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The San Diego Union-Tribune

April 29, 1998, Wednesday

SECTION: OPINION Pg. B-9:1,6,7,8; B-11:2,3,4,5

LENGTH: 989 words

HEADLINE: Fixing foster care in San Diego

SOURCE: COX is chairman of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors. For more information on becoming a foster parent, please call (619) 292-KIDS.

BYLINE: Greg Cox

BODY:

For every child, growing pains are a part of everyday life. But for children who are removed from abusive homes and placed in **foster care**, their growing pains take on a much harsher meaning. They take the form of welts, bruises, broken bones and broken hearts.

They've been beaten and neglected; betrayed by the very people who were put on this earth to protect and nurture them -- their parents. So when abused children are eventually rescued from their nightmarish home life and placed in **foster care**, their trauma is supposed to be over, the worst behind them; at least, that's the way it is supposed to be.

Unfortunately, this is not the case for too many of San Diego County's 4, 000 foster children. For a variety of reasons, foster children wind up bouncing around among different foster homes, and back and forth between natural parents and foster parents. As such, you can't blame them when they grow into adulthood unable to trust an adult or find it difficult to engage in a mature, respectful and loving relationship.

To make matters worse, far too many foster kids are not graduating from high school. Only half are obtaining high school diplomas, compared to 85 percent of all children countywide.

Not surprisingly, when foster children are released on their own at age 18 with few skills and no family safety net, it doesn't take them long to make their way back to the county, either for welfare or because they've been arrested and booked into county jail. Because of our past inability to help them while they're young and provide them with the resources they need to become self-sufficient, many foster children continue to be dependent on government well into their adult years.

In my State of the County address in January, I pledged that 1998 would be the year we fix the foster-care system in San Diego. This morning the Board of Supervisors will hold a special conference on foster care. We'll hear from the real experts on foster care, our former foster kids, who will testify before the board about their experiences -- good and bad.

What do they think we could have done better to prepare them for life after foster care? What can we do to ensure that a child's first placement in a foster home is the most appropriate for that child? These are the kind of questions to which we need answers.

While today's conference will guide much of our reform efforts from here on out, we've already begun to make improvements. We have launched a countywide campaign to recruit 500 new foster parents. We're seeking caring adults who are willing to open their hearts and their homes to a hurting child. A more abundant supply of foster parents will reduce the likelihood of having to pull abused children out of their school, away from their friends and the rest of their support system, and relocated in a foster home across the county.

It's traumatic enough for a child to be removed from their home, but if we can keep them in the same community, we can minimize the stress these children already are feeling. We have had a very good response so far, but we are still in need of more foster parents.

- ✱ To better prepare young teens for life after foster care, the county and the San Diego Workforce Partnership joined forces earlier this month to create a \$1 million job-training and mentorship program for those who will soon be out of the system because of their age. We'll teach them the skills they will need to live self-sufficient and productive lives as adults.

And while we seek to bring meaningful reform to the foster-care system, we are also working to keep children from becoming foster kids in the first place. Under way is a complete reform of the county's Dependency Court the judicial division of Superior Court that processes child-abuse cases.

Considering that nearly 80 percent of child-abuse and neglect cases are rooted in drug and alcohol abuse, the county, under the guidance of Juvenile Court Judge James R. Milliken, has developed a unique program to effectively rehabilitate child-abusing, substance-abusing parents. This will enable children to be raised in their own homes by their own clean and sober parents.

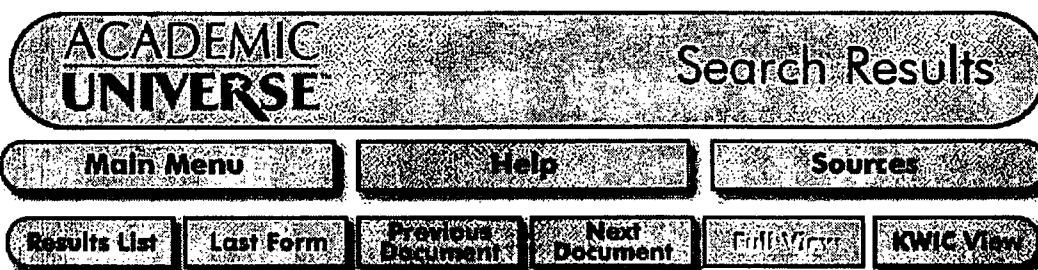
We've taken the most effective components of other successful programs across the country and merged them to create a program that will work for San Diego. This is the most tightly-controlled, comprehensive court-ordered treatment program the county of San Diego has ever undertaken. It will be administered by a private company and will entail intensive treatment and monitoring of parents brought before the Dependency Court.

Child protective services and foster care are "core services" provided by county government. My colleagues on the Board of Supervisors and I are committed to making these "core competencies" for San Diego's regional government.

Child abuse is a root cause of a myriad of expensive and destructive social problems for individuals, families and communities. According to the Welfare League of America, more than half of the adult prison population in our country was abused or neglected as children.

It is absolutely necessary to effectively protect and treat innocent young victims to avoid problems later, as child victims all too often become adult perpetrators. It is the moral obligation of a civilized society and of its government to actively intervene to protect, nurture and guide the vulnerable children among us whose own parents have abandoned those tasks and become the tormentors of their own offspring.

This Board of Supervisors takes our responsibility for these adjudicated "dependents" of county government very seriously. We are committed to working with the caring and concerned people of San Diego County who step forward every day as foster parents, child advocates and volunteers to make a difference in the lives of children crying out for love and guidance.



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Copyright 1998 Times Mirror Company
Los Angeles Times

June 16, 1998, Tuesday, Home Edition

SECTION: Metro; Part B; Page 4; Metro Desk

LENGTH: 97 words

HEADLINE: NEWS IN BRIEF: A SUMMARY OF DEVELOPMENTS ACROSS LOS ANGELES COUNTY;
COMMUNITY NEWS FILE / LOS ANGELES;
GRADUATES OF **FOSTER CARE** PROGRAM READY FOR COLLEGE

BODY:

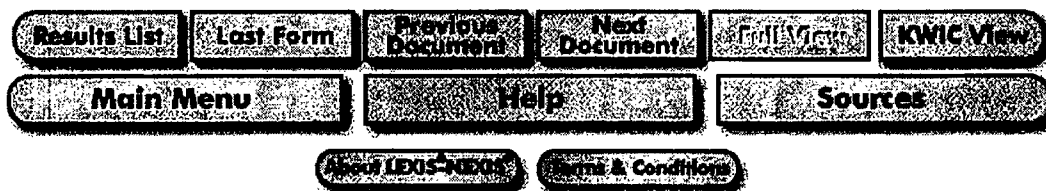
More than 100 high school seniors who were abused or neglected as children and grew up in county **foster care** graduated Monday night from a program to help them make the transition into adulthood.

The Independent Living Program of the Department of Children and Family Services teaches young adults who are raised in foster homes basic life skills such as balancing a checkbook, working out a food budget and applying for a job.

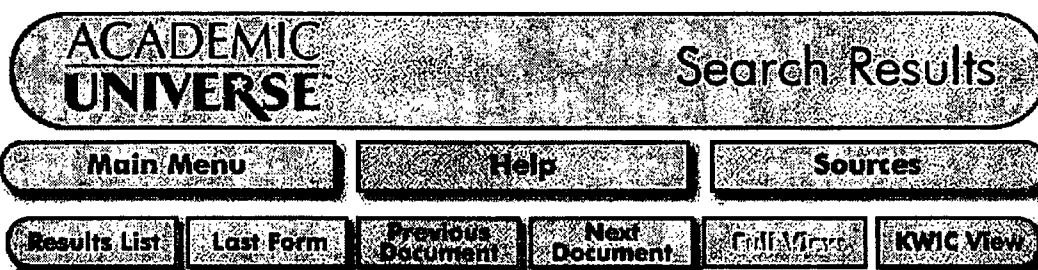
All of the 124 graduates have been accepted at state and national colleges for the fall semester, said department spokesman J. Schuyler Sprowles.

LANGUAGE: English

LOAD-DATE: July 7, 1998



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Copyright 1998 Journal Sentinel Inc.
Milwaukee Journal Sentinel

May 25, 1998 Monday Final

SECTION: News Pg. 3

LENGTH: 576 words

HEADLINE: Children's Village proposal stalled as hunt for site continues

BYLINE: MARY BETH MURPHY

SOURCE: Journal Sentinel staff

BODY:

After nearly seven years of discussion and planning, SOS Children's Village of Milwaukee has yet to become a reality.

The Milwaukee village is stalled because its board of directors can't find a 4-acre site in an urban setting for the project, planned to be a cluster of 10 single-family homes for 60 abused and neglected foster children.

The children would be primarily siblings who are unlikely to be adopted or reunited with their families. Under the village concept, they would remain together in long-term **foster care**, growing up in the care of a paid, permanent live-in house parent.

"We hoped to have the houses built and people in them in 1998. Now that's moved to 1999," said Billie Nash, project development coordinator for the Milwaukee village. The cluster also would include a director's residence and a multipurpose community center.

Nearly a year ago, it looked as though the village would be built on a city-owned playfield across from Lloyd Street School, 1228 W. Lloyd St. But the deal fell apart when residents of a nearby housing complex for older adults objected, citing concerns over vandalism.

"We want to stay in the urban city where most children attend school. . . . We need a community that's going to want us," Nash said. "People are so afraid. They want green space and pretty houses."

The residents' attitude is that it's too bad about foster kids but not in my backyard, Nash said.

Time is running out, and if a site doesn't become available within the central part of the city by June or July, Nash said she would approach mayors in surrounding communities.

The board also would consider building on the outskirts of the city, said Jill Broekhuizen, president and a founding member of the Community Board of the SOS Children's Villages, Milwaukee Chapter.

The lack of a site is having an effect on the board's ability to begin a capital fund-raising campaign, she said. Once a site is established, the chapter is set to launch a \$5 million campaign for the \$3 million cost of building. The remaining \$2 million would supplement operating costs for the first two years.

But the goal is to build an "urban" village. And Milwaukee would be the prototype for that concept. None of the more than 300 SOS Children's Villages worldwide is located within a large city.

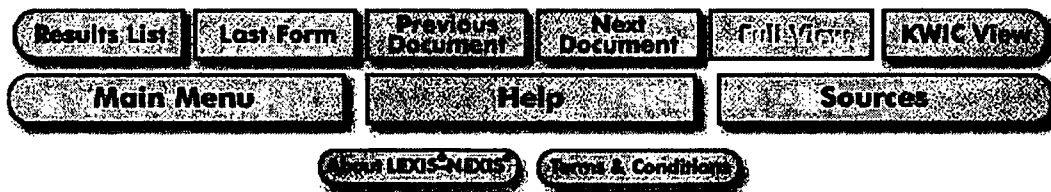
The Milwaukee village would be the third in the United States the others are in Florida and Lockport, Ill. The non-profit organization was founded in 1949 by an Austrian medical student on behalf of children abandoned and orphaned during World War II.

"We knew it wouldn't be easy," Broekhuizen said. "I do believe this project is worthwhile and we will find a niche. It's just taking a lot of time to find that place."

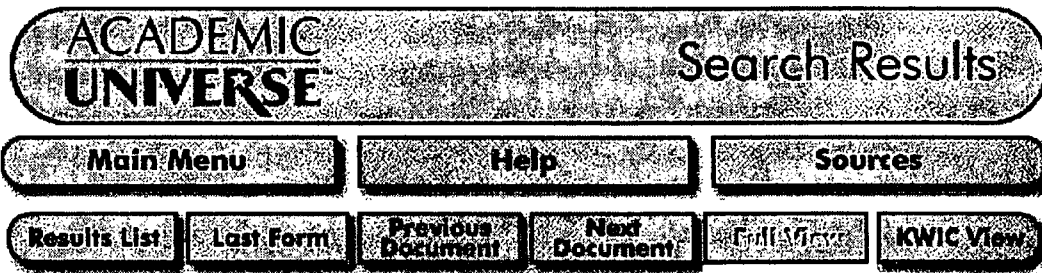
In the meantime, the chapter is sponsoring a benefit for children and adults June 14 to raise money for current operating expenses. The benefit will feature pianist Monique Copper performing "The Story of Babar" and "The Beast of Monsieur Racine."

The benefit a combination of piano music, slide show and storytelling will be at 3:30 p.m. at the Woman's Club of Wisconsin, 813 E. Kilbourn Ave. ----- Tickets to the benefit are \$10 for an adult, \$5 for a child or \$25 for a family. Patron contributions range from \$50 to \$1,000. To order tickets, send a check payable to SOS Children's Villages, Milwaukee Chapter to: Jill Broekhuizen, 4849 N. Oakland Ave., Milwaukee, WI 53217.

LOAD-DATE: May 26, 1998



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Copyright 1998 Sun-Sentinel Company
Sun-Sentinel (Fort Lauderdale, FL)

July 19, 1998, Sunday, Palm Beach EDITION

SECTION: LOCAL, Pg. 3B

LENGTH: 498 words

HEADLINE: DONATIONS POUR IN FOR FOSTER TEEN HOUSING;
MINISTER'S PROPOSAL DRAWS UNEXPECTED COMMUNITY SUPPORT

BYLINE: SALLY KESTIN; Staff Writer

BODY:

Jimmy Cox never doubted his cause. Who could be against helping abused and neglected children?

But when the Baptist minister appealed to the public last month to help build foster homes for 400 youths in Broward County, he never expected to get such an outpouring of support.

From a Tamarac woman who sent a \$ 25 check to a Palm Beach County foundation dangling the prospect of a multimillion dollar donation, South Floridians have stepped up to help make Cox's dream a reality.

Margate developer Philip Procacci pledged to build 10 foster homes at a cost of \$ 170,000 each, Cox said. Dozens of others have offered to help raise money, get the word out or do whatever they can.

"It touched a nerve because we're dealing with our children," said Cox, pastor of West Lauderdale Baptist Church.

Cox has been so overwhelmed by the response that he has scheduled a town hall meeting this week to discuss plans and organize volunteers. The meeting will be at 7 p.m. Thursday at Fort Lauderdale City Hall.

Cox's plan originally consisted of raising \$ 9 million to build a cluster of 40 homes that would house up to 10 children each. It has since grown to include an "academic village" to house 300 more youths, ages 15 to 18, on another site.

If successful, the projects, at a combined cost of about \$ 16 million, will be the largest private effort to date to help the state care for abused, neglected and abandoned children.

Cox is working with Johnny Brown, administrator of the Department of Children & Families in Broward County. The county's foster care system is in crisis, social services officials say.

