



# COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES OFFICE OF CHILD PROTECTION

KENNETH HAHN HALL OF ADMINISTRATION  
500 WEST TEMPLE STREET, ROOM 383  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90012  
(213) 893-2010


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September 4, 2019

TO: Supervisor Janice Hahn, Chair  
Supervisor Hilda L. Solis  
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Supervisor Kathryn Barger

FROM: Judge Michael Nash (Ret.)   
Executive Director, Office of Child Protection

### **INCREASING STABILITY AND PERMANENCY FOR TRANSITION-AGE YOUTH (ITEM NUMBER 8, AGENDA OF DECEMBER 4, 2018)**

On December 4, 2018, the Board directed the executive director of the Office of Child Protection (OCP)—in collaboration with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the directors of the departments of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Mental Health (DMH), the Juvenile Court, the Chief Probation Officer, legal advocates, and other external and internal stakeholders—to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to increase permanency for system-involved youth.

Since the beginning of 2019, the OCP has convened meetings of stakeholders that have occurred regularly since February. Participants have included representatives of DCFS, DMH, County Counsel, the Juvenile Court, the Probation Department, the Children's Law Center, the Center for Strategic Partnerships, Casey Family Programs, the Alliance for Children's Rights, Public Counsel, CASA of Los Angeles, the Commission for Children and Families, Child Trends, First 5 LA, the Children's Data Network, Hathaway-Sycamores Child and Family Services, and the California Child Welfare Indicators Project at the University of California Berkeley's School of Social Welfare.

OCP Permanency Workgroup activities have included a review of California law—specifically, California Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) section 366.26; a review of data received from DCFS, Probation, and the California Child Welfare Indicators Project; and hearing presentations from DCFS on its Youth Permanency Units, from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption on its Wendy's Wonderful Kids program, and from Casey Family Programs on Permanency Roundtables.

As a result, workgroup members have developed a series of recommendations that they believe will enhance permanency for children and youth involved with our system in Los Angeles County.

The recommendations below represent only the beginning of this effort, however. It is the OCP's intent to continue convening the workgroup to monitor implementation, as well as to develop/monitor the implementation of additional recommendations that the OCP will report to the Board in its quarterly progress updates.

The OCP Permanency Workgroup's initial recommendations are:

## 1) Data

**To use data for good, we need good data.** In developing any plan, it is necessary to maintain and track consistent, accurate data so that the intended work can be measured and evaluated. At this time, it is difficult to obtain consistent, accurate data from DCFS and others that relate to permanency. Examples appear in the data-related recommendations below:

- a. ***An up-to-date, accurate list is needed of Dependency Court cases that are 90 days or older and have not reached the disposition stage.*** At this point, figures suggest that between 800 and 1,400 cases fall into this category. Delays in processing these cases affect the ability of children and families to achieve permanency in a timely manner through reunification, adoption, or other means. A list sorted by child's name and court department needs to be generated every month (preferably), but no less than quarterly, so that DCFS and County Counsel can work with the Dependency Court and other legal advocates to resolve these matters in a more timely manner.
- b. ***An up-to-date, accurate list is needed of children and youth who currently have a so-called "plan" of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA).*** These are youth of all ages for whom family reunification has been terminated and who have no plan for adoption or guardianship. The ultimate destination for too many of these youth is a transition from the system that is also known as "aging out."

Moreover, many youth in this plan are under the age of 16, which is prohibited by law (WIC 366.26). An ongoing list sorted by child's name and by court department must be maintained so that DCFS, the court, and others can focus on efforts to develop true permanency for these youth, whom current data suggest may number in the thousands.

- c. ***An up-to-date, accurate list is needed of children and youth who have a permanent plan for adoption and are awaiting completion of those adoptions***—including children who have been freed for adoption for longer than six months.

