

KeYPOINT

Kern Youth Permanency Opportunities to Insure Nurturing Transitions (second year plan)

Review of First Year Plan

In September of 2005, Kern County submitted a first year plan for the California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP). This project was called KeYPOINT.

Our first goal for this project was to develop and implement an organizational model to facilitate permanency outcomes for a target population of age 14 and 15 year old youths who are in group home placements. To achieve this goal, we identified the following objectives:

Objective #1-Convene a Permanency Project Coordination Team to develop and implement the permanency project. We put together CPYP advisory committee with representatives from various DHS programs to help develop a plan. We sent out surveys throughout our department to measure individual perceptions of youth permanency. In June of 2006, we held a KeYPOINT kick-off at a local restaurant. There were over 200 representatives various programs in Department of Human Services at this kick-off. As the project has progressed, we have continued to have monthly CPYP committee meetings, but attendance has been sporadic.

Objective #2-Identify a target population and incorporate youth into the development of the permanency plan. We organized a pilot unit, to provide intensive permanency services to foster youths ages 14 and 15 that were placed in local area group homes and their siblings. We identified 18 foster youths that were placed in local group homes as the focus youth for this project. We also included 19 of their siblings who were placed in long term foster care for inclusion in the project. In November of 2006, we organized a Youth Permanency Advisory Committee. This committee consists of many of the foster youth in our pilot project, plus former foster youths. This youth committee has been meeting each months since November. They have discussed many issues regarding youth permanency, independence, and resiliency.

Objective #3-Research and identify a cost-effective, thorough electronic database capable of locating youth identified, permanent, long-term relationship possibilities. Our department has identified the ENTERSECT system to accomplish this. The system has been helpful, but sometimes the information is outdated.

Objective #4-Create a tracking system for determining effectiveness of permanency program- In October of 2005, we created a form in the Kern documents of CWS/CMS to document this information so it will stay in the case.

Objective #5- Create and train and specialized unit focused on implementing the permanency plan within the target population consisting of a Permanency Specialist,

Foster Care Placement Worker, Data Analysis Specialist, Youth Permanency Assistant, and Social Service Supervisor. The CPYP pilot unit was fully staffed with a Social Service Supervisor, a Permanency Specialist, a Permanent Placement Worker, and a Youth Permanency Advisor (former foster youth) in May of 2006. The Data Analysis Specialist position was not created, but Entersect access was given to the Permanency Specialist and a Program Clerk. Since May of 2006, we have experienced staff turnover in the Permanency Specialist position and the Placement Worker position. We have also struggled to keep the CPYP pilot unit fully staffed. The Foster Care Placement Worker resigned from our agency on January 26, 2007. We were not able to fill that position until April 16, 2007. The lack of staffing during this period has been difficult for the rest of the CPYP pilot unit and has caused delays in permanency activities for the youth in the project.

Our second goal was to actively search for long-term, meaningful relationship opportunities for youth in the target population utilizing relative contacts, child specific recruitment, and media campaigns. To achieve this goal, we identified the following objectives:

Objective #1 – Create and implement a process for working on achieving long-term, meaningful relationships for youth in the target population. To help us achieve this goal, state CPYP advisors have provided monthly “family finding” training to our department. We have conducted initial assessments with the initial 18 youth identified for the project. Due to our efforts, we have placed four youths in relative or NREFM (Non-relative extended family member) placements. We also have two pending relative/NREFM placements. Additionally, we have been able to send one youth home with his mother and another youth was ordered back into his mother’s care by the court against the department’s recommendations. We have also been able to identify relative/NREFM support for many of the youths we are working with. One relative placement failed because the relative was not prepared to deal with the youth’s behavioral issues. We also lost two youths from the project because they were arrested, became wards of the court and are now under the jurisdiction of the Kern County Probation Department. We have made progress in achieving this objective, but our efforts have been hampered by staff turnover and staff vacancies.

Objective #2 – Should initial permanency efforts produce unsuccessful or inappropriate options for the youth, additional, child specific services will be utilized. During this last year, we have organized a “Heart Gallery” where youth portraits are exhibited to potential permanent connections. Two of the youth in our project participated in this project. The “Heart Gallery” will be an ongoing project with opportunities for additional youth participation each year. We are still exploring family and NREFM permanency efforts with the youth in our pilot project.

In the first year in this project, we have been able to meet many of the goals we set. We decided to start with a pilot unit to better identify best practices for older youth permanency. The drawback of this model, is that the family finding practices we have used are somewhat isolated from much of our agency. We have also experienced staffing

shortages in the pilot unit, which has slowed our permanency efforts. In spite of these challenges, we have made numerous permanent connections for the youth we have served.

Next Steps:

Objective #1: Family Finding and Engagement efforts begun in Year One will be sustained.

1) Kern County will continue to the KeYPOINT pilot unit. As stated earlier in this report, the initial KeYPOINT caseload consisted of 37 foster youths (18 identified group home youths and 19 of their siblings). During the past year, the caseload has decreased to 26 youths. During the next year, we will gradually build the KeYPOINT caseload up to 40 youths. We will identify youths from the legal orphan population (youths who have had their parental rights terminated, but were not adopted) to be added to the KeYPOINT pilot caseload.