Because of a shortage of foster care, some children are crammed into homes with as many as a dozen other youths. Some have suffered abuse in the foster homes and shelters that are supposed to be safe havens.

A national youth advocacy center has called the county's foster care system one of the most dangerous in the country and is threatening a federal lawsuit. It was against that backdrop that Brown turned to Cox last fall.

Cox solicited the help of church leaders and appealed to the public. More than 60 people contacted Cox in response to a story in the Sun-Sentinel last month.

One man said he was affiliated with a Palm Beach County foundation that had \$ 750 million to give away and was interested in contributing to the projects, Cox said.

The man and the foundation want to remain anonymous.

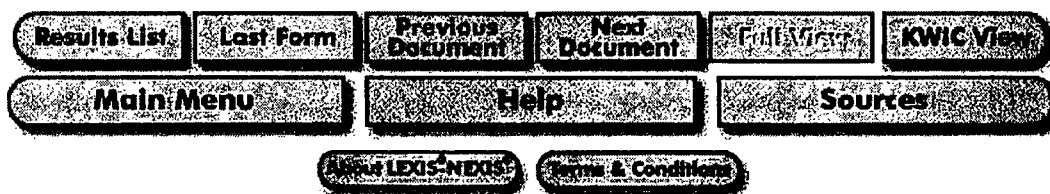
Procacci, a commercial real estate developer, told Brown he will build 10 homes, Cox said. Procacci could not be reached for comment.

Barbara Weiss of Fort Lauderdale, who calls herself a professional volunteer, offered to help coordinate recreational and educational activities for the children, such as music and dance instruction.

"They need every bit of positive enhancement they can get," said Weiss, who splits her time among 29 nonprofit agencies.

"They're so far behind, and they're fighting all the odds."

LOAD-DATE: July 20, 1998



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Protecting America's Children: It's Everybody's Business™

LEGISLATIVE ALERT

June 26, 1998

While tobacco legislation and its potential new revenue for child care have moved from center stage, several key issues^{3/4} proposed cuts to Title XX (the Social Services Block Grant), amendments to the Fair Housing Act, and the juvenile justice proposals S. 10^{3/4} remain pending and need your attention. Funding for Title XX is a moving target, but the juvenile justice and fair housing proposals appear to be on hold thanks to your ongoing advocacy. It is important to continue to let your Representative and Senators hear from you on these three issues. The Congress has just begun its Independence Day recess that will extend until July 14 for the House and July 6 for the Senate. This time provides another good opportunity to call and visit your Representative and Senators at home.

1. TITLE XX MESSAGE: Cuts In Title XX Grant Will Undermine Essential Services to Abused And Neglected Children, the Elderly and Persons With Disabilities

Thanks to the efforts of a broad array of social services advocates, representing children, the elderly and individuals with disabilities, a House Appropriations Subcommittee approved \$2.29 billion for Title XX for FY 1999^{3/4} the same level of funding the program received last year. This is a step in the right direction, but efforts to save this program are far from done. The House and Senate are not likely to give final approval for FY 1999 funding until September and the likelihood of more cuts looms for the future.

Action required on Title XX

- **Contact your U.S. Representative and two Senators. Tell them to oppose any reductions in Title XX funding.**

2. JUVENILE JUSTICE MESSAGE: Proposals Place Children at Great Risk

While S. 10 has not moved to the full Senate for action and efforts to modify it continue, the pending proposals still pose an extreme risk to children and young people.

Action Required on S. 10

- **Contact your two U. S. Senators. Tell them to vote NO on S. 10.** The bill remains short on prevention, places children in custody at risk of physical or sexual assault and intimidation by adult prisoners, and fails to prevent children's access to guns.

3. FAIR HOUSING MESSAGE: Fair Housing Amendments, Unfair to Children and Youths

Again, thanks to continued advocacy and negotiation, the House Judiciary Committee has repeatedly delayed voting on H. R. 3206, the Fair Housing Amendments Act, a bill that would strip the federal fair housing protections for abused and neglected children



and youths and others living in group care. If enacted, localities would be able to use zoning laws to exclude residential group homes servicing children and youths from neighborhood settings.

Action Required on H.R. 3206

- **Contact your U.S. representative. Tell them to vote NO on H. R. 3206 or any substitute bill.**

Call/fax/write your Representative and Senators at their District office AND their DC offices: U. S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515; U. S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510. To call a congressional office in DC, dial 202/224-3121 and ask for your Member's office.

For more advocacy/policy information contact the CWLA Public Policy Department at (202)942-0278, FAX: (202) 638-4004, or e-mail advocate@cwla.org.

[CWLA's Home Page](#) | [Advocacy Page](#)

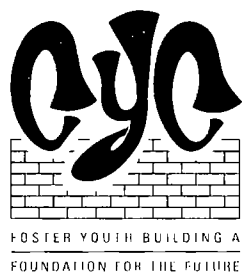
CA Youth Connection



CALIFORNIA
YOUTH
CONNECTION

FOSTER YOUTH BUILDING A
FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE

114 Sansome Street, Suite 921
San Francisco, CA 94104-3820



Janet Knipe
Statewide Coordinator

Joy Warren
Outreach Coordinator

114 Sansome Street
San Francisco, CA
94104-3820

CALIFORNIA YOUTH CONNECTION

"Working to Improve the Lives of Children & Youth in Foster Care"
1996-1997 SUMMARY

What Is CYC?

California Youth Connection (CYC) is an advocacy organization dedicated to improving the foster care system. Our members are current and former foster youth ages 14-24.

CYC educates and the public and policy makers about the unique needs of foster youth, as well as assisting decision makers to implement policies that truly serve children and families.

The Facts

There are currently **23 CYC chapters** in California with over 400 members. When the Statewide Office opened in January, 1995, there were only 9. This is an 250% increase in the last 2 ½ years. In 1996-97 alone, CYC added chapters in Santa Cruz, Shasta, Tehama, Glenn, Humboldt, Riverside and San Bernadino counties. Counties interested in starting chapters in 1997-98 include Orange, Kern, Kings, Santa Barbara, Ventura and Fresno. Chapters meet regularly, as well as attend statewide activities. Involvement teaches youth leadership and advocacy skills.

Accomplishments

Training:

Day At The Capitol: Over 120 youth from 20 counties received training on advocacy and the legislative process, and met with 90 legislators to discuss foster care issues.

Statewide Conferences: Santa Clara: 190 youth and adults attended and received training on the rights of foster youth, leadership, and identifying local issues.

Los Angeles: 130 youth from 17 chapters worked on developing policy recommendations and strategies on issues of adoption, kinship care, older/younger youth and changes in group home policies.

Administrative Board Training: 18 youth Board members learned about strategic planning and organizational development, as they were guided through a visioning process to determine where they wanted CYC to be in 1-2 years.

Legislation: This year CYC has collaborated with Assemblyman Tom Woods (R-Redding) on the *Higher Education Grant for Former Foster Youth*. This bill was recently amended into AB 1544 and will soon be heard in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Policy Committees: CYC youth participate in the following committees: Regulatory, which meets quarterly with Community Care Licensing; Legislative, which reviews all legislation related to foster youth.

Networking with all foster youth: CYC youth produce a quarterly newsletter, send regular legislative updates and minutes from Board meetings to all members, are working on the development of 2 videos to recruit more youth and explain CYC to potential funders, and are in the process of creating a website.

**We Have Made
Presentations To:**

California State Legislature
California Congressional Members and Senators
County Welfare Directors
Judicial Council of California
Child Welfare League of America
California Association of Children's Homes
California Association of Services for Children
National Resource Center for Youth Services
Los Angeles County judges
Foster and adoptive parent training programs
County social work training programs
CASA volunteer training programs
State of Wisconsin Independent Living Program

Why CYC is Important

CYC gives us a voice. Through our involvement in CYC we can facilitate positive policy change to benefit other children and youth in the foster care system.

CALIFORNIA YOUTH CONNECTION

“Working to Improve the Lives of Children & Youth in Foster Care”

SELECTED CYC CHAPTER PROJECTS:

Contra Costa: CYC youth have been hired by the Department of Social Services as full partners in the recruitment of foster and adoptive parents. The youth do outreach, assist with the homestudy process, and monitor paperwork. CYC youth are also a part of the training for prospective foster and adoptive parents, as well as new social workers.

Los Angeles: A group of youth recently met with two LA judges to address their concerns about the court process. The judges were so impressed, they will take up the youth's concerns and invited them to make a presentation at the judge's conference in October.

Merced:

CYC youth have been involved in the planning process for a new county shelter. The youth made policy recommendations and, when the center opens, will also decorate it. The county is also planning on adopting the LA model of “Emancipation Assistants” and will add one new position by the end of the year.

Sacramento:

CYC youth are researching transitional housing programs statewide and nationally, and will be attempting to work with the Department to bring create transitional housing opportunities for their county.

San Francisco:

CYC youth have assisted the Department with the development of an ombudsperson position for their county; and have been asked to participate in the Technical Assistance Committee, which makes policy recommendations to the Department.

Santa Clara:

CYC youth will be convening focus groups with youth in their county to discuss the different programs the youth have experienced while in the system, and what suggestions the youth have for improved policies. These findings will be presented to the Department.

Additionally.....

Most chapters also have youth members speak to new social workers, foster and adoptive parents and CASA volunteers as a part of their training curriculum.

California Youth Connection Conference Report

The Consumer Perspective on Foster Care: Legislators, Child Welfare Professionals, & Advocates Listen to Foster Youth's Proposals to Improve the System

California Youth Connection (CYC) is a foster youth advocacy organization which is unparalleled in any other state in the nation. The membership of this group consists entirely of current and former foster youth ages 14-24 who work to improve foster care. CYC youth pursue change through advocacy on the local level, through promoting foster youth participation in policy development, and by educating the public on the needs of youth in out of home care.

In August of 1997, CYC held its 10th semi-annual statewide conference in Los Angeles, California. At this event, over 150 youth presented their proposals for reform to a panel of "Distinguished Leaders."

The Panel

Assembly Member Louis Caldera
Assembly Member Carl Washington
Peter Digre, Director, L.A. County Department of Children & Family Services
Robin Nixon, Child Welfare League of America
Carole Shauffer, Director, Youth Law Center
Georgia Prover, Professor, University of California at Los Angeles
Deanna Carlson, Outreach Coordinator, Family Research Council
Nina Grayson, Director, California Services for Children

The youth focused on the following issues:

The Issues

- ◆ Adoption
- ◆ Kinship Care
- ◆ Group Homes
- ◆ The Needs of Younger Foster Children & the Needs of Emancipating Youth

The Proposals

Kinship Care At a time when the number of children living with relative foster care providers is rapidly increasing, relatives and even child welfare officials are calling for less supervision and oversight by child welfare agencies. The Director of the California Department of Social Services claims that it is time for the government to get out of the business of kinship care.

At the 1997 Child Welfare League of America Conference on Kinship Care, many relatives spoke out in favor of decreasing social worker visits and child welfare agency requirements for kin providers.

CYC youth selected kinship care as a topic because they are eager to add their voices to the conversation. CYC youth believe that it is best for foster children to stay with family *as long as* the relative can provide a safe home. These youth know the important issues in kinship care from first hand experience.

The youth identified the problems they feel need attention in kinship care and proposed the following solutions to the problems. Solutions appear in bold and their comments appear in italics. Direct quotes from the youth appear in bold italics.

Safety

***Do not place children with relatives unless the relative has a criminal record clearance and child abuse background check.**

No one should assume that a relative will be a good caretaker simply because he or she is an aunt, uncle, or grandparent. Several youth reported experiencing problems in relative placements, including living with relatives who abused alcohol or drugs, enduring abusive treatment, inadequate food, and being clothed in "rags" while the caretaker's biological children had adequate clothing.

***Establish a "trial period" of 3 months for relative placements. Conduct drop-in visits, if necessary, and quarterly inspections. Provide youth with access to an ombudsman.**

Social Workers

***Educate social workers on the special needs of children in kinship care.**

Social workers should pay special attention to children placed with kin because these children may be less likely to report problems in the home due to loyalty issues. Just as many children feel obligated to protect their parents, they may similarly feel that they have an obligation to protect their grandparents or other relatives.

References

- *Require prospective relative caretakers to submit letters of reference.**

You need references to get a job at McDonald's, but you don't need any references before you are entrusted with the care of a foster child.

Training and Support

- *Provide relatives with training developed specifically for kin providers.**

They should train relatives just as they train non-relative foster parents. Several of the youth recalled negative experiences which they believe might have been prevented if their relative foster providers had received training:

"My aunt always used to tell my sisters and me that we were not her kids and she openly treated our cousins differently. I think it would have been better if she had been trained."

"I can remember my aunt and my mom fighting for hours. My mom would be on the porch at 2 in the morning, drunk and screaming that she wanted to see her kids. A foster parent would have called the police, but I think my aunt put up with it because it was her sister. I think someone should have told my aunt that was not appropriate. It was painful for me and my siblings."

- *Establish joint support groups with relative providers and youth in their care.**

Adoption There is an enormous pro-adoption movement gathering strength in this country. In November of 1997, President Clinton signed into law legislation which is designed to move more children from foster care into adoption. In California, advocates are teaming up with child welfare agencies to train social workers on the philosophy that permanence is essential to the success of children and that, if children cannot be safely reunified with their parents, then adoption is the only option which guarantees permanence. CYC youth feel it is important to share their insights and opinions about adoption with social workers, judges, attorneys, advocates, and the general public.

The Needs of Youth

- *Maintain biological family ties when appropriate.**
- *Consult children about adoption and include them in decision making about their lives.**
- *Make an effort to place children with families with similar cultural backgrounds.**

Information Sharing

***Increase open adoptions.**

***Make available to adopted youth any information, including family history and family medical history.**

Information helps youth to develop a sense of identity. Also, providing medical history is clearly important for youth's health needs.

"I should be able to tell my doctor if my family has a history of heart disease. I can't do this without information."

***Provide adopted youth with the right to review their records when they turn 18.**

Siblings

***Never separate brothers and sisters unless a child is endangered by keeping siblings together.**

Adoption should not take priority over keeping siblings together.

***Establish a right to visitation for siblings.**

If siblings are not adopted together, then it is essential to a child's well-being and sense of identity to maintain sibling relations.

CYC youth would like to serve on a task force to address ways to ensure that siblings have the opportunity to maintain relationships after adoption

***Give siblings the right to participate in the decision making process for adoption of another sibling. This participation should include getting to know the prospective adoptive family and having veto power over the ultimate decision.**

***Train prospective adoptive parents on the importance of maintaining contact between siblings, including visits, phone calls, exchanging letters and pictures.**

Ensuring Quality Care

***Keep adoption cases open for 24 months.**

Because many youth have lived in poor quality foster homes, they are concerned about the fact that adoptive families are not supervised. Adoption cases should remain open for 24 months as a trial period to determine if the child is safe and satisfied in the adoptive home.

