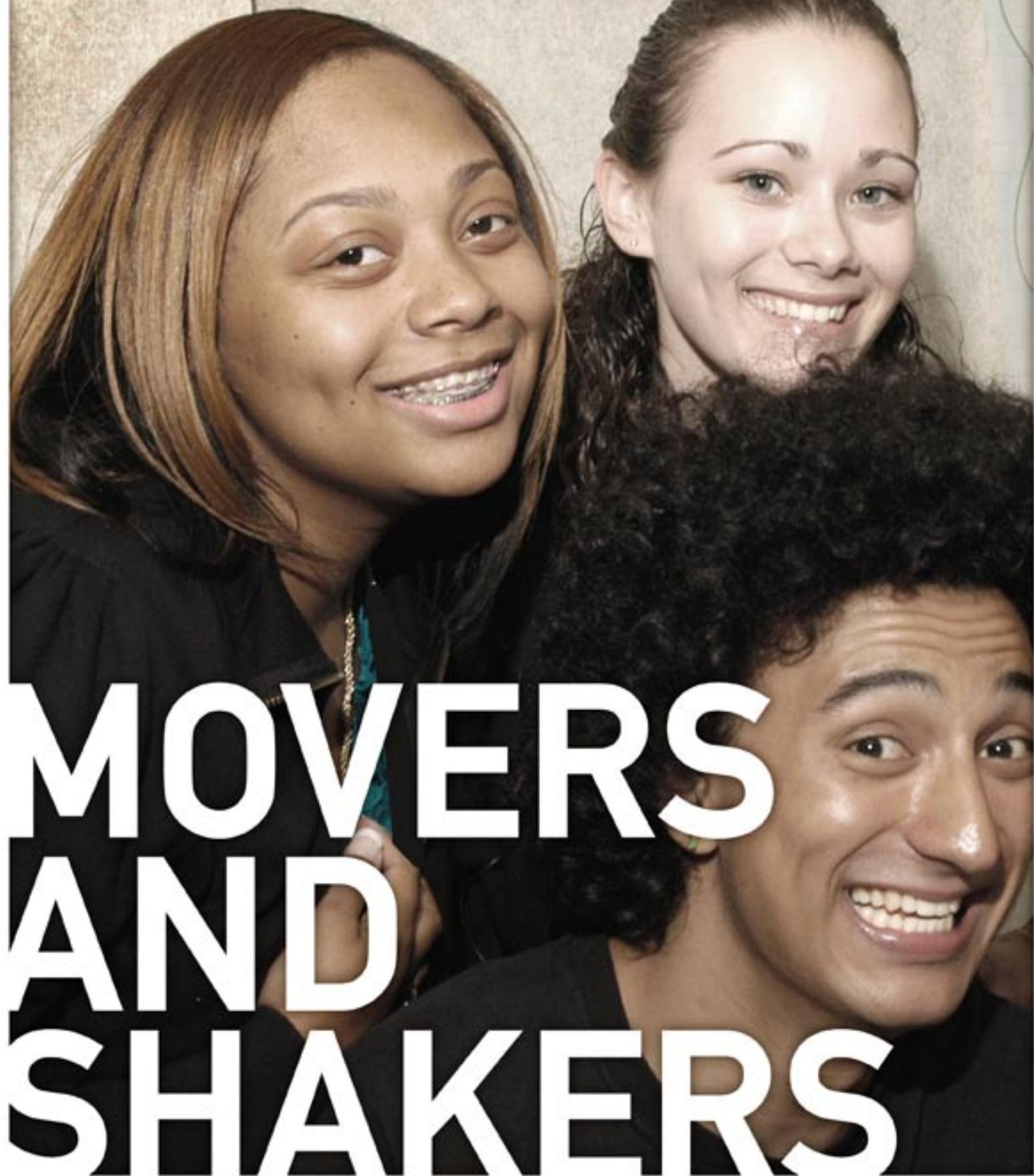


CALIFORNIA YOUTH CONNECTION
ANNUAL REPORT 2006



**MOVERS
AND
SHAKERS**



LEGISLATION & POLICY

STATE AND LOCAL POLICY

When California Youth Connection members speak, policymakers listen and take action. 2006 was a groundbreaking year for foster care reform, and CYC youth made a tremendous impact in state and local foster care policy at every level.

