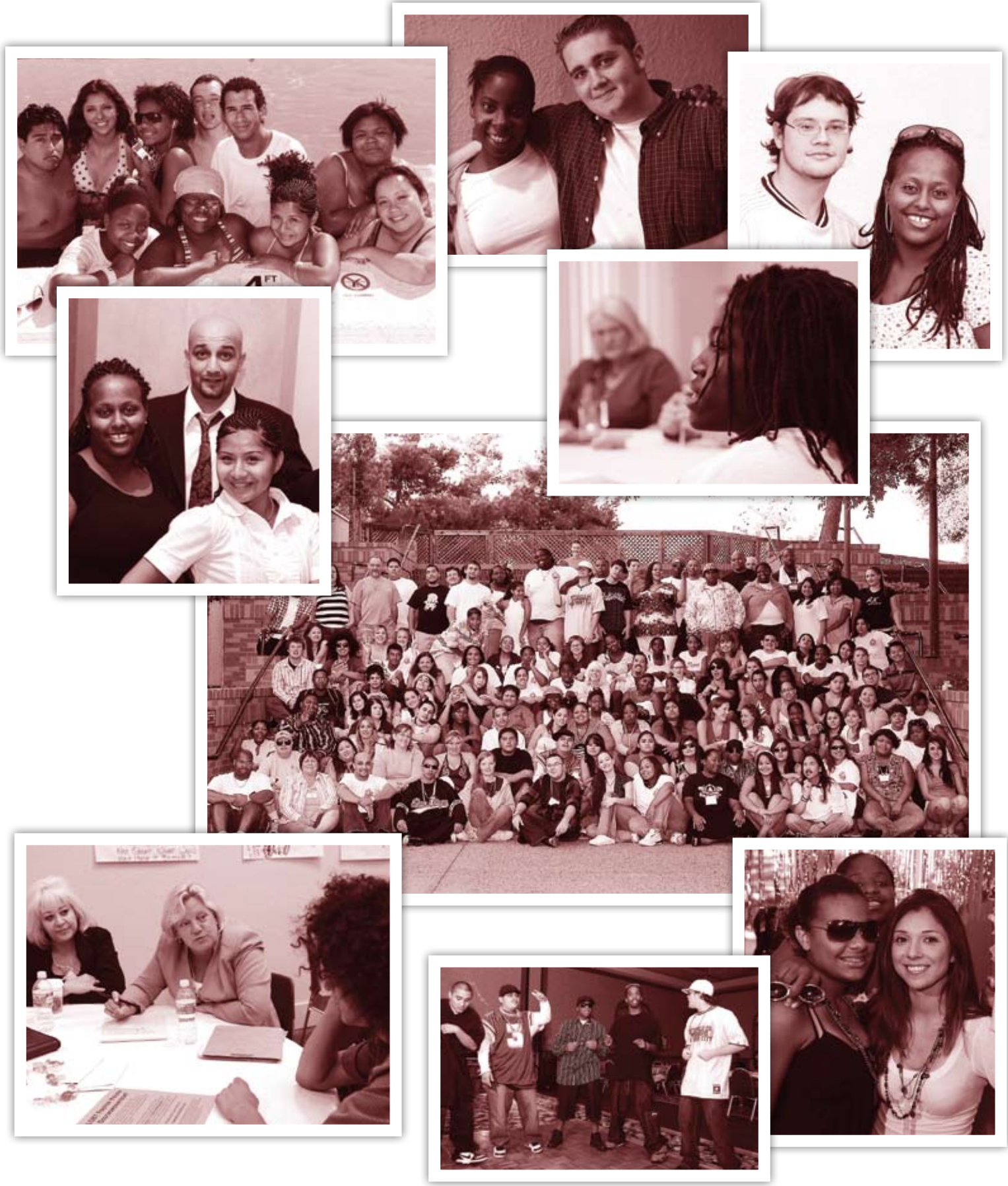




CALIFORNIA YOUTH CONNECTION
2007 POLICY CONFERENCE REPORT

IMPACTING TOMORROW TODAY

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2007 CYC CONFERENCE POLICY REPORT