Group Homes Often youth are placed in group homes because there are not enough openings in foster homes. Group homes differ from foster homes in many aspects: they use "shift care", which means that staff rotate shifts in caring for the youth in the home and they are often structured on a system which correlates behavior with privileges. Many CYC youth are current or former group home residents. Their personal experiences have inspired them to propose the following ideas for improving the lives of children in the system.

***Make group homes more home like.**

***Decrease group home placements.**

Many youth are placed in group homes when they don't need to be there. More youth should have the opportunity to live in foster homes.

***Make group home outings more family oriented.**

***Create a group home task force in every county and include foster youth participants.**

***Ensure that probation youth are not treated differently than dependent youth who live in the same group home together.**

The Rights of Youth in Group Homes

***Ensure that youth do not suffer retaliation for filing grievances.**

***Require social workers to keep confidential all information shared by youth.**

Accountability

***Require group homes to disclose their expenditures to the youth in their care.**

***Require counties to specify the amount of money that group homes are required to spend on clothing per month.**

***Require group homes to maintain records of the food they serve and require nutritionists to review food service to ensure that the youth are provided with adequate food.**

Staff

***Screen group home staff more carefully.**

***Establish procedures and guidelines for staff dismissal.**

***Include foster youth in screening process for prospective staff.**

***Ensure better trained staff. Use current and former group home youth to train staff.**

***Hire racially diverse staff.**

***Hire young staff with personal experience living in group homes.**

Services for Teens

***Create a special category of true emancipation homes which focus on preparing youth for independence, where the youth are actually involved in the operation of the home.**

***Establish guidelines for group homes regarding preparation of youth for emancipation. Require group homes to make independent living training a part of daily life.**

Youth should have the same opportunity that youth who live with their biological parents have in terms of helping to make meals, iron clothes, and perform other tasks in preparation for life on their own.

***Prohibit group homes from preventing youth from participating in extra-curricular activities such as sports and student government.**

Independent Living Program Participation

***Enforce the requirement that group homes provide access to Independent Living Program to youth.**

***Do not permit group homes to deny access to ILP as a form of discipline.**

***Require county ILP staff to visit group homes in order to ensure youth are provided access to ILP. County ILP staff should report to Community Care Licensing those group homes which do not.**

Community Care Licensing

***Create confidential group home evaluations to be conducted by the youth residents. Keep evaluations on file with Community Care Licensing (CCL.)**

***Require CCL to visit group homes every 3-6 months.**

***Require CCL to interview all residents during every visit to a group home.**

***Require CCL investigators to interview youth privately.**

***Create "emancipation assistant" positions for former foster youth who can assist CCL with development and implementation of youth evaluations. Emancipation assistants would also act as advocates for youth whose rights are restricted or denied in group homes.**

The Needs of Younger Foster Children & the Needs of Emancipating Youth

Younger children who enter foster care are particularly vulnerable because they are unable to advocate for themselves. With

caseloads increasing along with the numbers of young children in out of home care, more children are put at risk if social workers are less able to provide adequate services which reflect the unique developmental needs of the child.

The State of California terminates all support and supervision of foster youth once they turn 18, the age of “emancipation.” Without family to fall back on, many emancipated youth become homeless, drop out of college, or return to the abusive and neglectful homes from which they were initially removed.

CYC youth stress the need for specialized services for both younger and older youth and don’t want either group to be overlooked.

Social Workers

***Reduce social worker caseloads so that they can pay more attention to individual youth.**

Social workers often do not return phone calls and don't have enough time for youth

***In addition to regular monthly social worker visits, mandate surprise visits every 6 months.**

***Require social workers to ensure pre-placement visits to prospective foster homes and group homes.**

It is important to make every effort to find youth appropriate placements in order to avoid the disruption of multiple placements.

Services

***Create a mentor program for younger youth. Older and emancipated youth can serve as mentors.**

Youth would like to give back to the system by volunteering, mentoring younger foster youth, educating foster parents, social workers, lawyers, and the general public about the needs of foster youth.

***Teach youth their rights, i.e., their rights to be free from abuse, to adequate clothing, to an allowance, to participate in extracurricular activities, etc.**

***Provide tutoring.**

Preparation for Emancipation

***Mandate that foster care be made available to youth up until the age of 21.**

Currently, the state abdicates all responsibility for foster youth once they reach age 18. It is impossible to expect youth to establish complete independence at 18. Foster youth have no family on which they can rely for support or guidance, and many struggle in their transition to adulthood. Too many emancipated youth become homeless, are forced to drop out of college, or return to abusive environments.

***Provide vocational training and internship opportunities.**

***Establish resource centers for emancipated youth which provide the following:**

Referrals to affordable housing
Job referrals
Access to computers.
Create opportunities for recognition of achievement

***Expand transitional housing.**

***Create emancipation teams consisting of emancipated youth and specialized social workers who work together to prepare youth who leave the system at age 18.**

***Require that all youth have a copy of their birth certificate and social security card before they emancipate.**

Independent Living Programs

***Expand the Independent Living Program (ILP) from its current service population of 16-18 year olds to 14-21 year olds.**

***Ensure that Independent Living Programs include the following:**

Household duties (cooking, cleaning, laundry)
How to deal with peer pressure
Self-esteem issues
Leadership skills
Personal hygiene
Job etiquette
Sex education
Computer training
Assistance with completing college and financial aid applications and researching

scholarships.
Preparation for the SAT.
College tours.

***Place cash incentives given to youth for attending ILP in the bank.**

Evaluations

***Create placement evaluations to be completed by youth.**

*Social workers and foster care providers evaluate children when they leave placements
but the youth never have an opportunity to evaluate the providers.*

Quotes to use either at the end or as sidebars:

"You are not the leaders of the future. You are today's leaders."--Carole Shauffer, Director of the Youth Law Center, in response to CYC youth who called themselves "leaders of the future."

"I have been to hundreds of meetings about how to improve foster care. I learned more today from you than in all of those meetings." Professor Georgia Prover, in comments to CYC youth after their presentations to a panel of "Distinguished Leaders."

***RESHAPING CHILD WELFARE POLICY:
YOUTH PERSPECTIVES***

**CALIFORNIA YOUTH CONNECTION
FOCUS GROUPS REPORT, 1997**

By Janet Knipe

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Emily Bruce and Myeshia Grice for their assistance in the facilitation of the focus groups and, with Joy Warren, for their expertise in the child welfare field which greatly contributed to the completion of this final report. I would also like to thank Sheryl Fullerton for her expertise with the overall conceptualization and development of the project and her editorial assistance with the final report.

RESHAPING CHILD WELFARE POLICY: YOUTH PERSPECTIVES

FOCUS GROUPS REPORT, 1997

INTRODUCTION

As we near the end of the century, it seems that all our assumptions about welfare policy have been questioned. New laws have been passed, new policies adopted, old programs have been discontinued. In the debates about our responsibility to struggling families and their children and about the role of the child welfare system in both protecting children and preserving families, however, we have seldom listened to children and youth. Policy makers, politicians, judges, social welfare professionals, and researchers all have had input into what should be done, as witnessed by the proliferation of programs ranging from Family Support to Family Reunification to adoption. But we have not listened to those who have experienced the system and its programs directly. They have not, in fact, been considered reliable stakeholders in the system, but nothing could be further from reality. Current and former foster youth are essential participants in any reevaluations or changes because no one can be clearer or more articulate about how the foster care system has--or has not--worked for them. Their voices must be heard as we revisit our mission in child welfare in order to examine how the constructions of adoption, family preservation, family reunification, emergency response, long-term foster care, and other programs actually play out in the lives of youth and their families. It is critical for the future of children and their families that we find out whether their experiences match our assumptions.

California Youth Connection (CYC) is a statewide advocacy organization of 250 current and former foster youth that is unique in that it is run by the youth themselves. By working on legislation and collaborating with their own local county social service departments, they are striving to improve policies that affect youth in the foster care system. CYC members identify issues they believe should be addressed based on their experiences and work to educate the public and policy makers about their unique needs.

In existence since 1988, CYC was formed in response to the growing concern that the voice of foster youth (the true “consumer” of child welfare services) was not valued or included in the development of policies that controlled their lives and destinies. Some policy makers seemed aware of the lack of participation, but no moves were made to address it. Furthermore, CYC youth found that many policy makers who were determining the priorities and outcomes of the child welfare system had never spoken with anyone who had actually experienced that system. Until CYC was formed, this lack of foster youth participation had been acknowledged for some time but not addressed. According to Johnson, Yoken and Voss (1995), “The children themselves have much to teach us about those aspects of our family foster care system that are working well for them and their families, and those that need modification.” Faced with the rapidly changing nature of the child welfare system, and as leaders look for new answers to old problems, CYC was formed to create a vehicle for youth to study issues, articulate their needs, and develop solutions and policy recommendations. CYC youth agree with Bush and Gordon (1982) that “the participation of children who are affected by child welfare decisions is a necessary ingredient for effective decision making . . . there is an untapped potential for improving social services and contributing to family stability by seeking out and paying attention

to their views. These views are important because children are the *best source* (italics added) of information on some outcome measures.”

Although CYC members have regularly discussed ways to improve the foster care system, they had not been asked directly how the child welfare system had worked for them and their families. In an effort to assess the current child welfare system from the youth’s perspectives, CYC decided to talk to foster youth from across the state and then evaluate how their experiences matched current assumptions and knowledge. Rather than using a survey questionnaire or other interview methods, the organization decided to use focus groups. Focus groups provide a more comfortable peer group setting that is less intimidating and encourages foster youth to share their experiences more openly and to exchange ideas in a more analytical and thoughtful way. They also had the advantage of gathering large amounts of information from a broad sample relatively quickly.

This paper is a report on those focus groups. Its intent is to accurately depict the ideas, concerns, and recommendations of the youth who participated, and to educate those who create legislation, make child welfare policy decisions, adjudicate foster and adoption cases, or in any way work with or affect these young people’s lives.

METHODOLOGY

California Youth Connection is organized on a regional model, with five geographic regions and 20 chapters throughout the state. To ensure the greatest representation of views and participation, focus groups were conducted in each of the five regions, plus two additional groups-- one in the southern region and one in the Central Valley region. Since over 40% of

California's foster youth live in LA County and because of the large geographic distances from the northern to the southern ends of the Central Valley, these two additional groups were necessary to ensure appropriate representation. Focus groups were scheduled in San Francisco, Sacramento, Redding, Visalia, San Diego and Los Angeles, but youth from all participating chapters in the surrounding regions were invited to attend. Participation in the focus groups was voluntary, sometimes taking place at a regular CYC meeting, and other times at a meeting set up solely for this purpose. Approximately 55 youth, ages 16-20, or roughly one-fifth of CYC's membership statewide, participated in the seven focus groups. Approximately 60% of the youth were still in foster care; most of the remaining 40% had emancipated within the last two years. Adult supporters from the chapters also attended the sessions but did not participate. The groups were facilitated by Janet Knipe, CYC Statewide Coordinator; Myeshia Grice, CYC Youth Organizer; and Emily Bruce, doctoral candidate at the School of Social Welfare, University California at Berkeley.

The central overarching question asked in the focus groups was, "What were your experiences as young people in the child welfare system?" To focus the discussions further, facilitators asked the participants to concentrate on seven key programs or processes in child welfare: emergency response, court process, family reunification, long-term foster care, family support, family preservation, and adoption. In order to be sure that the youth all had the same concept of each of the programs, facilitators led discussions to help youth define and clarify their understanding of each one. Each program was then defined in a standardized way across all focus groups. Each group was asked the same questions about each of the programs they had experienced. If participants had not directly experienced newer programs, such as Family

Support or Family Preservation, they were asked to consider how they would have worked for themselves and their families. This was an especially helpful approach when the discussion turned to adoption, which had not been considered for most of these youth.

FINDINGS

Emergency Response Programs

Of all the topics discussed in the focus groups, the concerns about emergency response processes and procedures were among the most striking. Since all youth had entered foster care through this program, they had first hand knowledge to draw on. More than anything else, the youth objected to the lack of information they were given about what was going on, why they were being removed, and what was going to happen to them (and to their parents and siblings). There was almost near unanimity that the social worker “talked down to them” or “talked to [them] in a childish way and were not forthcoming with clear information.” When they asked social workers what was going on, they said they were told “we can’t tell you.” One youth said, “They kept telling me, you’re going home, you’re going home. Here it is eight years later and I’m still not home.” Another suggested that, instead of abruptly removing children from school, the social worker should meet with the whole family and explain to everyone what was going to happen.

Youth agreed that there should be more surprise visits to the home, but did not agree on visits to school. Some wanted school visits, others did not. Those who wanted school visits thought they would allow children to speak more openly about their family situations; others were opposed to it because of the loss of privacy and the stigma that would be attached to them if

their friends saw them interviewed by the social worker or police. They all did believe, however, that the social worker should always interview the child alone, even if a parent was nearby, because the child should have an opportunity to express his or her feelings about the family and would be inhibited if the parent was present.

Youth also stated that police, as well as social workers, could be more sensitive to their needs and more supportive of them during the confusing time when they were being removed from their families. The prevailing desire was to be told the truth, and the consensus was that withholding information was more damaging than anything. More training for social workers and police on assessment techniques was also suggested, since many youth lied to social workers to protect their family, even though they knew they should have been removed. Without exception the youth felt they should never be escorted from school or their home in a police car; it's not only embarrassing but also adds to the negative self-image many have as they blame themselves for their family's problems. One youth felt that the removal process she went through was more positive because the social worker consulted her about the placement with a particular foster family, and this smoothed the transition.

Court Process

The overwhelming view of the youth in these focus groups was that they felt left out of the court process, that their opinions were not taken seriously, that their attorney did not represent their interests in court, and that many never actually spoke to their attorney. They voiced concerns about a lack of information about every aspect of the court process: that they had an attorney who should be representing their interests; that they had the right to attend court

hearings; that they could state their preferences in court. Comments such as “no one asked me, they just told me what would happen” and “the social worker talked to everyone except me” embody the frustration the youth felt about the mysterious court process that seemed, in most cases, to go on without their knowledge. Some youth expressed concerns that they had not been prepared about what to expect. They described long waits for their time in court and feelings of being intimidated once they were in the courtroom. One youth told of the awkwardness of encountering a parent whom she had not seen in some time in the courtroom.

