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JULY 2014

Statewide Annual Permanency Report

Probation Adoption

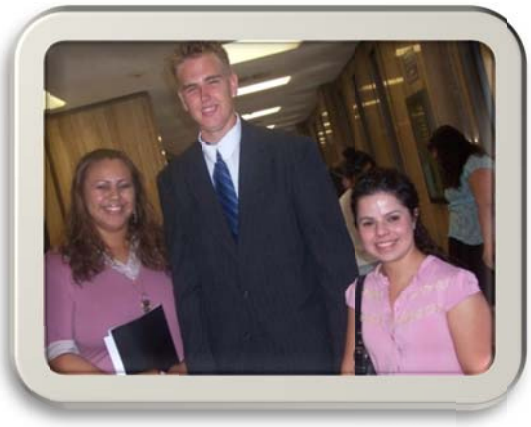
ADDRESSING THE NEED FOR *TIMELINESS TO PERMANENCY* FOR ALL FOSTER YOUTH

The Outcomes and Accountability Act (AB626) mandates all counties to improve outcomes for youth and families. Based on the findings from the Peer Quality Case Review (PQCR) and County Self Assessments (CSA), each county developed a System Improvement Plan (SIP). The purpose of the SIP is to address four systematic areas in need of improvement, one being timeliness to permanency.

ADOPTION IS AN OPTION

"All children deserve to be raised in safe, healthy, loving, permanent homes. There are many different paths to permanency—adoption, guardianship, family reunification—each of which, when achieved, marks a successful case resolution and exit from the foster care system. These successes can only happen if the juvenile courts and their partners keep permanency goals in sight from the beginning of every case and work toward them throughout the process."

Judge Nash, Los Angeles County Historically, juvenile probation at the state and national level were not involved with adoptions for youth who have committed crimes. Changes in federal laws and strong collaborations between child welfare agencies, juvenile probation and juvenile courts has gained groundbreaking momentum; thus, pioneering a practice unheard of until March of 2006!!



ADOPTION #1

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

CASEY

Dayna, a single mother of two daughters adopted from foster care, was not ready to adopt another. As the adoptive mother of Casey's biological sister, Samantha, she was simply making a family connection for Samantha. Samantha did not want to change her name until she found her brother. Dayna immediately went to work to find Casey.

At first glance, Dayna knew that Casey was not the typical kid featured in adoption brochures. Dayna was aware of Casey's history: removed from abusive parents at age 6 and spent 8 years between relatives, foster care, strangers, group homes, etc. Seeing that no one came to visit Casey and how utterly alone he was, she started taking him home for weekend visits.

One day, Dayna and Casey were talking and she asked him, "If you had a magic wand and could change one thing about your life, what would it be?" Casey's reply was, "I would make you my mom." The next day, Dayna called Casey's probation officer to begin the adoption process, leading to the first Probation youth in the nation! The adoption was finalized in March of 2006.

ADOPTION #2

YOLO COUNTY

JERONE

Jerone was removed from his home at the age of 3, alleging caretaker absence/ incapacity. Both parents were incarcerated and parental rights were terminated in 1996. Jerone lived with a non-relative caregiver, Paula, when he came to the attention of Yolo County Probation. While receiving services through the Kaleidoscope program through state adoptions, California Department of Social Services Sacramento District Office located and contacted Jerone's brother, Allen. The last contact the siblings had was when Jerone was 3 years old. Upon connection, phone calls and face to face visits started.

Paula contacted Probation because she is no longer able to care for Jerone. Jerone was initially welcomed to Allen's home as a non-relative extended family member caregiver, due to the termination of parental rights. On June 19, 2008, Jerone's adoption was finalized, reinstating his blood relationship with his brother permanently.

ADOPTION #3

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

BRYAN

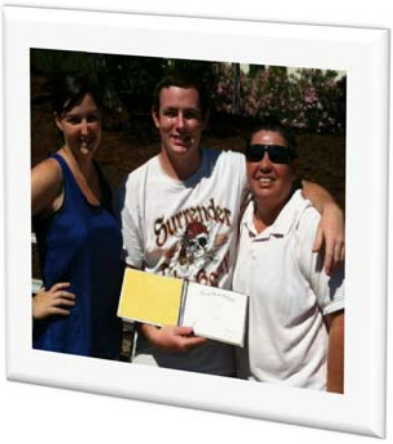
Bryan and his siblings were removed from their mother and were placed and remained with their stepfather. Bryan, along with his sisters, was adoptively placed in the home, but he was arrested for a tagging crime, became a ward of the delinquency court and was placed in a Group Home. The adoption was taken off calendar due to his dependency case being closed. Bryan lived in a group home for 6 months and eventually moved back with his stepfather. There were minor incidents subsequent to his arrest, but Bryan's behavior dramatically improved with the assistance of joint efforts between DCFS and Probation.

Bryan attended a charter school and went to weekly school-based counseling and attended Functional Family Therapy sessions.

Bryan's wish was to be adopted by his stepfather because his other siblings were adopted two years ago in dependency court. Due to a strong collaboration established between DCFS/Probation, the adoption was finalized on April 2010.

