

RFA Implementation for Probation Foster Youth:  
Best Practices in Supporting Youth in Least  
Restrictive Environments



Any change, even a change for the better, is  
always accompanied by drawbacks and  
discomforts.” ~Arnold Bennett

“The thing that lies at the foundation of  
positive change, the way I see it, is service to a  
fellow human being.” ~Lech Walesa

## BACKGROUND

### Current Snapshot: Probation Youth in Congregate Care



**35%**

of youth placed in group homes are probation youth

**77%**

of all probation youth in foster care placement are in group homes

**35%**

had been in group homes for more than one year

## What Do We Mean by Least Restrictive Placement for Probation Foster Youth?

WIC 706.6 changed to emphasize least restrictive placement, the agency selecting placement shall consider, in order of priority:

- (A) Placement with **relatives, nonrelated extended family** members, and tribal members
- (B) **Foster family homes** and certified homes or resource families of foster family agencies
- (C) **Treatment and intensive treatment certified homes** or resource families of foster family agencies, or multidimensional treatment foster homes or therapeutic foster care homes
- (D) **Group care placements** in the following order:
  - (i) Short-term residential treatment centers.
  - (ii) Group homes.
  - (iii) Community treatment facilities.
  - (iv) Out-of-state residential treatment

## Successful CCR and RFA Implementation May Involve Initiatives Across Systems to Meet Myriad Needs



**Stigma of the Probation label**, not seen as a foster child



**Histories of abuse**, neglect, abandonment, exploitation, DV



**Unreliable family support**, limited family resources, poverty



**Academic deficits** and little to **no work experience** or vocational training



Behavioral and **mental health issues**, trauma



**Lack of services** by responsible systems of care (e.g. child welfare, school system, etc.)

# BEST PRACTICES: RESOURCE FAMILY IMPLEMENTATION

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## County Spotlight: FFA Pilot Projects

- Probation Departments working collaboratively with providers to build less restrictive placements for 602 foster youth
  - FFA Pilots
    - Focusing recruitment and licensing on relatives and NREFMs



## FFAs and Recruitment

- **What we have heard that has been successful**
  - Bring the providers to the table
  - Some higher level FFA placements may need BHCSA or Social Services at the table
  - Resource Families (especially relatives) may become FFA placements in the future (i.e., turning Super Grandmas into Super Placements)



## Spotlight – FFA Roles

### What we have heard that has worked or could work -

- Psychosocial assessments
  - May include an emphasis on cultural appropriateness or specific supports for kin.
- Additional supports for youth in FFA placements.
- Additional supports for youth in non-FFA placements.
- Family finding.

## Family finding “due diligence”

**County spotlight:** Family finding training and/or contracting with FFAs to increase capacity for Family Finding.



"If the child is **detained or at risk of entering foster care**, the court must consider and determine whether the probation officer has **exercised due diligence** in conducting the required investigation to **identify, locate, and notify the child's relatives.**"

(Welfare & Institutions Code § 628(d))

*\*\*Due diligence" defined in Court Rule 5.790*

## When foster children are connected to kin, the experience is different

Research has shown that foster children in kinship care have:

- Fewer prior placements
- More frequent and consistent contact with birth parents and siblings,
- Felt fewer negative emotions about being placed in foster care than children placed with non-relatives
- Less likely to runaway



## APPROVAL OF RELATIVES: CORE ELEMENTS OF RESOURCE FAMILY APPROVAL

- **One standard** – relatives and recruited families treated the same
- **One process** – approved for any child in foster care, approved in any county, and approved for guardianships & adoptions
- **Comprehensive assessment** required, includes:
  - Home Environment Assessment
  - Permanency Assessment
- Pre- and post-approval **training** required for all families
- Procedures for **expedited placements**



*WIC § 16519.6*

## Best Practice: PLACEMENT PRIOR TO APPROVAL

### 1. Compelling Reason:

- Based on needs of the child
- After home environment approval completed
- Permanency assessment to be completed within 90 days