Youth felt that no one involved in the court process had made much of an effort to account for and anticipate the way they were likely to perceive it. These experiences left youth afraid of the court process, uncertain of what the outcome might be, and concerned about how it would change their lives without considering their feelings or preferences. Even those youth who were included in the court process expressed concerns regarding a lack of preparation about what to expect.

Some youth in the focus groups did report that they had been given more information about court, which gave them the opportunity to choose whether to participate or not. This knowledge gave them a sense of control over their lives that others who were left out of the process did not feel. In those instances, a responsive attorney or a judge who sought out the opinions of youth for whom they were responsible made a great difference in the experience. One youth had a commissioner who, because he paid particular attention to her case, was able to act as a strong advocate for her wishes.

For the most part, the court process was a mystery to youth participating in the focus groups. If they knew about it or knew that they had an attorney, in most cases they did not feel

their opinion was valued or needed. They expressed anger at being left out of such a critical phase of the child welfare system: the phase that ultimately determines their fate.

Family Reunification

Everyone participating in the focus groups had experienced the Family Reunification program, although many did not realize that their parents had had a certain amount of time to comply with a reunification plan so that they could be reunited with their children. Several youth stated, again, that the program was not explained to them and that they didn't feel supported in the process. Once the facilitator explained to them that, by law, their parents did have a certain amount of time (12-18 months), the groups were generally split on whether that was too little or too much time for the reunification process. Several youth stated that they thought the Department of Social Services (DSS) had attempted to reunify their families even though their home situation was very poor; they would have liked DSS to pay more attention to how their parents were actually behaving. As one youth stated, "Don't make the children go home if they don't feel safe." Others felt there was a strong push to reunify with a parent, even though the youth did not have a relationship with that person. As one said, "I'd rather stay in a foster home than be reunited with someone I never knew just because he's my biological father." Youth suggested that they should have been consulted more about the process and about visits with their biological parents as a part of their reunification plan. They recommended that they should be asked their preferences as early as age 10.

Those youth who were given information by the social worker on family reunification and understood the program reported more positive feelings about it. They supported the concept

because they wanted their parents to be given a chance. At least one youth stated that she thought reunification services should be extended past 18 months because “we should always be trying to get back together.” Knowing that their parents had this time gave them a more realistic sense of their parents’ abilities or limitations and, if reunification did not work and they moved into long-term foster care, the youth tended to blame themselves less for their parents’ problems and their removal. As one youth said, “At least the kid knows they tried; no matter how hard I try, I now know it’s never going to be there (family reunified).”

All youth agreed on the need for accurate information about the Family Reunification program and inclusion of youth in the decision-making process. While some believed 18 months was too short and some too long, they did concur that there should be a relationship between the child and the parent for reunification to work. The youth believe that, in some cases, social workers had pursued reunification based more on the biological ties than on any emotional relationship and sense of attachment. They emphasized the importance of their input in the process; they believe they know better than anyone else how visits with their parents have gone and whether they feel safe being at home.

Long Term Foster Care

Although many of the youth in the focus groups believed that foster care had made them stronger, had been better for them than their family situations, and was clearly “necessary,” they also felt that there were many policies that did not meet their needs as “consumers of the system.” They felt that recruitment and screening of caretakers needed to be improved, as well as training, especially on communication and confidentiality. Many cited instances when they felt

confidentiality was breached, either with a therapist or another caretaker, when they complained about their situation or placement. When this information got back to the caretaker, it jeopardized their relationship because the youth always felt only conditional acceptance from the caretaker. Youth in these focus groups universally agreed that foster home placements were preferable to group homes, because of the possibility of a more family-like feeling. They also emphasized that foster care “needs to be significantly better than my experiences at home; in some cases, it’s not.”

Family Support Programs

Although the family support model is so new to California that none of these youth had experienced it directly, they were asked to imagine how these types of services would have affected their families. When they thought about the prevailing premise that the success of this program depends on the background of the family and its particular dynamics, the youth were generally divided on its possible effectiveness. Supporters of the concept stressed that the services could help a family solve their problems before they became severe, and that this was preferable and possibly more effective than waiting until their family was in crisis. They believed that a family should have the opportunity to receive counseling early on and that, with support from a strong extended family, this program could help avoid an escalation of problems that would send a child into foster care, especially if the family could be realistic about their abilities to overcome their problems. Many youth agreed that it would be good for the family to be eligible for support funds during a financial crisis to pay bills temporarily or make a deposit for housing, thereby averting the need to remove children into foster care. But they also saw the

need to protect against the possible misuse of these funds, and suggested that social workers make the payments themselves, or require receipts from the family for any expenditures.

Youth who were skeptical of family support stressed the fragility of their family system and said they believed that bringing in counselors or other community/family members into the problem-solving process would be a breach of privacy that their family would not tolerate. Some stated that they had lived in so many places that they had no community support and that their family often remained isolated from others who could help. Many raised concerns about any money going to the family for the payment of bills. They felt strongly that if the money was given to their family directly, with no strings attached, it might very well support the destructive behavior already established in the family system.

Across all focus groups, youth were generally evenly split on the issue of Family Support programs, with some who believed it is better to try anything to avoid foster care and others who felt their family was too tenuous and lacked the community/extended family support to make this model successful. As one youth said, “My extended family just sat by and watched everything happen and didn’t reach out to help. No program could have made them care.”

Family Preservation Programs

Approximately 25% of all focus group participants had actually experienced some type of family preservation services. However, almost all the youth felt that by the time these services would be applied, their families’ problems would be (or were) very entrenched and that their parents would lie or misrepresent the situation to the social worker or counselor who came in to work with the family. Conceding that all families are different and that these services could

work if their parents “had an open mind,” the majority of youth said that a counselor coming into the home would not be welcome. As one youth stated, “My mother would say: No stranger comes into my house and tells me how to raise my kids. I brought you into this world; I know how to raise you.” Many youth stated that their parents would “pretend,” “lie,” and “not act normal” until the counselor left and then take it out on them. The youth also felt that children would actually be in a more vulnerable position, because they would be blamed for the family’s problems. They worried that if they did or said the wrong thing they would be taken away, or worse, separated from their siblings.

A small minority of youth favored family preservation because there would be somebody in the house watching how the family interacted. As one said, “It would be better than foster care; I wish I’d had it.” But the greater number of youth felt very strongly that family preservation, especially having a counselor spend a certain amount of time actually in the home, would be ineffective and could, in some instances, make the children more vulnerable.

Adoption

As stated previously, although many young people did not have the option of adoption presented to them, they still had opinions about it. Clearly, some youth would have liked the option, as one said, “I wished there was someone there for me.” To support adoption, however, they wanted to be able to maintain contact with their birth families and stressed that they had been fearful of adoption because they thought they would lose all of that contact. When the concept of open adoption was explained to them, they felt relieved that they would not have to choose between one family and another and that there would be greater continuity in their lives

under open adoption. The youth also stressed unilaterally that they never wanted to be separated from their siblings, especially in the adoption process, but also in all other forms of placement. They held this belief even if their biological mother would have had another baby with a different father after they were in foster care. It was “still your family,” many youth said, again highlighting their concerns around closed adoptions. Also, youth felt strongly that they should be a part of the decision-making process regarding their own adoption and that an adoption should occur only if they agreed to it.

Many youth talked about being misled about adoption or being told that by a certain age they were unadoptable. As one youth said, “I heard rumors through the foster care system that I was too old, but they got my hopes up, and then my mom wouldn’t relinquish her rights.” This mirrored another comment by a young woman who said, “They should make sure the parents will give up their rights before they ever talk to a child about adoption.”

The youth also disagreed with the notion that they were unadoptable at a certain age. As one said, “If I want to be adopted, it should be available to me at any age.” At least some youth believed that DSS should not automatically trust all adoptive parents, and that “someone should keep checking” to make sure the adoptive home is meeting the needs of the child. They also raised concerns about a change of status between being a foster child and an adopted child, especially with regard to a loss of assistance with financial aid for college. Finally, young people in all focus groups stressed that adoption should not be considered for everyone, because many feel such strong ties with their biological family and do not want to have to choose one family over another.

PATTERNS IN THE FOCUS GROUP COMMENTS

Aside from specific comments about each program, several patterns in the youth comments reflect overall concerns about their experience and treatment in the child welfare system:

- Youth are not given information and are in fact treated as objects to be moved from one place to another rather than as human beings who want to know what is happening to them and those they love. They reported that information that would have helped them through difficult times was withheld under the guise of protection. Youth frequently cited examples of not being told clearly what was happening to them, the parameters of the program they were in, or the court process.
- Their opinions are not solicited by adults in the system; when voiced, their opinions are often disregarded or discounted. They reported being lied to or misled and of being talked down to. Few adults sought out the youth's views as they went about making decisions about their lives and their families. As one youth said, "After all that has happened to us, what you have to say to me is nothing. I can handle it."
- Youth are left with feelings that they have no control over their lives.
- Families and their children often experience a sense of isolation from their extended family and/or community. This isolation raises questions for the youth about the effectiveness of some programs that require the family to interact with outsiders.
- Intervention should occur before there is a crisis, so that a troubled family can accept help long before it is necessary for children to be placed in foster care.
- More continuity is needed in relationships between youth, their families and social workers.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

One of the assumptions that has prevailed historically in child welfare is that children should never be consulted about their placement because all they will do is complain about it. This is consistent with other thinking that suggests that since the youth don't understand the complexities of the foster care system, they can't make objective decisions about it. It appears, however, that the system itself, including social workers, attorneys, judges and the police have actually contributed to the situation when youth are less able to make informed decisions by withholding critical information from them, instead of treating them as valued members of the decision making team. In addition, professionals in the child welfare system tend to make judgements about children's ability to participate in decisions about their fate based on a flawed sense of what is developmentally appropriate. Since many of these youth have often assumed a parentified role in their families, they are generally more mature than others of the same age who come from more stable families. Our assumptions about what children can handle are drawn from ways of life that may have nothing to do with what the child has experienced. For that reason, youth in (or about to enter) the foster care system are able to understand and accept what social workers and others may be fearful of telling them. From their comments in the focus groups, it's clear that they are all too aware not only of the troubles within their families but also of possible consequences. They can therefore be the social worker's best source of information and can be helpful in assessing difficult situations, especially what makes them feel safe or unsafe. It is only right, given these considerations, that they be consulted about their families and their fates.

Another assumption the youth challenged in these focus groups was the notion that all children wish they had been adopted and that all wish they had never been placed in foster care. Instead, it appears that the youth have a variety of views on adoption; it is not a universally desired outcome for a number of reasons. One of these reasons is the strength of ties to their birth families, dysfunctional as those families may seem to outsiders. They also believed in most cases that foster care was necessary, but that it needed to be better than the situation they were removed from. In many cases, in their view, it was not. This reinforces the aforementioned point that these youth have a clear grasp of reality and should be treated as such.

There are a number of policy recommendations we can draw from this report on the CYC focus groups:

- Improve communication and information sharing with children and youth at all stages of child welfare programming: be honest and learn to deliver information to children in developmentally appropriate ways, accounting for advanced levels of maturity among children who have assumed responsibilities beyond their years in their families.
- Include children and youth in the decisions about their future.
- Promote early intervention into family difficulties before there is a crisis through programs such as family support.
- Promote better training on communication, emphasizing sensitivity to and inclusion of youth's views, for social workers, administrators, caretakers, judges, attorneys, and police.
- Never remove youth from a family or school in a police car.
- Assist social workers in establishing long-term relationships with youth through reduced

caseloads and services that promote following a child through all child welfare programs.

- Always include children and youth in the decision about adoption; if they want to be adopted, they should have the option of an open adoption. All siblings should be kept together and adoption should be available to them at any age.

These policy recommendations are attainable and, according to these youth, would vastly improve the foster care experience for them and for those who will be involved in the child welfare system in the future. Through these focus groups, we have a unique opportunity to learn from the “experts,” the consumers of our child welfare services about how these services have impacted their lives. How better to improve policy and practice than to ask these young people to help us. These thoughtful and stimulating remarks can provide all of us with a critical resource as we reshape and rethink our interventions at all points in the child welfare system. How can we best help families and children in need? Listen to the children

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County of Los Angeles



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES
DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

425 SHATTO PLACE
LOS ANGELES, CA 90020
(213) 351-5602

ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN'S SERVICES
80 LAFAYETTE STREET - 18TH FL.
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10013
(212) 266-2100 • Fax: (212) 266-2250



PETER DIGRE
Director

NICHOLAS SCOPETTA
Commissioner

**TRANSITION TO ADULthood
AND INDEPENDENCE FOR OUR FOSTER YOUTH
EMANCIPATION INITIATIVE**

As we continue discussions around moving people from welfare to work, this important initiative could ensure that many young people, who are at significant risk of entering the welfare system, become productive citizens.

While adoption remains our primary goal for as many children as possible, for some children it is simply not a reality. Each year, thousands of youth who have grown up in the foster care system emancipate to independence without reliable and legally permanent families. Some have no support at all.

It becomes our responsibility as a society to provide these young people, who are proven to be at a heightened risk of homelessness or involvement in the criminal justice system, with the opportunity to succeed as adults.

We therefore, recommend that the President:

I. DECLARE NATIONAL GOALS for children who become independent after aging out of foster care.

These goals should include providing every youth with:

- a safe and comfortable place to live
- an opportunity to continue education or vocational training
- life skills training which supports independence
- employment opportunities or adequate income (i.e. SSI)
- access to quality health care
- access to community services including family planning and drug/alcohol treatment
- ties to community mentors
- adequate clothing and necessary personal items
- availability of records, including those pertaining to their education, health care, foster care, citizenship status, and driver's license
- naturalization education and information for non-citizen youth
- continuing access to supportive services during the most vulnerable years immediately following emancipation

Every state must develop a plan to achieve these goals.

II. ENCOURAGE STATES TO DEVELOP employment, housing and scholarship opportunities for emancipating foster youth.

States must develop a plan to target local, state, federal and private sector employment, housing and higher education scholarship opportunities for the special population of emancipating foster youth.

Initiatives should include:

- blending/earmarking public and private housing programs and foundation resources to create apartment spaces for emancipated youth.
- earmarking Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) funds and encouraging the private sector to create jobs for all older foster youth.
- encouraging local government and contractors to hire emancipating foster youth.
- encouraging blending of private contributions with college, state and federal scholarships to enable emancipating foster youth to go to college.
- creating Statewide support networks for emancipating foster youth. Such networks should provide resources, peer and adult supporters to help plan successful transition to adulthood

III. LOWER THE AGE FOR PARTICIPATION in the Independent Living Program, from 16 to 14, enabling us to engage youth earlier in preparation for this most difficult transition. Special attention to educational needs is critical at this time.