2). Interns will continue to be utilized to assist the Permanency Specialist and the Foster Care Placement Worker in the KeYPOINT ongoing pilot unit.

In our KeYPOINT pilot project, we have enlisted five MSW interns to help our target youth attain permanent placements and connections. These interns have been working with our project and doing adoption home studies for our adoption agency. Starting in the fall of 2007, we hope to have at least five MSW interns assigned directly to the KeYPOINT project. The use of interns helps us with the day to day tasks of achieving youth permanency and spreads our permanency practices. We will continue to involve MSW interns in our meetings and training sessions.

3). Youth who have not found permanency will continue to be referred to the Heart Gallery.

Objective #2: Family Finding and Engagement will be expanded beyond the Pilot Unit.

1). Family Finding and Engagement will expand to the Adoption Unit via the "Older Youth Adoption grant.

To further our county's older youth permanency efforts, we have obtained a 2.4 million dollar "Older Youth Adoption" (OYA) grant. We have just started implementing the first year plan for that grant. As part of the OYA plan, we will hire two permanent social workers in our adoption unit to work specifically with older youth. These workers are now taking applications from our Permanent Placement units to provide extensive permanency services to Permanent Placement youth who are placed in group homes. The youths that are referred for OYA services will remain with their placement social worker, while the OYA team provides extensive permanency services. This will spread our family finding practices and create more youth permanency champions in our adoption agency and in our permanent placement units. The OYA team will coordinate with the KeYPOINT pilot unit to provide family finding services to 40 additional foster youths during this next year. They will attend monthly KeYPOINT meetings and training. Additionally, our adoption agency will survey our current foster parent for interest in older foster youth commitment. Our agency will also begin a public campaign to recruit pre-adoptive families for older youth. We will use OYA funds to help pre-adoptive families with resources, services, and respite care.

2). Family Finding and engagement will be expanded into the Permanency Planning Units.

The KeYPOINT Permanency Specialist will also work with individual Permanent Placement social workers so they can provide family finding services beyond the pilot unit. At the end of this year, our department will develop a “family finding” policy to address older youth permanency throughout the agency. This is a very big step in cultivating more permanency champions within our agency.

3). On a quarterly basis success stories will be written and distributed internally to expand awareness of family finding and engagement to other caseworkers.

Objective #3: Training and Preparation of Youth and Families for Permanency will be a focus of year two activities.

1). To help us with supportive services, we are partnering with our Wraparound Team and a local counseling agency, Smothers and Associates. The Wraparound Team provides family-centered, community-oriented, culturally sensitive, strength-based, individualized alternatives to sending children to, or keeping them in high level placements. The Kern County Department of Human Services is the administrative agent the Wraparound funds, while Aspira Foster & Family Services is the service provider. Our KeYPOINT unit has recently referred two youths in our project for Wraparound services and we will continue to utilize them when intensive placement services are needed. We can use Wrap Around services for our youth who are re-uniting with their parents or coming out of a group home placement to a foster home or relative placement. We have also contracted with Smothers and Associates Counseling Agency to provide services to our youth, their relatives, and caretakers. They can provide a Behavioral Specialist to help with crisis counseling and parent coaching. They have agreed to conduct training and counseling sessions for foster parents, relative caretakers, and adoptive parents to help achieve placement stability, educational advancement, and positive parent/child interactions. They can provide us with placement services, pre-adoptive services, post-adoptive services, and educational services. Our Wraparound Team and Smothers and Associates have both agreed to partner with our department’s youth permanency efforts. Our department’s Wraparound social worker, a representative from Aspira’s Wraparound staff, and a staff person from Smother’s and Associates have started participating in our monthly CPYP technical assistance sessions and our monthly CPYP advisory committee meetings. These new permanency champions will help spread our family finding practices both inside and outside of our agency.

2). Four technical assistance sessions will be provided in Year Two to assist in implementing this objective.

This fall, we will start our four technical assistance sessions with Darla Henry, PhD, MSW. These sessions will explore the “3-5-7 Model” of preparing youth for permanency. As indicated earlier, we are partnering with the Wraparound team and Smothers and Associates to further our permanency efforts and they will also attend all our sessions. We will also invite representatives from other department programs, Kern County CASA, and Foster Youth Services to attend.

SUMMARY:

For our second year, we are expanding our youth permanency efforts to serve many more clients from our Permanent Placement units. Further, we have obtained an Older Youth Adoption (OYA) grant, which will help with additional services and personnel. In addition to our KeYPOINT pilot unit, we will be partnering with our adoption agency, Wraparound services, and a local counseling agency during this second year. During this year, we hope to combine our family finding practices with strong supportive services and develop a comprehensive family finding policy. During that time, we will also be creating additional youth permanency champions inside and outside of the Kern County Department of Human Services.