### 2. Emergency Basis (AB 404 includes ability for probation to emergency place):

- Must be with relative or nonrelative extended family member
- Requires CACI, CLETS and walkthrough of the home
- Home environment assessment must be initiated within 5 business days and caregiver must turn in RFA application

*AFDC-FC funding is not available to families until full approval has been achieved **BUT some counties have used expedited CalWORKs, Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention Funds, and/or Emergency Assistance to bridge the gap!!***

## Working with Kin and RFA May Be Different

Kinship Care	Traditional Foster Care
Unplanned, immediate/crisis-oriented	Planned decision to become foster caregiver
Changes existing relationships/family roles	Builds new relationships
Hopes and expectations for reunification	May hope to adopt
Knowledge of family dynamics	Limited knowledge of a family
Mixed feeling about role change	Excitement of a new role of parent
Mixed feelings about loss of parent to child	Celebration of new family
Limited preparation	Prepared and supports in place
Unanticipated requirements to become approved for placement	Anticipated requirements to become approved foster parent
Guilt over the issues of birth parents	No guilt over issues of birth parents
Feelings of betraying birth parents	Displaying loyalty to the child
Feel entitled to be in "driver's seat" – distrusting of system	Emotional entitlement is more gradual; legal entitlement only after adoption
Hesitation to legalize – doesn't indicate a lack of commitment to child	Low motivation to legalize triggers concerns about commitment to child

## RFA Toolkit

- Step by step instructions for families navigating RFA
- Vetted with relative caregivers
- Available online at [www.stepupforkin.org/RFAtoolkit](http://www.stepupforkin.org/RFAtoolkit)

## Resource Family Approval Guide



A project of The Step Up Coalition  
stepupforkin.org



# BEST PRACTICE: SUPPORTING YOUTH IN FAMILY SETTINGS

## Supporting and Stabilizing Youth on Probation: Foster Care

<b>Funding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AFDC-FC is more than twice CalWORKs at minimum</li><li>• Specialized rates for youth with disabilities and parenting youth</li></ul>
<b>Healthcare</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Full-scope Medi-Cal until 26</li><li>• Community-based MH care</li></ul>
<b>Housing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Subsidized placement options that extend to age 24 or 25</li></ul>
<b>Permanency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Connecting to a caring adult incl. reunification with parent</li><li>• Subsidized permanency and reentry option if caregiver stops providing support</li></ul>

## County Spotlight: Placement Orders with Non-Parent Caregivers (e.g., relatives, NREFMs)



### Relatives and Fictive Kin are a natural resource for 602 youth

*Making the court order a placement order (“3C”) instead of a straight release order (“4C”) **better leverages funding streams and resources** to help prevent congregate care or to better support youth returning from congregate care.*

## Supporting Youth with Mental Health Needs Placed with Resource Families

- **Specialty courts**
- **Cross-systems collaboration**
- **Growth in community based mental health services**

## County Spotlight: Juvenile Mental Health Courts Santa Clara, Alameda

Engagement

...with mental health

- ✓ Individualized treatment
- ✓ Community-based
- ✓ Comprehensive, unconditional, system of care
- ✓ Outcome focused

...with social supports through civil advocacy

Includes: Mental Health,  
Housing, Education,  
Financial Assistance,  
Parenting Support

- ✓ Public benefits (e.g., disability benefits, TANF)
- ✓ Education (e.g., special education, re-entry to school district)
- ✓ Health access (e.g., Medicaid)
- ✓ Housing (e.g., eviction defense, habitability)

Funding: Medi-Cal / EPSDT, SSI Advocacy, IV-E and/or IV-E Waiver

## Behnken & Arredondo (2009): A Controlled Evaluation Study Showed

- ✓ **Improvement in psychological functioning**
- ✓ **Significant reductions in commission of:**
  - Violent offenses (e.g. assaults, batteries)
  - Making violent threats
  - Possession of dangerous weapons

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## Community Based Mental Health Services

- Including but not limited to:
  - Individual Therapy
  - Targeted Case Management
  - Group Therapy
  - Crisis Intervention / Stabilization
  - Medication Support Services
  - Day Treatment
  - Mental Health Assessment