PETER DIGRE
Director

COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

**425 Shatto Place - Los Angeles, California 90020
(213) 351-5602**

EMANCIPATION PLANNING AND SUCCESS IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

**GLORIA MOLINA
YVONNE BRATHWAITE BURKE
ZEV YAROSLAVSKY
DON KNABE
MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH**

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is responsible for the care and supervision of 73,000 abused and neglected children. Every year, almost 1,000 youth age out of (emancipate from) our foster care system.

- In Los Angeles County 300 apartment spaces and crucial support services for emancipating foster youth are in the process of being created over the next three years, largely resulting from grants from the Weingart Foundation and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- In Los Angeles County, targeted employment efforts will generate over 2,000 jobs this year for older foster youth. Employment programs include summer youth employment, as well as focused recruitment efforts by corporations such as Universal Studios, Edwards Theaters and Jack-In-The-Box.
- In Los Angeles County, the Department of Children and Family Services hired over 70 emancipating foster youth, with excellent results, including employing 30 of them as emancipation assistants to help younger children prepare for independence.
- Last year, in Los Angeles County, 500 out of our 800 emancipating foster youth requested college or trade school scholarship assistance. We honored every single request, thanks to the generosity of our community.
- The California Youth Connection (CYC) is a statewide organization of foster youth that was created in 1988. Los Angeles County is home to twelve CYC chapters, representing approximately 200 young adults. The group offers foster teens and newly emancipated young adults (ages 14-24) the opportunity to have their collective voices heard in a positive and effective way.
- Last year, Los Angeles County initiated the "Early Start to Emancipation Program" (ESTEP) which provides 14 and 15 year olds with pre-Independent Living Program training. As part of this program youth 900 youth were assessed to determine basic educational skills, and provided with tutoring services if necessary. In addition, in cooperation with our schools, we work to ensure that children's educational needs are appropriately addressed (i.e., through special education or magnet programs).

15 Graduates of Foster Care Get Their Own Place

■ **Aid:** Complex offers lessons in life, smooths the transition to full independence. For some, it is an alternative to the streets.

By MATEA GOLD
TIMES STAFF WRITER

You're 18, just out of the county foster care system and on your own for the first time.

County officials call this step emancipation, but your future might look like this: No parents to help out with the first month's rent—or anything else, for that matter. No credit to get an apartment. You crash at friends' places and shelters, trying to stay afloat. Sometimes you land on the street because you have nowhere else to go.

But the future for 15 young people leaving foster care this month is decidedly different: A new, two-story apartment building. Monthly allowance for food and

expenses. A computer lab with Internet access. Daily courses in life skills, like balancing a checkbook, budgeting and writing a resume. A new job. And maybe, for the first time, their own home.

This was moving week for the first batch of residents at the Margarita Mendez Apartments, a new complex in East Los Angeles built especially for youths leaving the county foster care system—the first such facility in the state.

Every year, about 1,000 foster care "graduates" are emancipated in Los Angeles County. For many, the exhilaration of being out of the "system" is quickly tempered by the realities of living on their own.

Without a stable family, many become independent without knowing how to grocery shop, look for housing or find a job.

Almost half end up on the streets within six months, officials say.

"There is a crying need" for housing such as the Mendez Apartments, said Fred Ali, executive director of Covenant House California, a shelter for homeless and runaway youths. "Finally, these kids are being discovered. They were just slipping through the cracks when they turned 18."

Mindful of the number of former foster children who end up homeless, and anxious to provide emancipated youth with real-life skills, county officials collaborated with

housing officials to design a facility that provides an array of support and resources for these new adults.

The peach and beige complex, named for a pioneering county social worker, has nine town-house-style units, each one furnished with overstuffed couches, a table and beds donated by community groups. Skylights let sunlight pour into the apartments. An en-

closed courtyard allows children to play outside safely.

Next door to their new apartments, the young residents can work in a fully furnished computer lab or study in the multimedia library. Every day, a social worker will offer counseling and courses in life skills.

Funded by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the \$1.1-million facility was built by the county and the Community Enhancement Corporation, a nonprofit community development group. Additional funding came from the nonprofit United Friends of the Children and the Weingart Foundation.

On Thursday, the young residents hauled in boxes, unpacked clothes and excitedly explored their new digs.

"This is like a dream," said Arturo, 20, who can only be identified by his first name until he is emancipated next week. He has been in foster care for the last three years.

"It's a big step for me, becoming an adult," he said. "Without this—I would have been stuck. I would have had no support."

Gazing around the courtyard lined with new trees, he said: "This . . . is like it was made for us."

Groups like Covenant House have found that many young people like Arturo need more than just shelter, Ali said.

"If you're going to keep them off the streets, you have to surround them with a variety of services," he said. "Unless you have that, there's not much of a chance."

The Mendez Apartments, officials hope, will provide a bridge from the insulated world of foster care to the realities of living alone for the first time.

The residents can get a job with the Community Enhancement Corporation, which will hire them to rehabilitate buildings in the area.

Matilda Romero, the resident manager who lives in the building full-time, promises to be "la abuelita"—the grandmother—to these youths, cooking them meals and showing them how to take care of a home.

"This will be a big family," said Romero, smiling as the first tenants unpacked their boxes.

Joshua Markila was the first to move in, and he has quickly settled into his apartment.

The dishes and glasses are already stacked in rows in his cabinets. Upstairs, his bed is neatly made with a bright green blanket.

"I'm trying to make it like a home," he said, smiling bashfully.

Markila, 19, had been in foster care and group homes since he was 2. When he was emancipated last year, he ended up in a shelter, and then on the streets of Hollywood

for three months.

"Most group homes pay for your phone bills, your food," he said. "When you come out of that, you don't know what it takes. What's good about this place is that they treat you like an adult, like you're on your own."

But, he added, "you can't take your freedom for granted—you have to be responsible."

Residents can stay in the apartments up to 18 months, but they have to work or go to school full time. Each one is required to pay the county 10% of their monthly income, which is put in a trust and returned to them when they leave.

Currently, the county Department of Children and Family Services houses about 100 former foster children in apartments scattered throughout Los Angeles as part of their Bridges to Independence program. About 50 more are on a waiting list.

But the Mendez Apartments are the first designed for this population, and with additional HUD grants, officials hope to build more units like them.

"What we need to do is extend that notion of a family," said Sharlyn Logan, an administrator with the county's Department of Children and Family Services. "This will give them a head start on life, and they'll be ready to face the world a lot better."

In the next several years, officials said, they hope to house 300 to 400 young people leaving foster

care.

"It's a real blessing to have a place like this," said Rafael Angulo, the county social worker assigned to the Mendez residents. "A lot of these kids are not used to doing things on their own. It's really an opportunity for them to redefine their lives. If you're in the system, you're a foster child, period. Now, you can figure out who you are, outside of that."

For some, the center is a home they've never had.

Idalia Lopez wanted to cry when she walked into her new apartment.

"I was really emotional," Lopez, 18, said in Spanish. "It's all so beautiful. I've never lived in something like this."

Lopez had been in foster homes, off and on, since she was 14. "I felt very alone," she said.

Now she plans to finish high school and study cosmetology. "This is really important because you can learn to be independent, save money and help yourself," she said.

Katrina, 18, said living in the Mendez Apartments will help her reach her goal of becoming a social worker. Like Arturo, she is waiting to be emancipated.

"I've been there, so I can understand the kids," she said, as she unpacked dishes and pots in her new kitchen Thursday. She has lived in foster homes for the last 11 years.

The apartment will help her save money while she takes classes at East Los Angeles College and works full time.

"I think this can help out a lot of teenagers," she said. "It's someplace to come home to."

FACT SHEET

EARLY START TO EMANCIPATION PROGRAM (ESTEP)

Background

The ESTEP Program is for foster youth who are age fourteen or fifteen. It is designed ensure that youth begin secondary education with the tools needed to graduated.

Intensive tutoring is provided for youth who are two or more years behind their grade levels in reading or math. It is also designed to ensure that foster youth are better able to make appropriate use of ILP services which begin at age 16.

ESTEP was initiated by the Department in 1995. All services are provided through the California Community College Foundation. The ESTEP Program serve over 700 youth in Fiscal Year 1996/97.

OBJECTIVE

The Early Start to Emancipation Programs is designed for foster teens who are living with kinship caregivers, foster parents, placed in foster family agency homes or in small family homes. The objectives are:

- to develop a baseline assessment of youth who reach the age of 14 and 15
- to determine strengths and deficiencies in the following five domains
 - a. basic academic knowledge skills
 - b. career and vocational development skills
 - c. daily living skills
 - d. survival skills
 - e. interpersonal and social skills
- to clarify or gather additional information in support of the assessment findings
- to identify and provide linkages with appropriate public or private resources to help correct deficiencies
- to motivate youth and caregivers to play a more active role in the short-term series of group orientation and information sharing opportunities, and individual educational testing

- to introduce the contracting concept and to help the youth and caregiver complete the initial Emancipation Planning Contract which identifies the youth's perspective of his/her educational progress, strengths, career goals, and support needs. The Contract also provided direction for how the caregiver and social worker can assist the youth to achieve or re-evaluate his/her goals and priorities
- to provide emancipation enrichment services which included individual tutoring for 280 youth and monthly remedial attention in a group setting for 525 youth
- to provide monthly educational skill building workshops (which include the above referenced tutorial groups for 20 youth in each of the seven participating community colleges).

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FACT SHEET

STREET OUTREACH SERVICES (SOS) FOR YOUTH

Street Outreach Services (SOS) is a crisis intervention unit that provides mobile street outreach to runaway, throwaway and homeless youth who are at-risk for harm and exploitation. The SOS team consists of DCFS Social Workers and peer counselors who go into areas known to be frequented by street youth such as Hollywood, Venice, West Hollywood and Santa Monica to offer and provide appropriate short-term or long-term services. These services include counseling, clothing, hygiene items, snacks, referrals for medical treatment and shelters, and emergency placement. SOS has community-based support and often works in conjunction with privately funded programs also aimed at this vulnerable youth population.

Street Outreach Services operates six (6) days and nights a week in its commitment to reduce the amount of risk and exposure to harm for at-risk youth. Through repeated team contacts with youth and by "meeting kids on their level", SOS attempts to gain the trust and willingness of these youth in order to help them make productive life choices. The program's goal is to reach out to youth who may have not benefited from more traditional strategies and to provide them with options to help them succeed.

11/97arb

FACT SHEET

SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

In May 1995, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) established a Scholarship Program. The program is designed to give every youth emancipating from foster care the opportunity to advance their education with full support and backing of DCFS. Beginning with the class of 1996, this Department offered scholarship assistance based on an unmet need to make certain that 100% of eligible youth have a chance to continue their education. This assistance is provided after all other financial sources have been exhausted.

The Department has created a Scholarship Review Committee that meets weekly to monitor the status of the overall preparation process for upcoming graduates whether or not they are in the Independent Living Program (ILP). In addition, the Committee deals with individual requests for financial assistance or related for those youths already in college or trade school. The funds available are only awarded if the needs of the youths are beyond the services that can be provided by ILP.

The primary focus of the Scholarship Program is to give every youth the opportunity to go to college or trade school and assist in their retention in college. The Scholarship Committee sends out applications and letters to every youth, social worker, ILP Coordinator, foster parents and out-of-home care providers, aiding them in the scholarship application process. Over 500 graduating seniors submitted applications that are at various stages of review and award of assistance based on their completeness.

Scholarship is a program that looks at every applying youth's net financial need and which works to put a package together that will get him or her into a college, university or trade school. Since June 1996, DCFS has written checks for over 500 individual youths to more than 125 different colleges, universities or trade schools. The common criteria for financial support is only that the youth must apply and must complete a financial needs statement which identifies other sources of support including other scholarships, grants, loans, work-study, and the like. The staff then work to determine the bottom line need. In many cases, calls are made to the schools to negotiate reduced rates.

Two major emancipation celebration events have been held. Both involved significant public/private participation including the reward of scholarships. The first celebration was for 120 youths at the Dorothy Chandler Music Center, sponsored by United Friends of the Children. The second was for over 250 youths, hosted by Universal Studios, Hollywood.

Emancipated foster youth are also the recipient of special scholarships from United Friend of the Children, the Teague Family Foundation, Southern California Edison, Wells Fargo Bank, the Family and Children Trust Fund, Youth Opportunities United, radio station KLOS (ABC).

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FACT SHEET

INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM

BACKGROUND

In 1995, six (6) former foster youth ages 18 - 21 and three (3) current group home residents pending emancipation sued the State of New York and won their suit at the New York Supreme Court (Palmer vs. Cuomo). The youth claimed lack of supervision and lack of discharge planning and discharge services. The federal Independent Living Program (ILP) was developed as a result of this lawsuit and other studies on emancipation.

ELIGIBILITY

All current or former foster youth age 16 are eligible for ILP services. Youth may receive services up to age 21 even after the child welfare case is closed.

SERVICES

ILP services are designed to prepare foster youth for independence. These services include:

- Classes in daily living skills
- Vocational and pre-vocational training
- Counseling
- Career development
- Financial management
- Budgeting
- College planning
- Scholarships
- Assistance with SAT

Annually, over 2000 foster youth participate in one or more ILP activities.

FACT SHEET

JOBS SECTION

HISTORY

On January 21, 1994, a JOBS Section was established by the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to provide additional job development resources for emancipating foster youth. The goal of the section is to generate a minimum of 300 full-time and 1000 part-time jobs for foster youth from County departments and the private sector.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

On January 25, 1994, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors adopted Supervisor Deane Dana's motion instructing each County department to establish a 5% hiring goal of all entry level positions for youth emancipating from the foster care system.

On May 12, 1994, the Board of Supervisors adopted a motion by the Department of Community and Senior Citizens Services (DCSCS) to adjust the board approved Job Training Partnership Act's (JTPA) Service Provider Summer Youth Employment Training Program (SYETP) 1994-5 funding allocations by 15%. Eight hundred thousand (800,000) dollars have been set aside to fund services for foster care youth. This project is a collaborative effort between DCSCS, the City of Los Angeles, and the DCFS.

JOB SECTION

The primary focus of the JOBS Sections is job recruitment for emancipating foster youth. The staff of this section will work with various County department and the private sector throughout the County of Los Angeles to identify jobs for foster youth.

DCFS foster youth fill out Employment Referral Forms and submit them to the JOBS Section. These forms are reviewed and the youth are matched to a potential employer.

JOBS FAIR

The JOBS Section is conducting Job Fairs throughout Los Angeles County for DCFS foster youth to inform them about the current job opportunities in County departments and private sector.

STATISTICAL NUMBERS

The following is a breakdown of the number of youth employed yearly.