In addition, ***an up-to-date, accurate list is needed of children and youth for whom family reunification has been terminated and who are awaiting permanency hearings pursuant to WIC 366.26.***

With these lists, DCFS can work with the juvenile court and other advocates to complete permanency for these segments of the system's population.

## 2) Family Reunification

DCFS data indicates that, over the past five years, the number of family reunifications has declined while the overall DCFS population has remained relatively stable. Our recommendation is that **DCFS work with the OCP to engage all stakeholders in conversations (including through targeted focus groups) to discuss and develop efforts to increase the number of children and youth who are safely reunited with their families.**

## 3) Youth Permanency Units

For more than a decade, DCFS has operated three pilot Youth Permanency Units (YPU) in the Metro North, Pomona, and Santa Clarita regional offices. (See [DCFS Policy 0100-580.00](#), Revision Date 07-10-2014.) These units were created to develop best-practices in youth-permanency social work that could be expanded department-wide.

Youth can be transferred to the YPU if they have a plan of APPLA and are not placed with a relative or non-related extended family member, or if they have limited or no family connections. In addition, at least one of the following criteria must apply:

- Multiple recent placements
- Substance abuse
- Recent psychiatric hospitalization
- Repeat runaway
- Has been in a group home or any placement for years and has not had the opportunity to establish a meaningful relationship with anyone

Representatives from the Pomona and Santa Clarita YPU presented information to the OCP Permanency Workgroup on the success of their units. ***It is imperative that DCFS undertake a formal evaluation of this long-standing pilot to determine its effectiveness, whether it should be expanded to other DCFS offices, whether its best practices could be utilized elsewhere, or whether the units should be eliminated.***

## 4) Wendy's Wonderful Kids

In response to the more than 20,000 youth aging out of foster care each year in the United States, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption in 2004 created a best-practice model to find families for those children most at risk of aging out of the child-welfare system. Through this program—called Wendy's Wonderful Kids—the foundation provides grants to local public or private agencies to hire an adoption professional to serve a small caseload of the most difficult-to-place children (a summary is included as Attachment 1).

A five-year evaluation of the program was completed by Child Trends, which found:

- Children served by the foundation were 1.7 times more likely to be adopted
- Older children were three times more likely to be adopted
- Children with mental health issues were more than three times more likely to be adopted
- The older the child served, the higher the likelihood of his/her being adopted when served by the program

Rita Soronen, the president and chief operating officer of the Dave Thomas Foundation, made an impressive presentation to workgroup members in July.

The OCP Permanency Workgroup recommends that ***DCFS engage in meaningful discussions with the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption on expanding the Wendy's Wonderful Kids program in Los Angeles, where it has had a very small presence for a number of years.***

## 5) Benefits Analysis

The OCP Permanency Workgroup has begun a comprehensive analysis of all benefits available to system youth and/or families to determine which, if any, pose a real or perceived barrier to permanency, and what can be done to eliminate those barriers. While the compilation is not yet complete, a sample of the chart on Basic Living Benefits appears as Attachment 2 to this report.

The plan is to complete the analysis, to ensure that the chart is understandable, user-friendly, and accessible to all youth and caregivers, and to develop training for all system stakeholders on these benefits.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (213) 893-1152 or via e-mail at [mnash@ocp.lacounty.gov](mailto:mnash@ocp.lacounty.gov), or your staff may contact Karen Herberts at (213) 893-2466 or via e-mail at [kherberts@ocp.lacounty.gov](mailto:kherberts@ocp.lacounty.gov).