INTRODUCTION



The 2007 Leadership and Policy Conference was held in the balmy, heart-of-the-valley Modesto, CA in mid-August. The Stanislaus, Merced and Fresno CYC chapters all collaborated in coordinating this event that was attended by a strong turnout of 162 youth and supporters. Members came into the weekend prepared to address some of the more dire problems that face California's foster youth. The four subjects that members thought were the most crucial to California foster youth in 2007 were: Group Home Issues, Foster Youth/ Juvenile Justice Issues, Improving Social Worker Services and Transitional Housing Services. Throughout the four-day weekend, members participated in a succession of workshops by not only conceptualizing policy recommendations on those four topics, but also hammering out the details on how to implement them within the state's budget. In these varying workshops, members discovered how critical it was to invest now in preventative programs as opposed to paying (much more) later through interventional measures. In the following recommendation summaries are suggestions on how to improve group homes and social worker services, track and care for youth who "cross-over" from the foster care to juvenile justice system, and adequately prepare emancipating youth for their transition out of the foster care system. At the end of the weekend, CYC invited a distinguished panel of guests as well as over 110 other child welfare leaders and decision makers in statewide communities to hear members present their recommendations. After the presentation, the panelists and guests were welcomed to join small discussion groups in order to explore each issue more in-depth. This report summarizes the policy discussions and recommendations of the 2007 Leadership and Policy Conference.

CYC would like to thank the Casey Family Program for their generous support of the 2007 policy conference and the publication of this report.

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THE DISTINGUISHED PANELISTS WERE:

MR. JOHN WAGNER

Director of California Department of Social Services

BOB PHELAN

District Director of the 25th Assembly District on behalf of Assembly Member Tom Berryhill

TRISH WALLIS

Legislative Coordinator for the National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter

COMMISSIONER NANCY WILLIAMSEN

Superior Court Commissioner of Stanislaus County Superior Court

SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKER

KORDNIE LEE

Foster Care and Mental Health Advocate and Former CYC member

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JUVENILE JUSTICE

Foster youth who become involved in the juvenile justice system, also known as “cross-over youth,” often have no representative to advocate for them. Because cross-over youth are placed in juvenile hall, probation camps and ranches or California Youth Authority Facilities, they no longer have rights as a foster youth or have support services to help them find a family or prepare them for emancipation. Cross-over youth also lose their rights to visit and have contact with siblings, receive transition and education assistance, and receive no help from social workers with reunification efforts or finding an alternative permanent connection. Foster youth who are arrested also develop a juvenile court record that follows them through foster care and into adulthood. Because of this record, opportunities for permanency, housing, employment and military enlistment are not easily available to them, if at all. Once a dependent youth crosses over into a delinquent category, that youth is almost always completely on his or her own.

Given the way in which the foster care system is geared, it is understandable why foster youth are more likely to be arrested than those who are not in care. Youth with multiple placements in foster care (which is the norm) are 5-10 times more likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system than youth in the general population. [i] Also, foster youth are children



burdened with abusive backgrounds, instability of placements, having to co-habit with innumerable strangers, constant transitioning into unfamiliar homes or institutions all while trying to cope with trauma that led them to

being placed in foster care in the first place. It is no wonder why foster youth are more prone to running away or engaging in other delinquent behavior like using drugs and alcohol as a way to escape the unbearable pain they've been through in their short lives. CYC members at this conference feel that the remedy for these problems shouldn't be limited to locking them up in juvenile hall for good and without any services. If cross-over youth are not accounted for and assisted in any way now, then more problems will arise in the future for these youth and in society in general.



ISSUE #1 CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Foster youth are arrested at higher rates than the general population. A study of foster youth found that 61% of boys and 41% of girls had been arrested by the age of 17. [ii] One reason behind the high arrest rate may be due to care providers such as social workers, placement staff and foster parents' lack of conflict management skills. Currently, the tendency to resolve conflicts that occur among foster youth is to rely heavily on law enforcement to deescalate conflict, which in turn leads foster youth to crossing over into the juvenile justice system. A recent study analyzed arrests of foster youth and the results found that in many situations, social workers and group home staff used law enforcement intervention as a method to move foster youth they felt were disruptive to the home. When foster youth are arrested, they are more likely than other youth to be sent to juvenile detention facilities to await their trials for extended periods of time, thus remaining longer in the delinquency system. It has also been shown that foster youth are re-arrested more so than delinquent youth without a foster care history. These tragedies primarily occur because once arrested foster youth do not have nearly as many individuals advocating on their behalf or as passionately as delinquent youth in the general population whom often have well developed and extensive support systems.

In a study that examined the characteristics of delinquent behavior in cross-over youths, it was found that the type of placement played a significant role. The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) study on cross-over youth revealed that almost all cross-over youth (98%) were living in out-of-home placements at the time of their arrest.