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## Community Based Mental Health Services

- Therapeutic Behavioral Services (TBS)
  - Short-term, intensive, and behaviorally focused
  - Focused on behaviors that increase risk of institutionalization
  - Time-limited
  - 1:1 intervention
  - Strength based
  - Emily Q.
  - Katie A. / Pathways to Wellbeing Services

## County Spotlight: Growth in Community Based Mental Health Services (Alameda County)

Includes: Mental Health,  
Partnership with BHCSA



### Description:

Expansion of availability of community based mental health services including TBS, MST, and ICM contracts and school based supports specific to probation youth through close partnership with BCHSA and school districts

**Funding:** Medicaid / EPSDT / Violence Prevention Funding

## Permanency

- Exiting foster care to adoption or legal guardianship comes with benefits.
  - Non-relative legal guardians may receive AFDC-FC.
  - Kinship Guardianship Assistance Payment Program (Kin-GAP) is available to relative legal guardianships established by the juvenile court.
  - Adoption Assistance Payments (AAP) are available to relatives or nonrelatives who adopt children with "special needs" (broadly defined to include all youth adopted out of foster care)
  - Benefits last until age 18. If payments were received after the youth turned 16 or the youth has a disability, then benefits last until age 21.
  - Benefits continue if the family moves to another state.
  - Medi-Cal eligible.

## County Spotlight: Los Angeles County Probation Permanency Collaborative



- Goal: Robust case planning and permanency planning for probation foster youth that includes family finding.
- Specialized training for probation officers working with probation foster youth.
- Collaborative meets monthly and includes representatives from probation, county counsel, and community-based organizations.
- Has completed 5 delinquency court adoptions and several delinquency court guardianships.
- Funding: CWSOIP (permanency services and family finding); FPRRS (recruitment and retention of resource families; IV-E waiver (AFDC-FC, Kin-GAP, and/or AAP payments for families, plus training and administrative costs).
- Become strong partner with family through and after RFA process.

## Elements for Change

Mythbusting

Changing the Culture

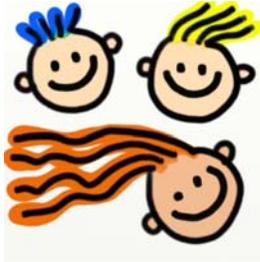
Changing the Language

Feature Strengths



# Profile of a Probation Foster Youth

• THE  
• FACES  
• OF  
• PROBATION  
• FOSTER  
• YOUTH



## First Recruitment Case for Adoptive Family - J T



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**Probation Foster Youth Adoption - Stephen**



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**Probation Foster Youth Adoption  
Fred**



First Adult Adoption - Naomi  
Nevada County



**Probation recruitment strategies:**

*Employee Recruitment*

*Resource Family Approval Process*

*Media Recruitment –Commercials, Child-Specific Testimonials, Media Campaign*

## Let's Get Crazy With It!!

- Remove the term Sex Offender and return the child home with services and supervision → Transgender youth—surround them with love and acceptance and place them where they feel comfortable
- Provide incentives for churches/synagogues to visit a child every weekend → Increase use of host weekend families—pay them to provide family life for our kids for the weekend to prepare them for a family → Put youth on Electronic Monitoring until they can build a supportive network → Create an after hours team that will “hang out” with CSEC youth through the night hours! → Ask the family what they need and give it to them!

What's your crazy idea?? It just might work!!

Our kids don't have time for our red tape and politics!



## County Spotlight: San Francisco Juvenile Collaborative Reentry Unit (JCRU)



- Goal: Intensive reentry services for all youth returning home from a group home or ranch.
- Services begin as soon as youth is ordered to complete probation in a group home or ranch.
- Serves up to 150 youth annually. Youth who turn 18 in a group home are eligible for extended foster care services.
- Collaborative team includes probation, the public defender, and community-based organizations.
- Funding: Second Chance Reentry Grant (pilot costs); JABG (funded dedicated public defender); local violence prevention and intervention funding; IV-E waiver (admin, training, and foster care benefits)