<u>1994</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>
1,209	1,600	1,502	1,800

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FACT SHEET

EMANCIPATION ASSISTANT (EA) PROGRAM

WHAT IS A EMANCIPATION ASSISTANT

Emancipation Assistants are former foster youth who serve as a vital link between emancipation services and youth in care. Because they have recently experienced the system first hand, they have the credibility and generational nexus to which other youth relate.

Emancipation Assistants support social work staff by explaining policies to youth, providing one-on-one attention to youth, ensuring that youth understand services and serving as a positive role model. Outside of their daily regional duties, Emancipation Assistants have made other contributions such as:

- Panel presentation at statewide conferences (e.g. National Association of Social Workers, California State Association of Pupil Services and Attendance Counselors, Educational Forums, Kinship Conferences, etc)
- Membership in Toastmasters International
- Training for newly hired social workers
- Public speaking at various emancipation events
- Mentoring youth
- Writing articles for national emancipation publication
- Interagency collaboration on projects of concern to foster teens
- Facilitating teen focus groups

GOAL

The Emancipation Assistant Program is designed to enhance emancipation planning and promote successful outcomes for foster youth leaving the protective services system. The Emancipation assistants are former foster youth who have been employed by DCFS in various support functions and who are being reassigned to provide peer support and case management assistance for adolescents in foster care. Under the guidance and directions of the Children's Social Worker, their intensive involvement with selected foster youth is expected to improve self-esteem, motivation, academic performance and readiness to engage in transitional planning.

EMANCIPATION ASSISTANT DUTIES

Emancipation Assistants will engage the youth in constructive planning measures by sharing their personal experience in foster care, conducting constructive interviews, demonstrating a thorough knowledge of relevant resources, peer counseling and advocacy, frequent follow-up contacts, placement support; preparation of life books, information gathering at schools, and accompanying youth to court (when appropriate), etc.

In addition, the Emancipation Assistant will become proficient in conducting or assisting with focus groups, participating in special emancipation events (e.g. job fairs, conferences, life simulations such as Independent City, interfacing with the ILP Coordinator, making single or tandem home visits with social workers, providing documentation, surveying caseloads, and promoting various emancipation programs and opportunities with staff and foster youth.

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FACT SHEET

rites of Passage Program

The Rites of Passage Program was developed to build self-esteem in children and to improve the chances of youth living in foster care. The Department entered into a collaboration with the National Family Life & Education Center (NFLEC), a private community based agency, to provide a services that addresses the lack of preparedness for youth. There are ten (10) Rites of Passage which each youth must complete. The RITES are as follows:

- Historical
- Cultural
- Spiritual
- Emotional
- Mental
- Physical
- Political
- Economics
- Personal
- Social

The ROP is a program for adolescents who are living in long-term foster care with relatives or other caregivers (foster homes, small family homes and group homes). All youth enrolled in the program may remain under the supervision of the child welfare system (DCFS) until 18 years of age. Youth targeted for this program reside in DCFS Regions II and VI and are receiving FR and PP services. Youth enroll in the program voluntarily and continue to participate for a minimum of 10 months or completion. A stipend is available to all active participants.

The 1996-97 emancipated class included forty-one (41) children, of this group 19 are enrolled or have been accepted in colleges, five (5) are going to trade schools, one (1) has joined the Job Corps and one (1) has joined the Army.

The ROP Program was honored as the recipient of the 1994 Achievement Award, presented by the National Association of Counties.

The Rites of Passage Program serves as a component of the Independent Living Program and is currently staffed to provide services for 200 youth. Staff are encouraged to seek out the services of the Rites of Passage Program for all eligible youth in foster care.

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MEMORANDUM

To: Nicole Rabner

From: Carole Shauffer

Date: December 17, 1997

Re: The California Youth Connection and Issues Relating to the
Emancipation of Youth From Foster Care

Every year thousands of young people leave the foster care system at age 18 with no place to go and no family to rely upon. Federal law terminates foster care benefits to young people when they reach age 18 or when they graduate from high school, but no later than age 19. Some states, like New York, extend benefits to youth who remain in school, but most offer little or nothing to these young people. The federal government does fund independent living services for foster youth aged 16 and over, but these services are limited and many youth do not have access to them.

The harsh reality is that, when foster youth leave care, they must find their own place to live, locate a job or other source of income, finance their higher education or training, obtain health care, and cope with all of life's emergencies with little or no help from the government or anyone else.

Emancipation for most young people is a gradual process. Parents slowly increase the rights and responsibilities they give children in handling money, making decisions, and bearing the consequences of their own actions. The family safety net is only gradually withdrawn.

For foster children, the safety net is cut precipitously. While many young people come home to live when they are in their twenties or thirties (and most have a home to go to as long as their parents are alive), foster youth not only can't come to live after college graduation, they don't even have a place to stay during school vacations. They have no one to give them advice on balancing a checkbook or to make an emergency loan when the balancing doesn't quite work. When

scholarships or school loans are late, they are totally without financial support. When they encounter life problems, either serious ones, like an unexpected pregnancy, or minor ones, like how to cook a turkey, they have no stable adult to turn to. Some youth do maintain ties with foster parents; others, who live in group-care, do not even have foster parents.

In summary, youth need help with emancipation, including: (a) expanded independent living programs that begin in the early teens and permeate all aspects of the child's life; (b) financial support once they are emancipated to enable them to complete higher education; (c) resources for emancipation, including housing, jobs and medical care; and (d) emotional and psychological support from caring adults and communities.

A federal initiative on emancipation could have a major impact on the availability of these supports. For example:

- Independent Living Programs should be available to all foster and former foster youth, from age 14 to age 22. HHS should set minimum standards for these programs rather than leaving the design to state and local agencies. Federal law should also require states to address preparation for independent living in the case plan of any child who has not been returned home and for whom an adoptive placement is not being sought. Colleges and universities should be encouraged to direct outreach to younger foster youth to encourage them to continue their education. (California law provides a model for this outreach.)
- States should be able to claim federal financial participation for financial support provided to emancipated youth who remain in school up to age 22. Private public partnerships should be encouraged to provide financial aid to former foster youth who are in college or trade schools. Colleges and universities should be encouraged to provide housing for former foster youth during vacations.
- Federal and state agencies should develop a coordinated approach to assist emancipated youth in obtaining jobs and housing. (For example, in Los Angeles County the Department of Children and Family Services provides housing to emancipated youth under a grant from HUD.) JTPA and other job programs should give priority to former foster youth. Both private and public agencies should be encouraged to develop employment opportunities for current and former foster youth.
- Individuals and community groups should provide mentoring and support to former foster youth. For example, we are working on a plan to connect faith communities with former foster youth. The communities will "parent" that young person, providing them with emergency help, but also with a sense of belonging and support. The development of advocacy organizations like the California Youth Connection should also be encouraged.

These are only a few preliminary concepts. I have enclosed a packet put together by Los Angeles County describing their programs and proposals for action. I am also enclosing more information about the California Youth Connection, including the results of focus groups among foster youth and the report from their annual meeting.

Family preservation, family reunification and adoption are the best solutions for children in foster care. The unfortunate reality is that they won't work for all young people. We owe these young people, and ourselves, the opportunity to take full advantage of their potential so they can become productive citizens and members of their own functioning families

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December 17, 1997

Nicole Rabner
Associate Director for Domestic Policy
The White House
West Wing, Second Floor
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Nicole,

First a belated thank you. It was a pleasure working with you on the event out here. We all had a lot of fun and hope we can continue to work together.

I am enclosing a brief summary of the problems foster youth face when they leave the system. This is far from an exhaustive list of problems with foster care, but does touch on most of the issues the youth raised. As you can see, it also includes some proposed solutions.

I have also included several other materials:

- A brochure describing the California Youth Connection (CYC) and two reports prepared by CYC on issues critical to youth;
- Materials on the Youth Law Center; and
- Materials prepared by Los Angeles County on services to emancipating youth.

CYC does not have an official meeting scheduled beyond January. As I said in my voice mail, they plan to meet in the spring to conduct an issues workshop like the one summarized in the report I am sending. They would be happy to work around your schedule, although it is obviously difficult for young people to meet in June because of school commitments.

I hope this is all helpful. I will call to talk with you further.

Sincerely,



Carole Shauffer
Executive Director

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YOUTH LAW CENTER

The Youth Law Center is a non-profit, public interest law office that has worked to protect abused and at-risk children since 1978. Based in San Francisco, the Center works in the Bay Area, statewide, and nationally to serve children, focusing particularly upon the problems of children living apart from their families in child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Staff attorneys investigate reports of abuse of children in adult jails, county juvenile detention facilities, state institutions, and child welfare systems, and use training, technical assistance, and negotiation to bring about needed change. If abusive conditions or practices continue, the Center uses litigation as a last resort to protect children and ensure humane treatment. Center attorneys also advocate on behalf of poor and disadvantaged children to help them gain access to critical health services.

Over the course of the Center's history, it has brought about extensive changes and improvements in conditions and services for thousands of children throughout the country. The Center's staff is widely recognized as a resource of expertise and support in children's law, and staff attorneys provide consultation, technical assistance, and write and widely disseminate educational materials relating to children's rights. In addition to many articles, book chapters, monographs and reports, Youth Law Center staff attorneys have written the leading legal treatise, *Representing the Child Client*, published by Matthew Bender and used by attorneys across the country.

The Center has a staff of 15, including seven staff attorneys, a paralegal, a development director, an administrator, and clerical staff. The organization is guided by a 21-member board of directors that is composed of representatives of the legal, business, medical, educational, media, and philanthropic communities.

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**YOUTH LAW CENTER
CHILDREN'S LEGAL PROTECTION CENTER**
114 Sansome Street, Suite 950
San Francisco, CA 94104
(415) 343-3379 (phone)
(415) 956-9922 (fax)
e-mail: ELL1418@earthlink.net
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As part of Friends of the Youth Law Center, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are doing your part to help vulnerable children. You will also receive:

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- ◆ Invitation to an annual Youth Law Center reception
- ◆ Recognition and acknowledgment in our newsletter and Biannual Report.

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CHILDREN'S LEGAL PROTECTION NEWS

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CHILDREN'S LEGAL PROTECTION NEWS

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MARCH 1997

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1

YOUTH LAW CENTER FILES LAWSUITS TO PROTECT FOSTER KIDS

San Francisco. In response to serious deficiencies in the State of California's supervision of children in foster care, in late 1996 the Youth Law Center filed two lawsuits against the State.

Rene M. v Anderson

The first suit was prompted by the fact that many child protection systems in California are not operating in compliance with the law. "This lawsuit is the result of many years of failure on the part of the State to guarantee that children are well cared for," said Carole Shauffer, Executive Director of the Youth Law Center and a lead counsel on the case. The suit was filed on behalf of a group of young adults who, until recently, were wards of the foster care system. The action focuses upon the State Department of Social Service's responsibility for ensuring that counties operate their foster care systems in accordance with laws designed to protect children from abuse and guarantee them basic services. The State is charged with ensuring that social workers visit regularly, that children in care receive adequate medical care, and that foster parents be informed about children's medical and educational histories.

"On all three counts, the State has consistently failed," continued Shauffer. "The majority of counties audited since 1991 fail to have regular contact with children in care. This means that children may remain in homes that courts have found to be dangerous, with little or no actual supervision by the agency." In fact, one petitioner in the case, Melissa R., was left in her home for five years while she complained of repeated abuse. Another petitioner,

Rene M., complained of being beaten by her foster mother, but was left in her placement for a year. She was finally removed from the home after another beating with a belt left her legs covered with welts. Yet another petitioner, a girl who was in care from age 14 to 18, lived for six months in a large group home where residents regularly stole from each other, engaged in fistfights that were unabated by staff, and were able to purchase illegal drugs from counselors.

"This lawsuit is the result of many years of failure on the part of the State to guarantee that children are well cared for"

Equally disturbing are the counties' failures in the area of medical care. Because county systems fail to provide timely medical exams or to provide foster parents with medical histories, children do not receive needed treatment, and many children are forced to endure repeated immunizations because past medical records are not given to the foster parents.

"Passage of the recent welfare reform bill virtually guarantees that many more children will be coming into the system," noted Shauffer. "The problems foster children are experiencing can only get worse if they are not addressed now." The suit is scheduled for hearing in June of this year.

(Continued on page 3)

SETTLEMENT BRINGS IMPROVED SERVICES TO CHILDREN IN LOUISIANA

Youth confined in a New Orleans juvenile detention facility will benefit from greatly improved conditions and enhanced services with the settlement of several claims in *Doe v. Foti*.

When YLC staff first investigated reports of maltreatment of youth in this facility operated by the Orleans Parish sheriff, we found substandard conditions of confinement and a variety of abuses. "In over fifteen years of inspecting juvenile institutions, this was among the worst I had ever seen," said James Bell, lead counsel on the case. "It was the only facility of its kind in the country in that it was an all-children facility operated by adult jailers. Kids were treated exactly like adult prisoners. Worse still, this is a pre-trial facility where kids have not even been charged with, let alone convicted of, a crime."

"In over fifteen years of inspecting juvenile institutions, this was among the worst I had ever seen"

The jail-like facility was overcrowded, youth were mixed together regardless of the charges against them, and defendants did not provide youth with recreation or allow adequate visitation. Young people were further subjected to abusive disciplinary practices. Two-thirds of the facility's population had no education services, and the remaining third attended school only two hours per week.

(Continued on page 3)

From the Director . . .



With this issue, I'm pleased to introduce the *Children's Legal Protection News*, which will be appearing three times a year. The newsletter gives us the opportunity to share our work with others who are concerned about our country's most vulnerable children, those who have no parents to protect them.

These are dangerous times for children who must rely on the state to care for them. Welfare reform, an increase in violent crime, and a desire to blame some of our youth for most of our problems jeopardize many of the gains we have made over the past 18 years. Proposals are before Congress that would allow states to return to the practice of incarcerating children in adult jails and lock ups, a practice that has led to rape, assault, suicide and murder. Welfare changes that threaten to tear families apart will become a reality over the next several months. More and more children will enter our foster care systems while fewer and fewer are able to leave.

But all the news is not bleak. The maintenance of the Federal Child Welfare and Adoption Assistance program as an entitlement guarantees that there will be an ultimate safety net for children whose families cannot protect them. Legislation proposed on the federal level, and enacted in many states, retains the commitment to family preservation while ensuring child safety and the child's right to a permanent home and family. Around the country experiments with community based alternatives to traditional service delivery are achieving some measure of success and national recognition. We are proud to be a part of these efforts.

In this issue we salute the work of our Board of Directors in raising awareness of and generating support for our work. While the article on this page focuses upon the accomplishments of our Florida members, each of our Board members has been generous with financial support as well as personal assistance in our work with children. All of the staff and I are proud to represent them.