Also, approximately one-third of the offenses were placement related, and these offenses most often occurred in group homes. Additionally, the study mentions that most of these youth were not regularly attending school (24% not enrolled, 45% enrolled truant or irregular attendance) at the time of their arrest. [iii] The results of this study beg the question of accountability: who is looking out for these youth? We know that these youth are in out-of-home placements and almost half of the delinquent offenses are placement related. If the caretakers responsible are not able to prevent delinquency from occurring, neglecting the issue further once youth officially cross-over will not solve any problems; if anything it may create more.

Obviously there needs to be a shift in thinking when it comes to administering resolutions because the effects can be extremely detrimental to a foster youth's psyche, emotional development and opportunities for the future. According to our members, there have been incidents where group home staff called the police because a resident argued, cursed or refused to comply with house rules. Improved conflict management skills could prevent this severe measure from being taken.

JUVENILE JUSTICE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: RECOMMENDATIONS

- **There should be a shift toward preventative services, programs and trainings for foster youth. It is not only personally beneficial toward foster youth but it would be more cost efficient for the state to invest in more preventative programs instead of intervention programs.**
- **Former foster youth should be hired to be liaisons/court advocates for youth in the juvenile court system.**
- **There should be liaisons and cooperation between the Department of Social Services, judges, and foster youth in the juvenile justice system, caregivers, and administrators in the juvenile justice system.**
- **Care providers need to attend trainings provided by youth with juvenile justice and foster care experience on conflict resolution and age appropriate behavior.**
- **All agencies serving foster youth should be present on-site in group homes in order to provide foster youth**

with the opportunity to connect with services such as mental health mentoring, Independent Living Programs (ILP), as well as transitional resources.

JUVENILE JUSTICE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: ACTION ITEMS

- **Encourage counties to develop preventative programs for foster youth using funding from the Mental Health Services Act.**
- **Advocate for standard use of preventative practices such as Team Decision Making meetings and EPSDT services whenever a placement is considering using a law enforcement intervention.**
- **Advocate that court improvement funds be used to create youth court liaisons for youth in the juvenile justice system.**
- **Encourage counties and entities such as the Community College Foster and Kinship Care Education program to provide funding to the Y.O.U.T.H. training project to develop and provide training for care providers.**

ISSUE # 2 CROSS-OVER YOUTH

Foster youth who “cross-over” to probation are not being tracked and are losing their foster care services as a result. Since dependent and delinquency systems are separated, many youth fall into the cracks between the two. The absence of coordinated responses for youth who cross into both systems is



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JUVENILE JUSTICE CONTINUED



particularly distressing because many youth in the dependency system are at much higher risk for delinquency, and many youth in the delinquency system are victims of abuse or neglect. Recent research indicates that up to 29% of dependent children engage in delinquent behavior, and the risk of delinquency is approximately 47% higher for victims of child abuse and neglect. [iv] So, since foster youth are already at a greater disadvantage in engaging in delinquency primarily due to their environment and background, it's all the more critical that a reliable tracking system monitors these youth. Without accurate data showing how many foster youth have "crossed-over," resources will not be utilized properly if at all, and cross-over youth will become lost, unknowingly being denied eligible services that may help them in the future.

When a dependent youth enters the delinquency system, that cross-over youth is completely unaware if he or she is eligible for any kind of support or services. Not only that, authority figures such as probation officers are also not informed on the types of support, services and laws that pertain to foster youth. Classification status and the county location also make it difficult to determine aid that's available to cross-over youth. Until a few years ago, California terminated foster care responsibility when a youth entered the juvenile justice system. But in 2004, California passed a law AB 129, Chapter 468 Statutes of 2004, that allows counties to keep "dual jurisdiction" so that services can continue to be provided to cross-over youth. What this means is that in most counties, a youth may not be under both the foster care and delinquency systems at the same time but this law allows counties to pilot programs to continue to provide services to youth who cross-over into the juvenile justice system from foster care. However, the vast majority of

California counties have not developed a jointly written protocol in order to participate in this initiative.

For cross-over youth who are out of juvenile hall or CYA but on probation living in a foster care placement, they face more problems. For instance, over half of the probation foster youth are transferred outside of their home county, which thus limits their accessibility to friends, family, ILP, social workers, attorneys, etc. Also, even though these probation youth are eligible for foster care services like ILP, Medi-Cal and permanency support, they are frequently treated differently and discriminated against because a lot of them, up to 40%, are placed in group homes, which often don't offer as much emotional support. Another problem cross-over youth face is that after emancipation, some of them find that they are denied entry to housing programs and other support services that would help make their transition successful.