MN:eih

c: Executive Office, Board of Supervisors  
Chief Executive Office  
Children and Family Services  
County Counsel  
Mental Health  
Probation



Dave Thomas  
Foundation  
for Adoption

Finding Forever Families for Children in Foster Care

**Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption**  
**Wendy's Wonderful Kids Child-Focused Recruitment Program**  
*Evidence-based best practice in foster care adoption*

**Program summary**  
January 2019

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**How the program works**

In response to more than 20,000 youth each year aging out of foster care in the United States, in 2004 the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption created and launched an aggressive, accountable best practice model to find families for those children most at risk of aging out of care. The Foundation provides grants to local public or private foster care adoption agencies to hire an adoption professional to serve a small caseload of the most difficult to place children. This recruiter implements an intensive, child-focused model (Wendy's Wonderful Kids) that requires a thorough review of the case file, a face-to-face relationship with the child, collaboration with all adults in the child's network, assurance of adoption preparation, an aggressive recruitment plan, and diligent search for all potential adoptive parents.

Grantees are provided with training and held accountable for outcomes, adherence to the model, and appropriate use of grant funds. The Foundation requires online monthly reporting and biannual financial reports. The grant covers salary, benefits, travel, some supervisory cost and all hard costs associated with the recruiter's efforts. The average grant is \$75,000 per year.

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**The effectiveness of the model**

A five-year, rigorous national evaluation of the Wendy's Wonderful Kids program, completed by Child Trends, found that this method of child-focused recruitment is dramatically more successful than business as usual:

- Children served by the Foundation were **1.7 times** more likely to be adopted
  - Older children were **3 times** more likely to be adopted
  - Children with mental health issues were **more than 3 times** more likely to be adopted
  - The older the child served, the higher the likelihood of being adopted when served by the program
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**Wendy's Wonderful Kids success to date**

437 WWK recruiters in the United States, District of Columbia & eight provinces in Canada  
20,371 children served (5,970 currently on recruiter caseloads)  
12,816 children matched  
693 children in pre-adoptive placements  
**7,850 total permanent placements** (including 509 legal guardianships)

**Children currently served through the program are the longest waiting children and most at risk of aging out of care**

- 63% are a part of a sibling group
- Average age is 13 years
- 82% have at least one special need
- 55% represent a racial or ethnic minority
- 33% are in a group home, institution or independent living at time of referral
- The average number of placements at referral to WWK is 5.1
- 23% had failed adoptions prior to Wendy's Wonderful Kids
- Spent an average of 3.1 years in care prior to referral to WWK



## **Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption Wendy's Wonderful Kids Child-Focused Recruitment Program**

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### **Child-focused recruitment curriculum**

With the generous support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption has created a national child-focused recruitment curriculum consisting of two days of in-person and e-learning modules. The curriculum is being used to train our Wendy's Wonderful Kids program grantees, states committed to scaling child-focused recruitment and jurisdictions seeking to embed this model as best practice for older youth adoptions across the nation.

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### **State-based case study - taking success to scale in Ohio**

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS) provided the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption with \$2.3 million in 2012 to add up to 35 recruiters to the seven Foundation-funded recruiters already working in the state. In 2013, the partnership was increased to \$3.4 million per year for two years, funding 50 recruiters. The sources of these funds are 46% Title IV-E, 46% state GRF and 8% Title IV-B Part 1. The goal is to use this evidence-based practice to focus on children aged nine or older, and who have been in care for at least two years and have been freed for adoption. In 2014, the Foundation began adding children with Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) status to the Ohio caseloads. Currently 54 recruiters are serving more than 840 children.

### **Ohio's return on investment**

Based on foster care placement costs, administrative costs and adoption subsidies for the specific children adopted, ODJFS estimates:

- Savings of **\$32 million** realized from 7 DTFA privately funded recruiters prior to the statewide expansion
- Savings of another **\$32 million** realized from ODJFS-funded adoptions
- Total savings of over **\$64 million** since the inception of WWK in Ohio

This does not include costs saved from averting the negative consequences for youth aging out of care (unemployment, homelessness, early parenting, etc.). Additionally, this expansion of state-wide adoption recruitment resources has established an impetus for local public agencies to review Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) cases resulting in a reduction of this population by more than half since the state's initial investment in 2012. The average monthly cost for children with the status of APPLA is \$3,695.