The California Legislature put an increased priority on foster care by creating the Assembly Select Committee on Foster Care. At the invitation of Committee Chair Assembly Member Karen Bass (L.A.), 150 CYC foster youth participated in every aspect of Select Committee activities. CYC hosted four foster youth forums in Los Angeles and Oakland where 80 foster youth shared their experiences and some remarkable ideas for change with members of the Select Committee. This youth input shaped the focus and priorities of the Select Committee throughout the year. CYC members testified at all six Committee hearings and shared powerful experiences and ideas for change on topics such as psychotropic medication, kinship care, implementation of existing laws, and transition services. Additionally, CYC members were honored to play a central role in planning and participating in a youth focused hearing on transition from foster care. The result of CYC youth's work was an amazing hearing that moved all that attended to want to take action.

CYC members became true partners with officials in all areas of the system including the courts, education, and state and county social service departments. CYC actively participated in incorporating our policy recommendations into many exciting efforts to improve the lives of foster youth across the state including: the California Community College Chancellor's Office Foster Youth Success Initiative; the Blue Ribbon Commission on Improving Foster Care; the National Governor's Academy on Youth Transitioning from Foster Care; planning for a statewide foster youth education summit; and a Department of Social Services

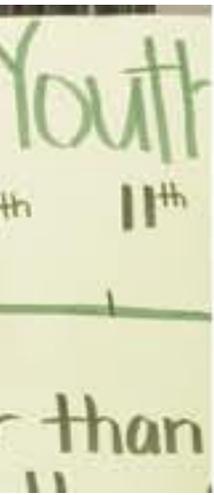
workgroup to revise the regulations governing placements to allow youth to have a more normal experience in foster care.

LEGISLATION

One of the most encouraging outcomes of CYC's decision to focus on implementing existing legislation this year was an offer from the County Welfare Director's Association (CWDA) to collaborate in this effort. CYC chapter and county officials are beginning discussion towards working hand in hand every day to bring about positive changes at the local level for foster youth.

CYC members also saw the impact of their hard work when the Legislature and Governor included \$13.9 million for CYC's priority education issues: academic preparation and increased funding for financial aid.

At the annual CYC Day at the Capitol conference, members received intensive training on how they could influence legislators to implement recent legislation on education and emancipation issues. Youth conducted successful visits with legislators and their staffs focusing on the Guardian Scholars program, permanent connections for youth, transitional housing, and preventive programs. During the conference CYC also partnered with other organizations to put on a great public event to celebrate Foster Care Awareness Month. Over 500 community members attended, and several CYC members were honored for their outstanding leadership.



COMMUNICATION

PROMOTING FOSTER YOUTH VOICES

CYC's Project Inform promoted the voices of foster youth as experts and fine tuned youth's ability to convey their experiences effectively to all audiences. The following efforts, combined with the passion our members have for change, motivated and encouraged all who have a stake in improving the lives of foster youth:

- Through individualized training and media workshops, we empowered dozens of youth to become persuasive public speakers and media representatives. Our members gained public speaking experience at our leadership and policy conference.
- Our quarterly statewide newsletter, EMPOWER!, written by CYC members, continued to be one of our largest communication platforms. It reached over 2,000 current and former foster youth, policymakers, child welfare professionals, and the community. We focused on issues surrounding mental health, transition, education, and policy in a context that all our readers could understand.
- CYC's media advocacy resulted in very broad and sympathetic coverage of CYC and foster youth issues in all major media markets in California, reaching millions of people. One highlight was our work with the San Francisco Chronicle. Our ability to build relationships and effectively shape our messages led to the Chronicle's excellent editorial series on foster care, multiple letters to the editor written by our members, and an article that focused on our rally at the Day at the Capitol.

- Presentations and trainings continued to be the cornerstone of our advocacy and communication efforts. Demand for CYC speakers rose dramatically this year. Our members appeared as panelists, trainers, and keynote speakers across California and in numerous other states. .
- Our website provided links to all CYC publications and other pertinent information in the foster care community. Chapters and the statewide office used the website as a tool to inform the community and engage public support for policy reform.





YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Training and support of our members in 23 chapters is the cornerstone of CYC's youth development model. Several chapters hosted community events to promote CYC—including dinners, speak outs, and fundraisers—allowing youth members to have an immediate impact locally. Others participated on local policy committees and task forces in order to be a voice for all foster youth. With increased public visibility, CYC membership continues to grow, and more counties in California are interested in starting a CYC chapter. CYC staff and the Advisory Board worked diligently to meet the needs of interested counties, while also making sure that existing chapters received the ongoing support they needed to thrive.