Cross-over youth are less likely to receive desperately needed services that could benefit them because their cases often get lost in social services and juvenile justice, both agencies with conflicting missions (to protect vs. to rehabilitate), which invariably prevents coordination and collaboration. Also, there's no database that tracks cross-over youth. Jurisdictions rarely can produce information on how many cross-over youth were processed, the characteristics of those youth, or the outcomes they received by the court.

Members are all too familiar of the problems that arise in the fragmentation



across the juvenile dependency and delinquency systems. Instead of a centralized and unified program in place, cross-over youth have no choice but to live with disjointed and uncoordinated bureaucratic parenting. Since only a few counties are piloting AB 129 currently, the absence of data-tracking, and system fragmentation, cross-over youth will suffer substantial consequences that will affect them in adulthood.

JUVENILE JUSTICE CROSS-OVER YOUTH RECOMMENDATIONS

- Extend dual-jurisdiction to all counties. The vast majority of California counties do not have a signed AB 129 protocols set in place. [v] Dual-jurisdiction specifically refers to a minor who has been designated as both a dependent child and a ward of the juvenile court and therefore becomes the shared responsibility of the probation department, child welfare department, and juvenile court within that county. By developing joint written AB 129 protocols in all 58 counties, a comprehensive plan will be developed for all foster youth that will ensure that youth received increased access to resources and services in a holistic and timely manner. Also, foster youth lost in the juvenile justice system may easily be tracked due to the shared responsibility of these entities.
- Provide cross-training services for social workers and/or for those who represent “cross-over” youth such as probation officers.
- Add additional social workers so there will be a better chance of keeping track of foster children and all parties will better be able to serve this unique population.
- Either create or add a database solely designed to track “cross-over” youth. There has to be tracking and accountability to help better “cross-over” youths’ lives.
- Courts and agencies on the local and state levels should collaborate and jointly plan for the collection and sharing of all relevant data and information, which can lead to better decisions and outcomes for children.
- Have cross-over youth who are on probation go through the dependency court system instead of the juvenile justice system. This way will ensure that probation youth will get more resources and be better prepared for the emancipation process.

JUVENILE JUSTICE CROSS-OVER YOUTH ACTION ITEMS

- Advocate for legislation requiring dual jurisdiction in all counties.
- Advocate that data on child welfare exits to the delinquency system be collected and reported within CWS/CMS.
- Require outcomes for child welfare youth now in the juvenile justice system be part of county outcome and accountability tracking.



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GROUP HOMES

According to the California Department of Social Services website, group homes provide the most restrictive out-of-home placement option for children in foster care. They provide a placement option for children with significant emotional or behavioral problems who require more restrictive environments. This definition given is not entirely accurate. According to the UC Berkeley, Center for Social Services Research, while 8% of California's foster youth are placed in group homes, 30% of all teenagers in care are placed in group homes. Often, group homes serve as a permanent placement for long-term foster youth. When there are no appropriate relatives or willing foster homes available, many foster youth are sent to group homes until emancipation. The majority of foster youth who live in group homes are teenagers and they are sent there because the state has nowhere else to place them. This is a problem due to the very nature of group home placements: staff rotations and other youth frequently moving into and out of the facility. Group home placements are not designed to promote permanency in the lives of foster youth in their care.

Group home youth are aware that their placements receive more money than regular foster homes, but they feel that they rarely receive increased supportive services or have their needs met which include emancipation planning and intensive case management. Also, there's a great concern that group home staff are not properly trained before and during their period of employment to address foster youth's needs in conflict resolution, child and adolescent development and providing basic emotional support. CYC members have stated that they realize group homes are not substitutes for real homes with loving families, but they feel that group homes must be accountable since they are responsible for caring for youth who have been abused and/or neglected. It doesn't help youth when there's high staff turnover because it impedes the opportunity for youth to build relationships. The focus here is to not only to identify problems within group home settings but also find solutions as to how to make the current situation better, particularly for youth who have no choice but to live in a group home until emancipation.

ISSUE #1: ACCOUNTABILITY

Who can a youth turn to when things are not right in the group home? Most



foster youth have lamented that they feel they have no rights when they are not treated appropriately in the place they are supposed to call "home." They don't know whom they can call when their rights have been violated such as unwarranted discipline, inappropriate touching or general neglect in allotment of allowance and hygienic products. They also feel helpless when group home staff professionals disrespect them and/or ignore their requests for basic needs. Foster youth are aware that they always have the option of calling their social worker or writing a letter to the State's Ombudsman, but the likelihood of those complaints being resolved in a timely manner is very small. At present, Community Care Licensing (CCL) is the sole source of accountability for group home management.