Sincerely,

Carole B. Shauffer
Executive Director

YOUTH LAW CENTER HONORS FLORIDA ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN

Youth Law Center board members, along with local children's advocates, hosted a gala reception in October to honor outstanding activists. The reception, held in Fort Lauderdale, honored **Stanley G. Tate** for his creation of the Florida Prepaid College Foundation and Project S.T.A.R.S., which provides college scholarships for deserving children. The program is now focusing on foster children. **Judges Melanie May** and **Robert Collins** were honored for their work to strengthen and improve Florida's juvenile justice system.

Youth Law Center board members Howard Talenfeld, Michael Dale and Rev. Wayne Thompson organized the event along with children's advocate Sheila Alu, and Mr. Talenfeld's firm, Colodny, Fass & Talenfeld, P.A. Mark Soler, President of the Youth Law Center, spoke to the gathering about the organization's work in Florida to improve services and conditions for disadvantaged children.

At a Board of Directors meeting in San Francisco in December, Mr. Talenfeld presented a check representing event proceeds in the sum of \$20,000 to board chairman Tom Welch. Event proceeds also supported the award of four college scholarships to Florida foster children. Our very special thanks to Mike Colodny, Joel Fass, Karen Purdy, Mike Powers, Paul Carland, Bobby Mitchell, and everyone who made the event such a wonderful success. Mr. Talenfeld, Mr. Dale, and Rev. Thompson hope to make the awards reception an annual event.



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LOUISIANA *Continued from page 1*

In 1993, the Youth Law Center filed a class action lawsuit against the sheriff and other officials. In 1994, the court ordered the implementation of a five-day-a-week school program and the reduction of the facility's population of more than 300 to a maximum of 150. While the population reduction and the implementation of a full school program improved many of the conditions in the facility, several major problems persisted.

James Bell, along with fellow staff attorney Maria Ramiu and paralegal Mamie Yee, prepared the case for trial on the issues of classification, visitation and recreation. However, in February on the eve of trial the parties reached a settlement on these issues. The sheriff agreed to construct a 10,000 square foot gymnasium and educational facility to provide space for school and indoor recreational programming, to immediately increase opportunities for recreation and exercise by implementing weekend recreational programming, and to increase the length and frequency of visitation. The sheriff will also institute a new classification system, which will consider such vital information as age, prior institutional commitments, suicide potential, psychiatric history and other background information to assist in determining dormitory assignments. We are hopeful that these changes will bring the facility up to constitutional standards. However, if necessary, the issues of visitation and mental health will be litigated after the gymnasium has been completed in April of next year.

LAWSUITS *Continued from page 1*

Jones Mason v. Anderson

The second lawsuit addresses the failure of the State Department of Social Services to develop licensing standards for the care of infants and young children. We are working with plaintiff Karen Jones-Mason, a staff attorney at Legal Services for Children, as well as Alice Bussiere, staff attorney for the National Center for Youth Law, and private attorney Tom Weathered. In California many foster children, including some infants, toddlers and preschoolers, live in group homes - facilities where children are cared for by employees as well as owner-operators. The current regulations that govern the licensing of group homes do not address the special needs of infants and very young children. In fact, group home requirements are less demanding than regulations that govern the licensing of day care facilities. For example, group home regulations require only one staff person for every ten children, whereas day care facilities that serve infants are required to have a staffing ratio of one teacher to every four infants. In addition, many basic health and sanitation requirements, such as diaper changing, special feeding instructions for infants,

or toilet training for toddlers, are not addressed.

"These are not new problems," said Carole Shauffer. In late 1993 the state legislature recognized the fact that this situation was dangerous to the health, safety and cognitive and emotional development of young children. At that time they passed a bill and signed into law a directive to the State Department of Social Services to develop standards and regulations for group homes that cared for these young children. However, in the three years since the legislation was passed, the State has not written standards or regulations. As a result, infants and young children continue to be subject to dangerous and substandard conditions.

"The situation facing infants and toddlers in care is particularly serious in light of the first lawsuit that we filed against the State," said Alice Bussiere, lead counsel on the case for the National Center for Youth Law. "If children are in homes without adequate licensing standards and are not being visited by caseworkers, helpless children are in jeopardy."

Since the filing of this lawsuit, the State has agreed to promptly develop licensing standards, and we are in the process of reaching a final settlement with defendants.

WASHINGTON REPORT

BY MARK SOLER

Working with Congress - In the new session of Congress, Democrats and Republicans have already introduced several new bills dealing with juvenile justice issues, including reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (and its implementing agency, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention), funding of prevention programs, increased prosecution of juveniles in adult court, and new measures for controlling gangs and drug crimes. The Youth Law Center is working with the Children's Defense Fund, the ABA Juvenile Justice Center, the ACLU, and other national organizations to monitor this legislative activity. On request, we are also providing consultation to Congressional leaders in the House and Senate on topics such as current research, effective programs, and policy implications of legislative proposals.

Juvenile Justice Roundtable - Each month, the Youth Law Center and the Public Welfare Foundation host the Juvenile Justice Roundtable, a forum for more than 60 representatives of local and national child advocacy organizations, professional organizations in related fields such as education and child welfare, juvenile justice researchers, and local law schools. Roundtable meetings feature updates on developments in Congress and the Administration, prominent speakers on topics of current interest, and sharing of information and strategies.



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CHILDREN'S LEGAL PROTECTION CENTER

114 Sansome Street, Suite 950 1325 G Street, N.W., Suite 770
San Francisco, CA 94104 Washington, D.C. 20005
(415) 543-3379 (phone) (202) 637-0377 (phone)
(415) 956-9022 (fax) (202) 347-0493 (fax)
e-mail: HN1315@earthlink.net

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As a support center funded through the IOLTA (Interest on Legal Trust Accounts) Program of the California State Bar, the Youth Law Center is available to provide California Legal Services Field Offices with an array of consultation, advocacy support and technical assistance services. If you need help with cases involving children, and particularly cases involving foster care or juvenile justice issues, please call one of the following YLC staff attorneys at (415) 543-3379:

Juvenile Justice

James Bell
Sue Burrell
Shannan Wilber
Loren Warboys

Special Education

Loren Warboys

Child Welfare

Carole Shauffer
Maria Ramiu

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Mamie Yee, Paralegal

YLC
CHILDREN'S LEGAL PROTECTION NEWS
CLPC

SEPTEMBER 1997

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 2

POLITICAL GRANDSTANDING WILL
NOT REDUCE CRIME

By Mike Farrell



*Mike Farrell, producer, human rights activist and star of the long-lived M*A*S*H television series, speaks out on proposed legislation to try children as adults.*

In the politically popular game of appearing "tough on crime," Congress is on the verge of passing new federal mandates that will both increase the number of juveniles prosecuted in adult court and allow these young people to be incarcerated with adult criminals. Typically, politicians promise that these laws will increase public safety and deter youth from committing more crime, but, as usual, their rhetoric doesn't match the facts. In truth, as the evidence shows, prosecuting children as adults wastes lives and threatens public safety.

Fact: Prosecuting children as adults actually increases juvenile crime. After a decade of increased transfers of children to adult court, the public is no safer. In truth, the numbers show that youth tried as adults commit more crimes on release than those who remain in juvenile court. Florida has mandated this practice for 14 years and now has the highest juvenile crime rate in the country. A comparison of New York youth tried as adults with similar New Jersey youth tried as juveniles found that the New York youth had a higher recidivism rates, reoffended sooner, committed more serious new offenses and had higher rates of reincarceration. The moral? Children are apt students.

Fact: A young person's chance for rehabilitation decreases significantly once waived to the adult system. The overwhelming majority of juvenile offenders are abused, neglected, illiterate, developmentally disabled, or emotionally disturbed. Since young people placed in the adult system do not receive the vital educational, mental health and vocational help available to them under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court, they will thus be educated not in a classroom but in the halls of a prison inhabited by hardened career criminals. In Florida, well over half the youth released from adult prisons committed another offense within two years, this compared with just over one-third of the young people released from juvenile treatment programs.

Fact: Adults prey on juveniles in prison. Young people are five times more likely to be raped or attacked in prison than in juvenile detention. Of thousands of horror stories about children abused in adult jails, a particularly poignant example is 17-year-old Christopher Peterman of Boise, Idaho. Christopher was arrested for failing to pay \$73 in traffic fines. After fourteen hours of torture, he was murdered by other prisoners in his cell, this despite the fact that another teenager had been beaten unconscious by the same inmates several days earlier.

SUIT CHALLENGES
GROUP HOME
PLACEMENT FOR
FOSTER CHILDREN

San Francisco. In a continuing effort to ensure the safety of foster children in California, the Youth Law Center has filed a third lawsuit against the state, challenging its failure to develop a system for deciding where to place abused and neglected children entering care. The basis of the suit is that many children are placed inappropriately - leading to situations where young children with few behavioral problems are exposed to children whose needs are far more complex, and beds needed for seriously emotionally disturbed children are filled with children who could benefit from living in a much less structured setting. The suit demands that the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) meet its legal obligation to develop a system to ensure that these children receive the care and treatment they need, and that taxpayer dollars are used prudently.

In California, group homes are one form of residential care for children who cannot live with their parents. Group homes vary widely in the services they offer and the amount they charge - ranging from \$1,100 to \$5,000 per month. The suit charges that decisions about placing children in these homes are made without any objective standards. As a result, children are often accepted into placements that cannot serve them, and are expelled when their real problems become evident. "These repeated failures cause emotional scars that permanently impair children's lives," said Youth Law Center staff attorney Maria Ramiu.

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued on page 3)

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CHILDREN'S LEGAL PROTECTION NEWS

From the Director . . .



"These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will in this time of crisis shrink from service to their country."

Thomas Paine

For children's advocates, the time has come to determine whether we are, in fact, summer soldiers, ready to fight for the rights of children while our cause is popular, but fearful of defending our principles when public opinion turns against us.

The outcry against the perceived rise in juvenile crime has reached hysterical proportions. Mark Soler's report from Washington describes federal proposals to force states to give up on children and sentence them to adult facilities. Many states have already returned to policies that virtually eliminate the juvenile justice system, replacing it with one that values punishment to the exclusion of rehabilitation. Faced with reports of gang violence or teen murders, it is easy to focus on retribution and forget that these are our children. Advocates must maintain their commitment to those children whom society would like to forget, even as popular and financial support for their cause is dwindling. We are grateful to public figures like Mike Farrell, who bring a rational voice to the discussion and are willing to stand up for children.

The public still ostensibly supports abused and neglected children; however, advocacy in this area has also become more challenging. While everyone in child protection decries foster care drift, there are many providers, government agencies and professionals whose interests are served by maintaining children in the system. Too often, when self-interest conflicts with the best interest of children, self interest prevails. In a field where government and providers seek a cozy consensus based on lucrative contracts and the children themselves are rarely at the table, "workable" and "good enough" become the norm rather than the excellence we expect for our own children.

Our challenge is to serve the interests of children without being distracted by our own interests or the interests of our friends and allies. We must listen to what children and youth tell us even when their opinions conflict with popular wisdom, and we must continually reassess our ability to make independent judgements. Our children deserve no less.

Sincerely,

Carole B. Shauffer
Executive Director

WILSON WATCH

Advocates for children in California are disheartened by the latest rash of actions by Governor Wilson and his administration. In the latest round of budget negotiations, Governor Wilson has:

- ◆ cut \$8 million from SSI/SSP for disabled children
- ◆ cut \$500,000 from the augmentation budget for school breakfast and summer lunch programs
- ◆ eliminated food stamp assistance for legal immigrant children and the elderly
- ◆ eliminated prenatal care services for undocumented immigrants
- ◆ cut \$1 million from the emergency shelter program
- ◆ discontinued the use of national guard armories to shelter the homeless during winter months

Our Very Special Thanks To

Safeway Inc. for its grant to support publication of this newsletter

The Staff of Give Something Back for their ongoing, generous contributions to the Youth Law Center and other community organizations

James W. Brown and the Staff of Community Research Associates for their ongoing commitment and support

We couldn't do it without you!

WORKPLACE CAMPAIGNS BEGINNING

Thank You to all of the workplace donors who supported us in the 1996 campaign (please see the enclosed list). The 1997 **Combined Federal Campaign, United Ways**, and other workplace campaigns are now underway. We hope you will consider directing your gift or pledge to the **Children's Legal Protection Center (Youth Law Center)** again this year. Look for us in your campaign brochures under Children's Charities of America or visit our web page through www.childrenscharities.org for more information.

FOSTER CHILDREN (Continued from page 1)

The plaintiff in the case, Heidi Bohler, is a volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). CASAs investigate the cases of children in the dependency system and advocate for their best interests. Ms. Bohler had first-hand experience of the dangers of this system when she represented an eight-year-old boy who was exposed to sexual activity in the very restrictive group home where he was placed for treatment. Through her efforts he was moved to a more homelike facility. "This abuse could have been avoided if there was some rational system for placing kids appropriately," Ms. Bohler stated.

The State of California spends approximately \$1 billion a year on out-of-home care for children, the majority on children in the child protection system. Almost \$650 million of this is spent on specialized care facilities and foster family agencies. There is no uniform system for determining the needs of an individual child or for matching the child with a program that can meet those needs. Although the Legislature recognized this problem over four years ago and directed the CDSS to develop a system to address the problem by July 1, 1994, CDSS has failed to do so.

POLITICAL GRANDSTANDING (Continued from page 1)

Fact: Distraught young people are eight times more likely to commit suicide in an adult jail than in a juvenile facility. Consider 15-year-old Kathy Robbins, who was taken to a local jail in rural Glenn County, California, for staying out past curfew. After several days in jail, she had a detention hearing, but was not released. Returned to her cell, Kathy hanged herself. Robbie Horn, 15, from LaGrange, Kentucky, was confined to an adult jail for refusing to obey his mother. Soon afterward, he took off his shirt, wrapped one sleeve around his neck and the other around the bars of his cell and hanged himself. Dawn Armstrong, 17, of Knox County, Indiana, was held in county jail for shoplifting a \$6 bottle of suntan lotion. Despite a history of mental problems, Dawn was put into an isolation cell. Several hours later she was discovered, having hanged herself in the shower.

Fact: There are no easy answers to the problems of juvenile crime - but there is abundant, well-documented evidence that meaningful rehabilitation services do work. Contrary to the mindless ranting of self-serving politicians, draconian laws that further abuse and harden young people do nothing to deter crime or help troubled youth turn their lives around. While a small proportion of violent, dangerous offenders need to be separated from society, the vast majority of young offenders are charged with non-violent property or drug crimes - and are clearly capable and desirous of change. They won't find any help in a prison cell, but education, mental health services, health care and vocational training are the building blocks that will enable them to overcome problems and make something of their lives. This is not about being "soft on crime," but about truly making a difference in our common future.

