

## **Declaration of Commitment to Permanence for Older Foster Youth**

As members of the Child Welfare community in California, we recognize the crisis that exists for older foster youth who lack permanence. We hereby declare our commitment to support and achieve permanence for all youth, and that:

We are deeply concerned that approximately 80,000 foster children are in care in California, many of whom are unable to return to their families, and who thus rely on the foster care system to provide them with a family and a sense of permanent belonging; and

Youth in foster care need the same permanent family connections as youth in the general population. Permanency for youth is a process that includes involvement of the youth as key participants in defining permanency for themselves and finding stable and secure lifelong connections; and

Research has demonstrated that a lifelong connection and relationship with a supportive adult, related by blood or not, is one of the key variables associated with resilience and will have the single greatest impact on each youth's ability to navigate the transition to adulthood; and

A committed adult is one who provides a safe, stable and secure type of parenting relationship; love; unconditional commitment; and lifelong support in the context of reunification, a legal adoption, guardianship or some other form of committed lifelong connection; and

Many foster youth currently leave care without a single lasting relationship or connection with any adult, and many youth only have relationships with adults that are limited solely to professionals and last only as long as the youth is in foster care; and

Statistics show that many negative outcomes experienced by foster youth are a result of having no one to turn to for help and support once they exit the foster system; and

Older foster youth greatly need and want permanent connections and lifelong relationships with adults, particularly as they prepare to leave the foster care system and face the challenges of life alone; and

For permanency to be achieved for adolescents, public and private child welfare professionals must work in partnership together with the youth in defining lifelong connections, that are permanent, secure and healthy relationships; and

We acknowledge the particular role and the significant contributions of youth themselves and recognize that their full involvement and participation is crucial to effectively achieving permanence for youth;

We commend the leadership role the California Permanency for Youth Project has taken in acting as a resource to public and private child welfare agencies, providing training, inspiration and support to obtaining lifelong relationships for teens in foster care; and

We acknowledge that the current resources devoted to achieving permanence for older foster youth are not commensurate with the magnitude of the need; so therefore

***Working within our organizations, agencies, and communities and through the growing permanency for foster youth movement we promise to support and promote these objectives by doing the following:***

**Promote recognition of and respect for** the urgent need to ensure every foster youth has at least one lifelong permanent relationship;

**Educate** all we come into contact with on the need, urgency, and promising practices for achieving permanence for foster youth;

**Support** local and statewide projects and efforts to raise awareness, recommend policy changes, increase funding for and provide assistance to improve older youths' opportunities to develop a lifelong connection with a committed adult before leaving foster care;

**Initiate change** within our own organizations to support youth permanence and lifelong connections.

**Fortify** our common commitment to the permanence of older foster youth- not as a matter of charity but as an obligation of the entire child welfare and human community to the children in our foster care system.

Signed by

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Name Title Organization Date

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Name (authorized signer for) Organization Date