In 2003, CCL reduced visits to inspect foster care placements to once every five years (36 other states require visits at least annually). In addition to the years-long lapse of time in between these inspections, group homes seem to know when CCL will be arriving which may mean CCL is not always getting the most accurate picture of how the group home operates. CCL visits also typically take place during times when youth are not in the residency.

Currently, there is no bill or law that monitors the quality of residencies. However, in 2001, CYC created the Foster Youth Bill of Rights and it is now law (AB 899, Chapter 683 Statutes of 2001) for all group homes to post the bill of rights. This is critical since group home staff may be unaware of the rights that foster youth have and may infringe upon them. The posting of the bill of rights is a nice start but more needs to be done. For group home residents to feel safe and well-cared for, group home staff needs to be trained in conflict management and emancipation pre-planning or at least

be required to inform and encourage residents to attend workshops that will help their transition and lastly, group home administrators need to be accountable for failure of enforcing existing standards.

GROUP HOMES ISSUE # 1 ACCOUNTABILITY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Community Care Licensing (CCL) should make more unannounced visits. CCL should visit twice a year, if not annually, to enforce rules and ensure that staff members are not abusing their authority.**
- **The visits should occur when the youth are at the group home.**
- **CCL should speak to youth individually and in confidence.**
- **CCL should hire former foster youth to work within their division. Former foster youth will go with licensing analysts when residences are having their licenses renewed or a complaint has been filed to speak with youth at the residence. The information they collect will be included in the licensing and complaint processes.**

GROUP HOMES ISSUE # 1 ACCOUNTABILITY ACTION ITEMS

- **Encourage the State Legislature to increase annual budget funding for the Community Care Licensing Division, to ensure that licensing visits to foster care placements are made at least on an annual basis.**
- **Rearrange or create new work shifts within the Community Care Licensing Division that enable LPA's to make visits during non-school hours and on weekends when residents are available to be spoken with.**
- **State CCL should create a confidential, youth friendly, quality assurance form with a business return envelope that can be left for residents if Licensing Program Analysts (LPA's) are not able to speak directly with youth. This form would allow youth an opportunity to provide confidential feedback about conditions in their placement.**

ISSUE #2: CONFLICT RESOLUTION TRAINING

Imagine if someone in your own home called the police every time you got into an argument. Strangely, this is a reality many group home residents face in their daily lives. Unlike foster youth, minors in the general population are often allowed to make mistakes, get into arguments, and fight with their siblings and/or peers. The consequence for a minor not in care is usually limited to a verbal reprimand or being grounded. For foster youth, the consequences are often far more severe: jail time, a permanent record and a loss of freedom, rights and privileges.

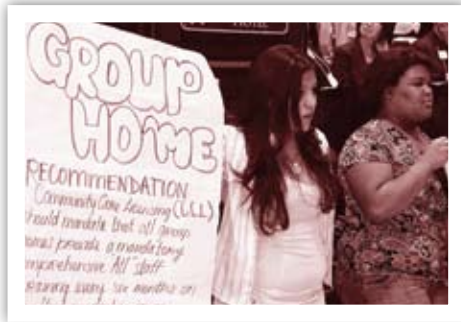
Foster youth do not have the luxury of going through growing pains that come with natural development. Foster youth, particularly the ones in group homes, must suppress their reactions to a stressful environment for fear that



staff will either manhandle them or call the police. The psychological effects of calling the police anytime a problem arises could only be damaging to the youth. In addition to coming from environments of abuse and neglect, experiencing post-traumatic stress effects due to personal history and constantly worrying about an unknown future, group home residents have to also contend with untrained staff professionals who overreact to what can be usually considered normal adolescent angst. In every workshop, youth have recounted incidents where group home staff dialed 9-1-1 anytime there was a fight or an aggressive argument. Some foster youth felt that because of its general set-up, group homes are a breeding ground for particular behaviors: institutionalizing young residents who are continually reminded they are unloved, offering little to no opportunities for advancement and

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GROUP HOMES CONTINUED



failure to guarantee youth stability, security and safety. Although members reasoned that ultimately there's no excuse for fighting, there is however, a gross

misunderstanding of the youth's perspective as well as poor conflict management from group home staff professionals. It is understandable that group home staff must take action when conflict arises but their limiting course of action is what primarily concerns foster youth.