ADOPTION #4

MENDOCINO COUNTY



DAVID

David first came to the attention of Probation at 14 when he was arrested for stealing. Investigations revealed that he received very little supervision at home, was struggling with school and abused drugs and alcohol. David's mother was an active methamphetamine user and the home was in deplorable condition. David was recommended out-of-home placement by his probation officer.

David was placed in a foster home through a Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) program, designed to modify the behavior of youth with intensive needs. He flourished in the program, improving his grades and remaining drug free. Upon graduating from the program, David was moved to a regular foster home.

The foster home had great potential to becoming a long-term placement. The foster mother previously worked with David in the MTFC program. David adjusted quickly and continued to improve in school, took on a part-time job and was involved in several extra-curricular activities.

After six months in his foster home, David and his foster mother approached the Probation Department about long-term options and decided to pursue the most permanent plan, adoption.

The adoption was finalized on October 15, 2012. David plans to go to college and to major in Criminal Justice. He wants to become a police officer so that he can help others.

ADOPTION #5

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY

DAVID

David came to the attention of Child Welfare Services (CWS) when an investigation discovered that his younger niece was held in a closet and was a victim of severe physical abuse and neglect. David's mom was determined to be the main perpetrator; however, he was also involved and detained in juvenile hall. He was later charged with felony assault. David was declared a ward of the court, with the added precaution that he needed to be closely supervised by probation after being evaluated as a possible sociopath.

David's mother had severe substance abuse issues and criminal behavior. She eventually went to prison for felony child abuse. Since David's father's whereabouts were unknown, he was placed in a group home. David was then reassigned to a different probation officer, who saw a memo from David's file of a court recommendation to allow Matt and Lisa to visit David in juvenile hall.

Matt worked in a skate park where David went after school and stayed until the park closed. Matt would let David eat for free at the snack bar because he knew that he did not get enough to eat. Lisa is a teacher with a special education credential. The court authorized the visits, and Matt became a father figure to David. Home passes during the holidays were later authorized by Probation.

Probation eventually recommended for David to be placed with Matt and Lisa under a non-relative extended family member placement. David excelled in his classes and won the Monster Skate Board tournament.

Adoption has never been done for Probation kids in SLO County. However, the officer knew that adoption is the preferred permanency plan. With the help of the officer's supervisor and CWS, the adoption was finalized on December 2011.

ADOPTION #6

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

FRED

Fred originally came from a functional and stable family, until his father was diagnosed with cancer. Fred's mother became less capable of caring for him and he ended up in foster care, moving from one group home to the next. The stress of Fred's deteriorating family took a toll in him and he started getting into trouble with law, landing him in probation. Fred was charged with battery with serious bodily injury and ordered camp community placement

Upon completion of camp, Fred was ordered to be suitably placed with his paternal aunt and uncle. He did fairly well in his academics and behavior in school. He was consistent with attendance and progressed well with his grades. He obeyed all of the conditions of his probation and was highly compliant to the rules in the home. The plan adoption was discussed. According to Fred, "I feel like God gave me a new set of parents." His aunt and uncle agreed to the adoption because they felt it was in Fred's best interest.

In order to proceed with the adoption, Probation needed to locate Fred's mother to terminate her parental rights (father is deceased). Fred's mother was incarcerated and was originally opposed to the adoption. She requested to speak directly with Fred before she will consider it. Probation flew Fred and his aunt and uncle to visit Fred's mother. Fred assured his mother he still loved her, but adoption was what he wanted. His mother agreed to terminate her parental rights. Fred's biological mother was granted permission to attend the adoption hearing, finalized on June 2013.

ADOPTION #7

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

STEPHEN

Stephan was 15 years old when his adoptive mother died from cardio failure, leaving him cared for by his aunt that was not in interested in adopting him. Stephen came to the attention of Probation Department when he was arrested for burglary. He was placed on suitable placement and lived in multiple group homes while Probation/DCFS worked together to find him a home. Over the course of three years, the two agencies worked with several potential families that were interested in adopting Stephen, but for various reasons were not successful.

One day, Probation and DCFS workers contacted the mother in law of Stephen's aunt. She immediately loved Stephen and became very active in his case plan. She traveled from Northern California to Los Angeles to attend family therapy sessions and all other necessary appointments. Upon further discussion, both parties agreed that adoption was the best permanent option for Stephen. The adoption was finalized on December 2013, right in time for Christmas.

ADOPTION NOT AN OPTION?

THERE ARE ALTERNATIVES!

LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP

The idea of Legal Guardianship in delinquency court is spreading! As of May 2014, Los Angeles County Probation has 3 strong potential legal guardianship cases!

FAMILY FINDING

Family Finding utilizes U.S. Search, Lexis-Nexis and other means to locate family members for youth. Due diligent efforts are made to find parents whose whereabouts are unknown, and for legal guardianships and adoptions purposes.

MEDIA-BASED RECRUITMENT

On February 2010, Los Angeles County Probation made history by having the first media-based recruitment case in delinquency court! Media-based recruitment allows Probation to showcase the youth to potential adoptive families through various forms of media, such as Heart Gallery, Wednesday's Child, Dodger games/calendars, Kid Save and recruitment websites.

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Foster youth, Stephen, was the first Probation kid to be included in the Heart Gallery Los Angeles!