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### **Building toward North American scale**

In 2016, the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services committed to an initial three-year co-investment partnership with the Foundation to begin to take the program to scale. Currently, 364 children are on recruiter caseloads in Ontario.

In 2017, the Foundation's child-focused recruitment model success encouraged additional investors to launch an aggressive scaling plan to achieve full U.S. expansion of WWK within the next 12 years. The public/private co-investment strategy in states will help to assure 60,000 additional adoptions of those children and youth most at risk of aging out of care.

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### ***About the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption***

*The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption is a national nonprofit public charity dedicated exclusively to finding permanent homes for the nearly 155,000 children waiting in North America's foster care systems. Created by Wendy's® founder Dave Thomas who was adopted, the Foundation implements evidence-based, results-driven national service programs, foster care adoption awareness campaigns and innovative grantmaking. To learn more, visit [davethomasfoundation.org](http://davethomasfoundation.org).*



# ATTACHMENT 2

Basic Living Benefits										
Benefit Name	ILP General Benefits	ILP Life Skills / Individualized Transition Skills Program	ILP Youth on the Move	AB 12	Extended Adoption Assistance	CalWORKs	CalFresh	Transition Jurisdiction Services (Non-Minor)	Transition Jurisdiction Services (Minor)	
<b>Benefit</b>	Provides financial assistance and services, such as car insurance, driving lessons, books, etc. to current and former foster/ probation youth	Provides a life coach to help youth navigate access to benefits/services, enhance daily life skills and to gain self-sufficiency and permanent connections/ relationships	Offers Annual Transit Access Passes	Extends foster care to age 21 all the services and benefits DCFS/ Probation has to offer, e.g., support, funding, transportation, and housing			Provides cash aid and services to eligible families that have a child(ren) in the home	Provides benefits that are used instead of money at the grocery store, so low-income households can purchase the amount of food their household needs	Probation provides supervision, support, and guidance to youth in Extended Foster Care under WIC 450 jurisdiction	Probation provides supervision, support, and guidance to youth in Extended Foster Care under WIC 450 jurisdiction
<b>Benefit Period</b>	Ages 16 thru-20		Ages 18 thru 21	Ages 18 thru 20	Ages 18 thru 20	thru age 21		Thru age 20	Thru age 20	
<b>Kin Care</b>	<b>Elig:</b> ILP Eligibility - case closed after age 16 + receiving Kin-GAP pymts	<b>Elig:</b> ILP Elig. + age 16-20 + live in LA Co + open case; OR closed case and referred before age 19	<b>Elig:</b> ILP Elig + age 18 thru 21	<b>Elig:</b> Meets one: 1) youth age 16 before Kin-GAP pymts started, AND working to complete HS or GED, OR enrolled in college/Voc Ed, OR emply min 80 hrs/mo, OR part. In prgrm to assist in gaining emplymnt, OR unable due to med condition 2) youth turned 16 after Kin-GAP pymts started and is expected to graduate HS or GED before age 19 3) Youth has a physical or mental disability justifies continued asst		Elig: foster youth must have a child in their care at least 50% of the time and must not be receiving foster care benefits for themselves, AND meet the residency, income, and resource requirements of the program	Elig: Benefit is based on the income of a household. There are various rules and exceptions.			
<b>Adoption</b>	<b>Elig:</b> ILP Eligibility - after age 16 + receiving Adoption Assistance Payments	<b>Elig:</b> closed case and referred before age 19	<b>Elig:</b> ILP Elig + age 18 thru 21		<b>Elig:</b> Youth who began to receive AAP after 16yrs + one of following: working toward completing HS or GED, enrolled in college/Voc Ed, employed min 80 hrs/mo, part.in gaining employment, or unable to do due to med. cond.	Elig: foster youth must have a child in their care at least 50% of the time and must not be receiving foster care benefits for themselves, AND meet the residency, income, and resource requirements of the program	Elig: Benefit is based on the income of a household. There are various rules and exceptions.			
<b>NR Legal Guardian</b>	<b>Elig:</b> ILP Eligibility - after age 8 + placed with non-related legal guardian	<b>Elig:</b> ILP Elig + age 16-20 + live in LA Co + open case; OR closed case and referred before age 19	<b>Elig:</b> ILP Elig + age 18 thru 21			Elig: foster youth must have a child in their care at least 50% of the time and must not be receiving foster care benefits for themselves, AND meet the residency, income, and resource requirements of the program	Elig: Benefit is based on the income of a household. There are various rules and exceptions.			
<b>Rel. Legal Guardian</b>	<b>Elig.:</b> ILP Eligibility - closed after age 16 + guardian rec Adoption Assistance Payments	<b>Elig:</b> ILP Elig + age 16-20 + live in LA Co + open case; OR closed case and referred before age 19	<b>Elig:</b> ILP Elig + age 18 thru 21			Elig: foster youth must have a child in their care at least 50% of the time and must not be receiving foster care benefits for themselves, AND meet the residency, income, and resource requirements of the program	Elig: Benefit is based on the income of a household. There are various rules and exceptions.			