Overall, CYC members strongly believe that group home staff are not being adequately trained on vital issues that affect foster youths' lives. In an attempt to resolve this widely ignored issue that so greatly affects foster youth, members suggested that an organized group such as the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project should be responsible for training statewide group home staff professionals. The Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project is a program of San Francisco State's Bay Area Academy made up of current and former foster youth, ages 16-24, all of whom are recruited from California Youth Connection that train social workers and social work supervisors in a variety of areas. The idea behind this recommendation is that not only will the opportunity offer employment to youth, which is welcomed considering 50% of them are unemployed upon emancipation, but the nature of these trainings will be more conducive to the goal of pinpointing the areas that need improvement. In addition to highlighting the problematic areas that occur in group home residencies, the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project is in a better position than anyone else to offer solutions because they have lived in those environments. Ultimately, foster youth feel that because of their experiences, they are the true experts of the child welfare system and the insightful information they can provide in these trainings will prove to be more useful than professionals who only have a clinical understanding of group home living conditions.

GROUP HOME ISSUES # 2: CONFLICT RESOLUTION TRAINING: RECOMMENDATIONS:

- An organized group such as the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project should be responsible for training group home

staff. These youth trainers will also develop curriculum in their strategic planning on how to resolve issues that affect foster youth. Reasons why the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project should train statewide group home staff:

- Having current and former foster youth as trainers is imperative because only youth who experienced life in foster care can accurately convey the culture within it.
 - Current and former foster youth would develop the curriculum for trainings since they know all about the intricacies of the foster youth culture and the impact of decisions made on their behalf.
- Group home administrators should require prospective staff to have a successful employment history of working well with adolescents so to ensure that staff is qualified to supervise group home youth.

GROUP HOME ISSUES # 2: CONFLICT RESOLUTION TRAINING: ACTION ITEMS

- Require prospective group home employee applicants who have not had previous employment experiences working with group home youth to first intern within residences to ensure they are qualified to work with foster youth. Include in their application for employment an evaluation of their internship.
- Include youth residing within the residence (or other current and former foster youth) on group home applicant hiring committees.
- Implement a customer satisfaction survey that allows youth the opportunity to provide ongoing feedback regarding staff hiring policies and staff quality.
- Advocate for foundations supporting the Residentially Based Services Reform to provide funding to the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project to provide technical assistance and trainings per AB 1453, Soto, Statutes of 2007.

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SOCIAL WORK SERVICES

The role social workers play in a youth's life is the most important one. Social workers are not only navigators of the often disjointed and complex system known as foster care but they, and the courts, determine the fates of foster youth. Social workers are responsible for placing a youth in a safe and stable environment, also making sure that the youth's educational, physical and mental health needs are met, establishing and maintaining sibling contact, and preparing the youth for emancipation. Many foster youth at the conference claimed that social workers have struggled to provide the quality services that foster youth need. For instance, social workers often make decisions for youth without their input. This renders the youth powerless and the choices made may not be in the best interest of the child and may not include all the information that will help make the most well informed decision on the youth's behalf. When youth are consulted and made partners in decisions regarding themselves, they have a much more vested interest in the outcomes of these decisions as opposed to if these decisions are made unilaterally on their behalf.

There are other problems foster youth have with their social workers. Many claim they never see or hear from their social worker despite leaving multiple messages and other attempts in trying to get a hold of them. This poses a dilemma since youth often need a social worker for clearance issues or when there are problems at their residence or school. Aside from absenteeism, youth also complain that they miss out on crucial services, particularly transitional programs, because their social worker may not inform them of



these workshops at all or within a reasonable amount of time. In general, many youth feel not all social workers are prepared to work with the diverse population that

makes up foster care. Members have stated that some social workers need to put their personal values and judgments aside in order to provide youth with adequate services. To quote one youth at the conference, "To them [social



workers], this is their job...but to us, this is our life."

Because most social workers have not had personal experiences with the foster care system, they often lack the proper training to relate to foster youth. As a result, foster youth feel the burdens of social worker overload and it's not surprising. The average caseload per social worker that works within permanent placement programs is 54 cases. [i] According to the SB 2030 workload study, the minimum of cases social workers within permanent placement programs should carry in order to complete the minimum job requirements is 24 cases and optimally, the caseload would be approximately 16 cases in order to perform effectively overall. Since social workers are often the sole constant a foster child has, it's vital that social workers should be put into a position where they can look at their clients more as a human being and less like a case file number.