The House of Representatives, that bastion of foresight, has already passed a bill that will require states to put more young people into the adult criminal justice system. Now the U.S. Senate is considering its counterpart, S. 10. This bill will require that states try youth 14 years and older in adult court for a broad range of violent and non-violent offenses and will reinstate the practice of confining youngsters in adult jails throughout our country. Can Americans really accept sweeping children under the rug of adult incarceration so that politicians can pretend to be "tough on crime?" We need to demand that our elected representatives provide meaningful crime prevention strategies rather than hiding behind rhetoric and ill-conceived political grandstanding like S. 10.

WASHINGTON REPORT

By Mark Soler

Federal Juvenile Justice Legislation -

In the adjacent article, Mike Farrell points out the folly of much of the proposed legislation dealing with juvenile crime. Three juvenile justice bills are moving through Congress. Two are extremely punitive. H.R. 3, sponsored by Rep. Bill McCollum (FL), would dramatically change current law in federal prosecutions, sending more juveniles into adult criminal court and providing less protection for youth held in adult jails. It would also require states to change their juvenile justice systems in order to receive federal funds, notably by prosecuting more juveniles as adults and reducing confidentiality of juvenile court records. Similarly, in the Senate, S. 10, sponsored by Sen. Orrin Hatch (UT), would provide for more prosecution of juveniles as adults in state prosecutions, more incarceration of status offenders (e.g., truants, curfew violators, and runaways), less confidentiality of juvenile court records, and many more children held in adult jails. In fact, S. 10 would allow children to be placed in the same cellblock, and to have direct conversations, with adult inmates, provisions that would set back federal protections 25 years and subject thousands of children to physical and sexual abuse, and suicide. In contrast, H.R. 1818, by Rep. Frank Riggs (CA), preserves federal protections for children in the juvenile justice system and provides funding for a variety of delinquency prevention programs.

Our staff is working to educate the public, as well as members of Congress, about the dangers of the punitive proposals and the importance of supporting basic protections for children and funding for prevention programs. We have appeared on NBC, Fox, and other network television news programs, radio talk shows, National Public Radio, and worked with reporters and editorial writers for the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Miami Herald*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and other publications around the country.

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114 Sansome Street, Suite 950 1325 G Street, N.W., Suite 770
 San Francisco, CA 94104 Washington, D.C. 20005
 (415) 543-3379 (phone) (202) 637-0377 (phone)
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 e-mail: HN1418@earthlink.net

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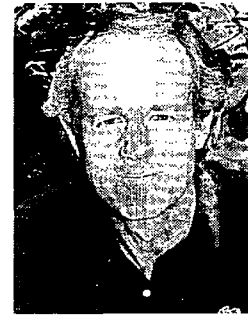
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SEPTEMBER 1997

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 2

POLITICAL GRANDSTANDING WILL NOT REDUCE CRIME

By Mike Farrell



*Mike Farrell, producer, human rights activist and star of the long-lived M*A*S*H television series, speaks out on proposed legislation to try children as adults.*

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Fact: Prosecuting children as adults actually increases juvenile crime. After a decade of increased transfers of children to adult court, the public is no safer. In truth, the numbers show that youth tried as adults commit more crimes on release than those who remain in juvenile court. Florida has mandated this practice for 14 years and now has the highest juvenile crime rate in the country. A comparison of New York youth tried as adults with similar New Jersey youth tried as juveniles found that the New York youth had a higher recidivism rates, reoffended sooner, committed more serious new offenses and had higher rates of reincarceration. The moral? Children are apt students.

Fact: A young person's chance for rehabilitation decreases significantly once waived to the adult system. The overwhelming majority of juvenile offenders are abused, neglected, illiterate, developmentally disabled, or emotionally disturbed. Since young people placed in the adult system do not receive the vital educational, mental health and vocational help available to them under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court, they will thus be educated not in a classroom but in the halls of a prison inhabited by hardened career criminals. In Florida, well over half the youth released from adult prisons committed another offense within two years, this compared with just over one-third of the young people released from juvenile treatment programs.

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(Continued on page 3)

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CHILDREN'S LEGAL PROTECTION NEWS

From the Director . . .



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The public still ostensibly supports abused and neglected children; however, advocacy in this area has also become more challenging. While everyone in child protection decries foster care drift, there are many providers, government agencies and professionals whose interests are served by maintaining children in the system. Too often, when self-interest conflicts with the best interest of children, self interest prevails. In a field where government and providers seek a cozy consensus based on lucrative contracts and the children themselves are rarely at the table, "workable" and "good enough" become the norm rather than the excellence we expect for our own children.

Our challenge is to serve the interests of children without being distracted by our own interests or the interests of our friends and allies. We must listen to what children and youth tell us even when their opinions conflict with popular wisdom, and we must continually reassess our ability to make independent judgements. Our children deserve no less.

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Executive Director

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Our staff is working to educate the public, as well as members of Congress, about the dangers of the punitive proposals and the importance of supporting basic protections for children and funding for prevention programs. We have appeared on NBC, Fox, and other network television news programs, radio talk shows, National Public Radio, and worked with reporters and editorial writers for the *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Chicago Tribune*, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, *Miami Herald*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and other publications around the country.

FOSTER CHILDREN (Continued from page 1)

The plaintiff in the case, Heidi Bohler, is a volunteer Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). CASAs investigate the cases of children in the dependency system and advocate for their best interests. Ms. Bohler had first-hand experience of the dangers of this system when she represented an eight-year-old boy who was exposed to sexual activity in the very restrictive group home where he was placed for treatment. Through her efforts he was moved to a more homelike facility. "This abuse could have been avoided if there was some rational system for placing kids appropriately," Ms. Bohler stated.

The State of California spends approximately \$1 billion a year on out-of-home care for children, the majority on children in the child protection system. Almost \$650 million of this is spent on specialized care facilities and foster family agencies. There is no uniform system for determining the needs of an individual child or for matching the child with a program that can meet those needs. Although the Legislature recognized this problem over four years ago and directed the CDSS to develop a system to address the problem by July 1, 1994, CDSS has failed to do so.

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Fact: Distraught young people are eight times more likely to commit suicide in an adult jail than in a juvenile facility. Consider 15-year-old Kathy Robbins, who was taken to a local jail in rural Glenn County, California, for staying out past curfew. After several days in jail, she had a detention hearing, but was not released. Returned to her cell, Kathy hanged herself. Robbie Horn, 15, from LaGrange, Kentucky, was confined to an adult jail for refusing to obey his mother. Soon afterward, he took off his shirt, wrapped one sleeve around his neck and the other around the bars of his cell and hanged himself. Dawn Armstrong, 17, of Knox County, Indiana, was held in county jail for shoplifting a \$6 bottle of suntan lotion. Despite a history of mental problems, Dawn was put into an isolation cell. Several hours later she was discovered, having hanged herself in the shower.

Fact: There are no easy answers to the problems of juvenile crime - but there is abundant, well-documented evidence that meaningful rehabilitation services do work. Contrary to the mindless ranting of self-serving politicians, draconian laws that further abuse and harden young people do nothing to deter crime or help troubled youth turn their lives around. While a small proportion of violent, dangerous offenders need to be separated from society, the vast majority of young offenders are charged with non-violent property or drug crimes - and are clearly capable and desirous of change. They won't find any help in a prison cell, but education, mental health services, health care and vocational training are the building blocks that will enable them to overcome problems and make something of their lives. This is not about being "soft on crime," but about truly making a difference in our common future.

The House of Representatives, that bastion of foresight, has already passed a bill that will require states to put more young people into the adult criminal justice system. Now the U.S. Senate is considering its counterpart, S. 10. This bill will require that states try youth 14 years and older in adult court for a broad range of violent and non-violent offenses and will reinstate the practice of confining youngsters in adult jails throughout our country. Can Americans really accept sweeping children under the rug of adult incarceration so that politicians can pretend to be "tough on crime?" We need to demand that our elected representatives provide meaningful crime prevention strategies rather than hiding behind rhetoric and ill-conceived political grandstanding like S. 10.

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CHILDREN'S LEGAL PROTECTION NEWS

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DECEMBER 1997

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 3

ANNUAL REPORT

December 1997

Dear Friends,

This has been an extremely eventful year for children's advocates. Legislative proposals that drastically affect the welfare of children in the juvenile justice system have been presented to Congress and are still under consideration. Welfare reform has already caused the first wave of increases in children entering the foster care system. We have initiated new projects to respond to the needs of these two vulnerable populations and continue to analyze and address emerging issues and problems. Using the ultimate power of litigation to protect abused and neglected children, we have filed several lawsuits this year, settled others, and are monitoring consent decrees in several states.

In this issue of the *Children's Legal Protection News*, we are pleased to describe our challenges and accomplishments over the past year. Many foundations, corporations, law firms, and individuals have provided the support needed to sustain the Center's work and we are delighted to have an opportunity to acknowledge and thank each one. You will also find information about publications and resources available from the Center, and a summary of our financial position. We are proud to highlight members of our dedicated volunteer board of directors and to set forth the accomplishments of our talented and able staff. We greatly appreciate all of the individuals and organizations who work with us to help disadvantaged children. Together, we can truly make a difference in the lives of vulnerable children. Thanks to all who have made 1997 a powerful and productive year.

Thomas A. Welch
Chairman
Board of Directors

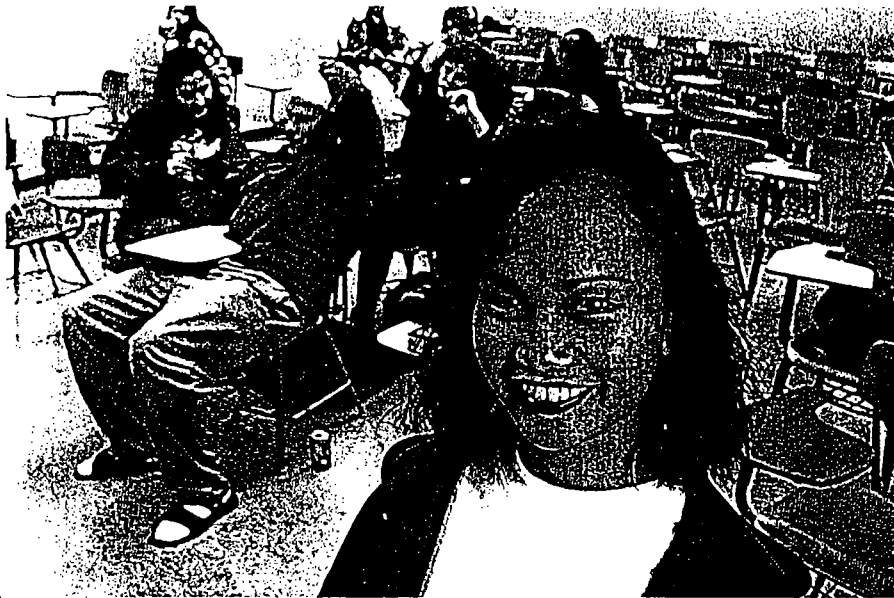


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FOSTER FRIENDS



FOSTER YOUTH FIND SUPPORT IN THE STATE LEGISLATURE

Foster teen Anna Agtarap: a familiar face in Sacramento

WITH FOSTER care rolls swelling by more than 5 percent a year and Congress threatening spending cuts in social services, the state's foster youth need all the help they can get. It turns out that they are their own best advocates.

In April, a statewide network of foster youth—California Youth Connections—made an impression on state legislators deliberating AB 1127, a bill that, in part, calls for a sex education program for foster youth. Before the bill passed out of the Human Services Committee, legislators gave the 16 young people who came to speak on the sex education portion of the bill a standing ovation. "The committee doesn't listen to me," bill sponsor Assemblywoman Barbara Friedman (D-Van Nuys) told them. "But they listen to you."

CYC has been proposing and supporting legislation affecting the more than 90,000 children in state foster care for the last six years. Started by foster youth and

some of their adult supporters, the organization is assisted by Carole Shauffer of San Francisco's Youth Law Center.

"Taxes and laws have a big effect on us," observed 18-year-old Anna Agtarap, a group-home resident in Alameda County, who was clutching a fistful of legislative abstracts on a recent visit to the Capitol. "This organization is one of the ways politicians get information on how we live." Agtarap, an aspiring lawyer, was back in town twice in May: once to testify against SB 341 (Tom Campbell, R-Stanford), which would require a youth facility in Santa Clara County to lock its fences, and once to educate her local representatives on general foster-care issues.

"In the Legislature, we tend to hear about the failures of the foster-care system," says HSC Vice Chair Tom Bates (D-Berkeley), who has sponsored CYC's bills in the past. "But when we see these kids coming forward with ideas about ►

Sticking to their guns

THE MAKER of the assault weapon used by a gunman in 1993 to kill seven people in San Francisco's now-defunct law firm of Pettit & Martin has been unable to get out of lawsuits brought by victims and survivors.

Ernest Getto of Los Angeles's Latham & Watkins contends that the Miami-based Navegar didn't sell its TEC-DC9 in California and should be dismissed from eight strict-liability personal-injury suits filed in San Francisco. Plaintiffs liaison counsel William D. Kissinger of San Francisco's McCutchen, Doyle, Brown & Enersen claims Navegar not only advertised a weapon that was banned under a 1989 law, but that its ads were found in the trunk of the car belonging to gunman Gian Luigi Ferri. In April, Getto lost a motion for dismissal and now plans to bring a summary judgment motion in the fall.

how to help themselves and others, the legislature is inclined to do anything it can to help them."

One of the organization's sweetest victories in recent years was a law that created a pilot program of supervised apartment living for youth leaving the system at age 18. Out-of-Home Placement Pilot Programs (Health & S.C. § 1559, 110 et seq). To convince legislators, CYC cited studies that found that as many as one-third of former foster youth end up homeless after age 18—some on their first night out. The program is expected to go into effect in three counties this summer.

The biggest hurdle facing CYC this year is the battle to save federal funding for the Independent Living

Skills Program, which prepares youth to leave the foster-care system by helping them to do everything from opening a checking account to applying to college. The block grants proposed by Congress, says Shauffer, "will not give states flexibility. In fact, the states will probably have to divert funds from the Independent Living Skills Program to support their basic foster-care programs."

"If the ILSP is cut we'll all be at a much higher risk," says Alfred Perez, an 18-year-old foster youth from Contra Costa County. "If I wasn't going to college I don't know what I would be doing. I don't want to be a burden."

—LISA MARGONELLI

