A County Guide to Funding Child-Centered Specialized Permanency Services for Youth in Foster Care

Federal Mandate

The federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (PL 113-183) creates new mandates on states and counties to provide intensive and ongoing efforts to place children waiting in foster care into permanent families. No longer can children under the age of 16 be given a permanency plan for placement into "another planned permanent living arrangement" (APPLA, also known as long-term foster care). For those children age 16 and older who are given a plan of APPLA, the county must provide the court with regular documentation of the intensive and ongoing efforts they have made to place the child into a permanent family.

The Importance of Permanency

PL 113-183 recognizes the importance of permanent, stable families in preparing children for successful adulthood and providing a supportive safety net as they make that transition. Types of specialized youth permanency practice models are identified in Appendix A.

Young people aging out of foster care face enormous challenges. Studies show:

- More than 1 in 5 will become homeless
- Only half will graduate from high school
- 1 in 4 will be incarcerated within two years of leaving foster care
- Less than 3 percent receive college degrees

California counties unnecessarily spend thousands of dollars annually if they do not provide specialized permanency services for youth who remain in the system. These services pay for themselves.

Permanency Is Possible

A decade of innovation, including pilot projects in California and elsewhere, has identified best practices for specialized permanency services, with model programs in select jurisdictions across the country. The results are clear:

- Forming permanent connections for older foster youth is achievable; it increases their likelihood of avoiding dire consequences and achieving successful independence.
- Two California-based federal demonstration projects and five older youth adoption pilots demonstrated that after a startup period, services can be sustained long term at no net cost to the counties or state.

Fiscal Implications of Permanency

Keeping youth in foster care creates an unnecessary financial burden for counties. Achieving permanent families for our youth not only improves their opportunities for success, it has significant positive fiscal impacts for the county. The cost of providing lifelong families is low in comparison to foster care, even after accounting for adoption and kin guardianship subsidies to help with the cost of caring for the children. Greater savings are accrued through second chance reunifications with birth families who have turned their lives around.

Intensive child-centered specialized permanency services more than pay for themselves. Reinvestment of these savings allows counties to sustain and expand the services to improve their permanency outcomes.

Additionally, permanency is a public safety issue. Achieving permanency for our youth reduces counties' long-term, 'downstream' costs as fewer youth leave foster care alone and join the rolls of those needing services for homelessness, substance abuse, indigent medical care, early pregnancy, unemployment, incarceration, etc.

This guide presents a fiscal methodology for counties to meet the objective of achieving permanent families for all youth before they age out of foster care.

All savings based on available rate information at time of publication.

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Achieving Permanency

Meeting the goal of no youth leaving foster care without a committed lifelong family connection is a challenging but doable process. It involves the introduction of new ideas and practices. It requires building within each child welfare professional's office, as well as our agencies, a new "filter" through which programs, procedures, practices, outcomes, staff, clients and paperwork must pass to ensure a permanent family connection.

California has benefited from the work of the California Permanency for Youth Project (2002-2010), Seneca Center's National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness, two federal Youth Permanency Demonstration Programs, including Destination Family Youth Permanency Project led by Sierra Forever Families in partnership with Sacramento and Nevada counties since 2003, and Dumisha Jamaa Family Builders in partnership with Alameda County from 2004 to 2010 and San Francisco County since 2007, as well as five state older child adoption contracts.

Important keys to success were identified:

- Youth-centered practice
- Addressing youth's grief and loss
- Supporting children and families to successfully develop and maintain committed relationships
- Team approach (both within the department and using external partners)
- Commitment of the agency's top administrators
- Careful planning
- Identification of forces that would propel the project forward and restraining forces that would hinder success
- Training and development of a permanency culture throughout the agency
- Whatever-it-takes approach to the work
- Youth involvement throughout their process

Financial Mechanisms and Benefits

The cost of providing adoption and kin guardian assistance subsidies is minimal compared to the high cost of maintaining youth in group homes or long-term foster care placements, so much so, specialized permanency services pay for themselves.

Savings below represent reduced county payments to providers after permanency is achieved for older children placed in foster family agencies and group homes. Additional savings not shown here are accrued from lower costs for county caseworkers, supervisors, administrators, treatment services and court costs.

Go to www.FamiliesNOW.org to access the full guide with appendices and endnotes.

Typical Net County-Controlled Savings Achieved When Youth Move from Foster Care to Permanent Families

Achieved for every year the youth would have remained in care

From:	Into:	Annual IV-E Waiver County-controlled Savings	Annual Non-Waiver County-controlled Savings
Foster Family Agency Home	Adoption	$13,710	$10,856
Group Home Level 10	Adoption	$75,663	$55,272
Group Home Level 14	Adoption	$103,540	$74,198
Foster Family Agency Home	Kin Guardianship	$11,442	$11,281
Group Home Level 12	Kin Guardianship	$92,477	$67,582
Foster Family Agency Home	Second Chance Reunification	$23,537	$15,770
Group Home Level 10	Second Chance Reunification	$90,663	$62,772

Specialized Youth Permanency Services One-Time Cost per Youth Served

$12,000 to $15,000

Sierra Health Foundation

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