

FRESNO COUNTY SECOND YEAR PLAN - DRAFT

Agency Name: Department of Children and Family Services

Project Name: California Permanency for Youth Project

Executive Sponsor: Cathi Huerta, Interim Director

Project Manager: Veronica Salmeron, Permanency Specialist
559/453-5165
Vsalmeron@co.fresno.ca.us

Lisa Nichols, CC25I Coordinator
559/453-5095, fax: 559/453-5172
Nichol@co.fresno.ca.us

Project Team:

Howard Himes, Deputy Director
Kathleen Mattesich, Permanency Program Manager
Dalvin Baker, Supervisor
Rochelle Delgado, Social Worker
Ivana Carter, Social Worker
Annette Jones, Social Work Practitioner
Nicole Castanon-Bletz, Social Worker
Fola Olukkani , Student Intern
Cynthia Betancourt, Student Intern
Socorro Ruvalcaba, Supervisor

Review of first year/Highlights

The following information provides a detailed report and highlights many of the activities implemented in year one of the plan. It should be noted that this work would not have been successful if it weren't for the great collaboration of agency staff, youth, community partners and agencies and technical assistance received through CPYP.

Implementation of the CPYP plan began in December of 2005 with the primary focus on 12 youth placed in –group home care. A CPYP Task Force was created to assist with the work in establishing permanent connections for all youth. Due to the tremendous amount of work and organization that needed to be accomplished, a permanency specialist was designated to organize and track the family finding process on the 1 youth pilot for CPYP and to support other needs of the project.

One of the major aspects of the plan was to train staff, community partners, resource families and youth about permanency. Various trainings and presentations were given to mental health, probation, CASA, Wrap Services, Foster Family Agencies, Juvenile Court, Behavioral Court, neighborhood collaboratives, local non-profit agencies, and college interns. In addition, a Permanency Handbook was designed by the task force as a training tool to educate on the importance of permanency for foster and probation youth.

Wednesday's Child, a recruitment method utilizing the local news Channel, featured children available for adoption. The efforts of Wednesday's Child and the targeted recruitment to provide adopted homes for youth, was essential in educating the community of the importance of permanency for all youth. Twenty-one youth were highlighted for possible adoptive placements through the program.

Initially, lack of funding was a concern, however administration allocated funding to support activities and permanent connections made through family finding efforts. Fresno County is participating in the California Connected by 25 Initiative which supports counties in building a comprehensive continuum of services to support foster and probation youth transitioning into adulthood. Grant funding received from this initiative was also allocated to assist with all work in the area of permanency.

There were several key elements that contributed to the success and great work under CPYP. The support of administration and the direct communication with the director has allowed for concerns and issues to be dealt with in a timely manner.

Technical assistance that was available to our county was found to be helpful and beneficial to the work for CPYP. In particular, Kevin Campbell's monthly TA sessions and Cheryl Jacobsen's TA greatly influence our ability to begin our finding family efforts for our identified youth. The CPYP tri-county meetings and conference provided great feedback, lessons learned, barriers and successes of other CPYP counties.

Challenges

The absences of the group home social worker at case update meetings brought challenges of miscommunication. Midway into the project, the number of participants on the CPYP team decreased due to staff changes and promotions. Much of the work and responsibility fell on the permanency specialist and a few individuals. Much of the work was done by the “Jr. Varsity Team” which sometimes caused role clarification problems among support staff and the group home unit social workers. In addition limited staff support made it difficult to facilitate some connections for some youth.

In instances where connections were made for a youth, staff support lacked the experience of handling the emotional scars for youth who were dealing with past issues and old pain. The absence of the mental health component was evident in many cases. A mental health therapist has been hired and assigned to work with youth involved in the project. The therapist attends CPYP team meetings and has begun consulting with youth on an individual basis.

Next Steps/Year 2 Plan

Recently twelve additional group home youth were added to the project, however the target population for year 2 will be expanded to include youth from various task areas within the department. One of the challenges of the project is creating ways to recruit more champions for permanency as well as exploring ways to spread family finding to more staff. Training in the first year focused more on educating staff about what the true definition of permanency is and the importance of permanent connections for youth. Training in year 2 will be geared towards providing staff and community partners’ hands on tools so that the work can be expanded department wide.

Fresno County will be utilizing Darla Henry and the 3-5-7- model as TA training for the next year. Department of Children and Family Services Staff, Children’s Mental Health, Wrap Services, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Foster Parents, and Probation will be key community partners at the training sessions and will assist in creating more permanency “champions” in the community.

A written policy and procedure guide for finding life-long permanent connections and family engagement will be developed and shared with supervisors and staff. These policies and procedures will clarify roles and responsibilities, establish a criteria for youth in need of family finding, as well as identify available supportive resources, such as community partners to assist in family finding and engagement, for case workers when searching for life-long connections for youth. A process for permanency case reviews will also be developed and implemented. This information will be conveyed in a training setting.

A written procedure will also be developed and implemented for ILP eligible emancipated youth in need of family finding and life-long connections.

Additionally, the exploration of existing policies and procedures regarding the placement of youth with case carrying social workers will be made in efforts to develop and implement such policies in DCFS.

Fresno County is participating in the Model Standards Project. Using a set of professional standards governing the care of LGBT youth in out-of-home care, known as CWLA Best Practice Guidelines for serving LGBT youth in out-of-home care, DCFS will focus on creating inclusive systems for LGBT Youth in Out-of-Home Care.

The work under the Model Standard Project will coordinate with the efforts for CPYP to deal with policy, and issues regarding the safety, equality, and need for permanent life-long connections for youth who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Questioning (LGBTQ). Attention will also be given to the development of a grievance procedure for youth and families who feel that they have been discriminated against based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. This information, as well as information regarding community resources available to youth and families, will be made available in writing in the form of a distributed brochure. In addition, an effort to recruit foster parents, TDM Community Representatives, and Cultural Brokers from the LGBTQ Community, will be made to create more options for youth. This will be done by the participation of DCFS in community events specific to the LGBTQ Community. Training and education will be made available DCFS staff, community agencies, community partners, foster parents and youth. A monthly youth meeting for LGBTQ youth and allies will also be implemented to allow youth the opportunity to learn about available resources and activities specific LGBTQ issues.

To assist in creating more champions for permanency special attention will be given to ensure that all department managers and supervisors attend training specific to permanency, family finding and engagement, Models Standards Project, permanency case reviews and identification of youth needing family finding.

In efforts to raise the awareness of youth in out-of-home-care, and to recruit potential adoptive families, Fresno County will collaborate with community agencies and partners to implement the Fresno County Heart Gallery. Additionally, events and activities specific to siblings in out-of-home care, such as the Sibling Spring Fling, will be developed in efforts to raise awareness of the need for siblings to be placed in the same home and to create more opportunities for sibling to see each other.

To expand permanency efforts to all areas of DCFS, each area will be evaluated to ensure that the need for permanent life-long connections for youth is being recognized. A medical and familial information form will be developed and implemented for the Emergency Response unit to ensure that important medical and familial information is collected during the initial contact with family of each child and youth.

Data collection for the participating youth will continue to be collected and tracked by the computer database created by the CPYP taskforce. The permanency specialist will begin collaborating with the CPYP evaluator and Efforts to Outcomes (ETO), Social Solutions staff to determine if an internet based tracking data system would be beneficial for the data collection of Fresno County's CPYP.