**Basic Living Benefits**

Benefit Name	ILP General Benefits	ILP Life Skills / Individualized Transition Skills Program	ILP Youth on the Move	AB 12	Extended Adoption Assistance	CalWORKs	CalFresh	Transition Jurisdiction Services (Non-Minor)	Transition Jurisdiction Services (Minor)
<b>APPLA</b>	<b>Elig.:</b> ILP Eligibility - After age 16 + placement not with parent or guardian due to suitable placement order	<b>Elig:</b> ILP Elig + age 16-20 + live in LA Co + open case; OR closed case and referred before age 19	<b>Elig:</b> ILP Elig + age 18 thru 21	<b>Elig:</b> Foster Care placement order on 18 <sup>th</sup> bday + under court jurisdiction + youth agrees to placement req + monthly mtg with CSW + 6 mo review; and one of following, working toward completing HS or GED, enrolled in college/Voc Ed, employed min 80 hrs/mo, part.in gaining employment, or unable to do due to med. cond.		<b>Elig:</b> foster youth must have a child in their care at least 50% of the time and must not be receiving foster care benefits for themselves, AND meet the residency, income, and resource requirements of the program	<b>Elig:</b> Benefit is based on the income of a household. There are various rules and exceptions.		
<b>Probation</b>	<b>Elig.:</b> ILP Eligibility - After age 16 + placement by Probation	<b>Elig:</b> ILP Elig + age 16-20 + live in LA Co + open case; OR closed case and referred before age 19	<b>Elig:</b> ILP Elig + age 18 thru 21	<b>Elig:</b> Foster Care/probation placement order on 18 <sup>th</sup> bday AND any of the following: youth agrees to supv placement + mutual agreement + monthly mtg with DPO + 6 mo review; Under order of foster care placement on the 18 <sup>th</sup> bday + finished term of probation and under transition jurisdiction; OR between 17 yrs 5 mo and 18 year under transition jurisdiction on 18 <sup>th</sup> bday AND one of following, working toward completing HS or GED, enrolled in college/Voc Ed, employed min 80 hrs/mo, part.in gaining employment, or unable to do due to med. cond.		<b>Elig:</b> foster youth must have a child in their care at least 50% of the time and must not be receiving foster care benefits for themselves, AND meet the residency, income, and resource requirements of the program	<b>Elig:</b> Benefit is based on the income of a household. There are various rules and exceptions.	<b>Elig:</b> youth had a foster care placement on their 18 <sup>th</sup> birthday + successfully completed the terms of probation + under age 21	<b>Elig:</b> youth is under order for foster care placement + between ages of 17 yrs 5 mo and 18 yrs old + no longer required supervision of delinquency court – at risk of abuse or neglect and cannot safely be returned home + intends to meet the NMD requirements