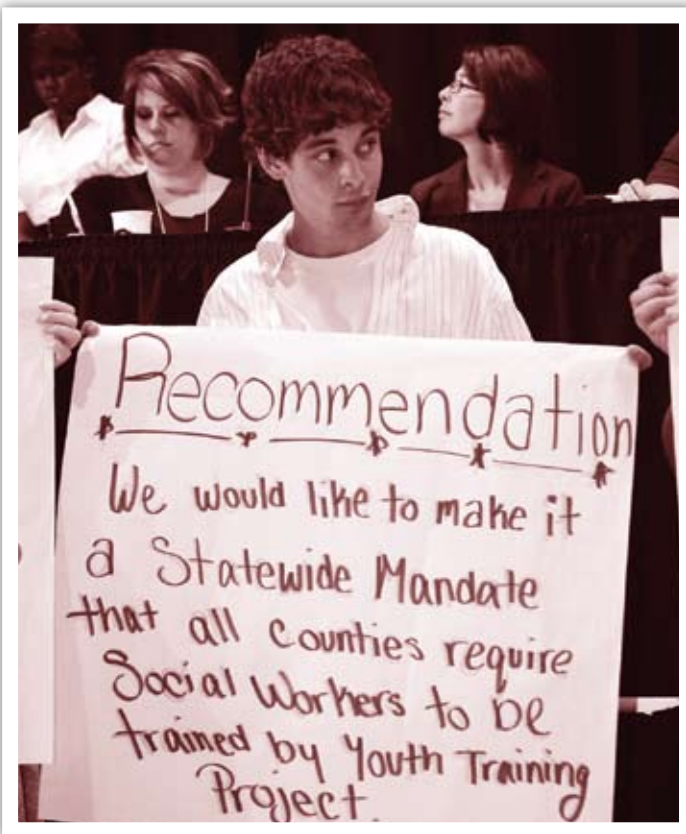
Another issue that greatly affects foster youth is the lack of contact they have with their siblings. This contact problem is trickier if a sibling is living in a juvenile detention facility, community treatment facility, mental ward, group home or any other high level residency. Understandably, CYC members became emotional at the conference when they explained that they cannot just pick up a phone and call their brother or sister whenever they needed to. Social workers should enforce the basic right of sibling contact by evaluating the youth's placement, checking to see if that right is being violated. Sibling contact is paramount considering that most siblings don't live together. In a study conducted last year by the UC Berkeley Center for Social Services Research, less than half (49.5%) of siblings were all placed together in the

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SOCIAL WORK SERVICES CONTINUED

same home. [ii] Ideally, more resources and families would be available and more homes would be accepting and/or able to care for sibling groups but in the meantime social workers should double their efforts in making sure youth are in continuous contact with their siblings.

Until more social workers are hired, which in turn would reduce their caseloads, there are subtle but effective ways social workers can maximize their ability to help foster youth. First and foremost, social workers need to have communication with youth when developing their case plans about youth's concerns and recommendations in the areas of permanency, education, placements, physical/mental health needs, and transitional services. Also, social workers need to make youth aware of any available transitional and higher educational services and programs within their county (e.g. Guardian Scholars, THP-PLUS, etc) or a county in which a youth is planning on moving to by the age of 16 and should for youth who have a case plan designed toward emancipation. This course of action will allow youth who will be emancipating from the system more time to explore these options.



SOCIAL WORKER SERVICES RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Implementing a statewide mandate that all counties require social workers to be trained by the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project*. Some topics of training would include: permanency, resiliency, LGBTQ, mental health and crisis management.
- The California Department of Social Services should increase funding for the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project so they can train more social workers.
- The California Department of Social Services should require a "social worker performance evaluation" form, which will be created with the assistance of CYC. The evaluation form will be distributed every six months and focus on areas of improvement and identify patterns of social workers. The State Ombudsman and County Supervisors will receive the evaluations and determine if poor performing social workers need training, a change of responsibilities or should be required to shadow a higher performing social worker. Additionally, the evaluations will be included in the individual County's "AB 636 Outcome and Accountability Report and will be integrated into the individual County's System Improvement Plan's.

SOCIAL WORKER SERVICES ACTION ITEMS

- Require Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project training be a mandatory part of all social workers' core training.

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TRANSITIONAL HOUSING SERVICES

Think back to the day when you turned 18. You were then officially an adult. Did that mean you could take care of yourself? Unfortunately, emancipating youth do not have the luxury of entertaining that question because they are forced onto the streets regardless of whether they were prepared for such living or not. According to the latest statistics, these youth are not prepared: 46% have not completed high school [i], nearly 50% require government assistance [ii] 25%-40% become homeless after leaving care [iii], 60% of former foster youth are unemployed [iv] and 25% become incarcerated [v]. The story behind these statistics is that while in the state's care, foster youth are not properly trained, if at all, to care for themselves and this means youth struggle to achieve their potential and self sufficiency as adults.



