentation will provide an examination of why permanency planning is so important.

For more information or to enroll, visit the Academy Web site at www.humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy.

In Our Next Issue

Look for more articles, research, success stories and resources in our next issue of *Reaching Out*. Part 2 on Permanency will be available in September.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA
Training Academy
Supporting Children & Family Services

About the Northern California Training Academy

The Northern California Training Academy provides training, technical assistance and consultation for 33 northern California counties. The counties include rural and urban counties with various training challenges for child welfare staff. The focus on integrated training across disciplines is a high priority in the region. This publication is supported by funds from the California Department of Social Services.

 **The Center
for Human Services**
UC Davis Extension
University of California

About The Center for Human Services

The Center began in 1979 with a small grant to train child welfare workers in northern California. It has grown to become an organization that offers staff development and professional services to public and private human service agencies throughout the state. The Center combines a depth of knowledge about human service agencies, a standard of excellence associated with the University of California, extensive experience in developing human resources and a deep dedication to public social services.

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