Every year, from 2000-4000 foster youth emancipate from the foster care system in California. The average young person does not leave home and become fully self-sufficient until age 26 [vi], however foster youth are abandoned by the system and expected to be fully self-supportive at 18 years old. At present, whether a youth has access to post emancipation services or not, foster youth are expected to find housing, employment, provide for their medical needs, secure transportation and do whatever else is necessary for survival and success. The word emancipation indicates that foster youth are “set free” from the system but without the proper safety nets and lifelong connections with caring adults, this form of liberation can be harmful to the quality of life foster youth experience as adults. Being without a safety net and supportive people who can provide assistance in times of crisis can ultimately impact results for stable living conditions, education, self-love and sanity.

By the time foster youth turn 18, nearly two-thirds of them in California need housing at the time of emancipation. A recent study showed that in LA County alone there are 5,100 former foster youth who are eligible for transitional housing services yet there are only 244 Transition Housing Placement Program beds available. [vii] One of the greatest concerns youth expressed at the conference is the waiting list for Transitional Housing Programs (THP). In counties that even have transitional housing programs available, the lists are often too long, and there are not enough sustainable programs or alternative resources emancipating youth can access. In every testimony told at the conference, no good consequences can come out of being homeless and turned away from these transitional housing programs.

In addition from feeling alone, lost, scared and hopeless, many youth recounted stories of how their friends turned to prostitution or selling drugs as a means of survival shortly after they couldn't find residency at a THP.

Most CYC members are deeply frustrated over how inadequate their preparation of transitional services has been in their respective counties. Upon emancipation, most foster youth don't know what an IRA is, they have little to no money management skills (a 2005 study indicated that only 46% of former foster youth have a savings or checking account) [viii] and many youth don't know how to fill out job or financial aid applications on their own. When it comes to housing, foster youth don't know where to go or how to begin looking for a place to live. If emancipating youth do not gain access to transitional services then other social problems are sure to follow, i.e. homelessness, unemployment and/or incarceration.

Obviously, there should be better alternatives made available. For example, every social worker should be familiar with Independent Living Programs, which among other things, helps youth up to age 21 in paying rent and deposits, higher education or job training costs. Another program that youth should know about is THP-PLUS, which provides affordable housing and comprehensive supportive services to former foster youth, age 18-24 over a two-year period. In this program, there are 15 required supportive services which include: educational counseling, employment assistance, mental health counseling, mentoring, case management services, a monthly rental subsidy and apartment furnishings among others. Housing provided by THP-PLUS is flexible in that it can be either permanent or transitional, and

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TRANSITIONAL HOUSING SERVICES CONTINUED

be provided in many models including apartments or a host family model where young adults either continue to live with their foster family, kinship placement or with an adult which they have a permanent connection. THP-PLUS currently operates in 16 counties and an additional 28 counties have just been approved by the California Department of Social Services to implement the program. The goal is to expand THP-PLUS to all counties and make it a requirement that all social workers notify their youth about this program and any other transitional services located within their county.

Transitional programs such as THP-PLUS are good in that they're not designed to prolong dependency but rather allow foster youth time to develop the crucial life skills they need in order to survive on their own. Still, spaces in these transitional programs are very limited and often have long waiting lists. More will have to be done in order to guarantee a successful emancipation for California's foster youth.

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Policymakers should continue to provide additional funding for transitional housing programs throughout the state since there is not enough housing, waiting lists are too long and no adequate alternatives are available.**
- **The California Department of Social Services should require counties who have THP to administer public awareness campaigns to county housing development authorities.**
- **All foster youth who get into THP should be assigned a THP peer mentor who has already gone through the THP successfully.**
- **All transitional housing programs should have mentors and therapists on site or nearby so they are easily accessible to youth.**
- **Offer courses at the THP or in ILP that will teach youth money management and employment preparation skills.**

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING ACTION ITEMS:

- **Require county Independent Living Programs (ILP) to partner with Transitional Housing Programs in their county to provide services to ILP eligible foster youth.**
- **Encourage county Mental Health Services Act plans to fund therapist and mentor positions for county THP's.**
- **Encourage the DSS to develop a statewide database of THP graduates and include in that database a category for graduates who would be interested in mentoring other foster youth within THP programs.**



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CONCLUSION

This report is a brief introduction to some of the issues foster youth currently face in California. With its publication, CYC anticipates informing local and state officials as well as decision makers about these issues in hopes of effectively changing the foster care system for the better. CYC strongly believes foster youth are the most knowledgeable when it comes to these issues; therefore, any effort to bring change to the system should be made in collaboration with them. It's important for foster youth to not remain voiceless in addition to all the other challenges they have to deal with on a daily basis. Positive change is inevitable, for these voices are truly impacting tomorrow today.



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