Several chapters are highlighted in this year's annual report for their continued dedication to CYC and their community:

The San Luis Obispo Chapter worked in a joint effort with the San Luis Obispo Foster Parent Association in creating a curriculum to train new foster parents. This enhanced training offers new foster parents a chance to hear from the youth about issues that are important to them, and is now included in all orientation trainings for new foster parents.

The Orange County Chapter tackled three issues this year. First, they partnered with the Orange County Social Services Agency to help provide training to foster parents through the Family to Family program. They presented a total of eight trainings, and began to work on the issue of undocumented foster youth in Orange County. The members are interested in finding out how they can help those foster youth get documented so they can live, work, and go to school as legal residents in the United States. The Orange County Chapter also took an active role in distributing the Mental Health Services Act (Proposition 63) funds by ensuring that the voices of foster youth were heard in this decision making process about how mental health dollars will be spent in their county.

LEADERSHIP/POLICY CONFERENCE

The annual Leadership/Policy conference was held in Redding in August. The Shasta County Chapter hosted a great conference that brought together a total of 160 members and supporters from all chapters. Youth leaders gave workshops on our core policy issues for this year—higher education, LGBTQQ issues, family, and emancipation—as well as public speaking and presentation skills. All participants then presented their ideas for policy change in each area to 75 child welfare policy makers from around the state.

YOUTH LED EVALUATION PROJECT

The Youth Led Evaluation Project reached tremendous milestones in its third and final year evaluating group homes in Alameda county and statewide. They compiled key findings to create a final report, developed Alameda County and statewide recommendations, and held presentations in Sacramento and Oakland to publicize their findings and recommendations. Key stakeholders attended these presentations, including Alameda and California Departments of Social Services and Education, Employment Development Department, California Alliance of Children and Family Services, social workers, group home directors, community organizations serving foster youth, and policymakers.

The data show that nearly 50% of youth said that their group home provider is not helping them do better at school or work, 23% felt that their group home forces them to take medication, and 1/3 of the youth felt that because of their care provider, their expectations of the future got worse or stayed the same. Based on these and many other findings, the recommendations from the Youth Led Evaluation Project are: in Alameda County, group homes need to offer increased pre-emancipation planning; statewide, group homes need to offer youth support with school and work. CYC will continue to press for the implementation of these recommendations.



Y.O.U.T.H. TRAINING PROJECT

The Y.O.U.T.H. (Youth Offering Unique Tangible Help) Training Project, now in its sixth year, is a collaborative project with the Bay Area Academy of San Francisco State University to train child welfare workers. This year we graduated 20 new youth trainers and delivered workshops in 13 counties to more than 500 social workers. We were also: featured speakers at the California Social Work Education Center's Annual Fairness and Equity Conference; selected to give a workshop at the National Pathways to Adulthood Conference; and honored at a luncheon held by the California Permanency for Youth Project. The project also produced another twenty of our world famous digital stories featuring CYC members, including: 10 success stories on good foster parents and good social workers; and 10 stories on topics such as group homes, non-public schools, mental health needs, and grief and loss. These digital stories are powerful tools to educate the public, policymakers, and child welfare workers on the realities of the lives of foster youth.

NATIONAL IMPACT

CYC is the only organization in the country that brings the foster youth voice directly to the policy process, and is a model for the child welfare field. This year, in response to increased demand, we improved and intensified our training program to help advocates in other states create their own foster youth advocacy organizations from the ground up. Connecticut youth and adults have begun our training on the CYC model. Our national training team also provided specialized trainings to advocates in Florida, Ohio, New York, and Arizona on issues of most concern in those states. This is an important step in realizing CYC's long-term goal to expand its programs to improve the lives of all 500,000 foster youth in the United States.

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CYC would like to acknowledge outgoing staff Myeshia Grice, Brandy Hudson, Viko Gracian, Jimmy Mosqueda and Leesa Webster for their dedication, commitment, and passion for foster youth advocacy.

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Remy Todd	Alex Tran
Maggie Tuazon	Kevin West
Nicky Wu	Captain Young

CYC would like to acknowledge all current and former special project youth consultants who contributed so very much to the overall success of CYC over the last year.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Penny Sandhu, PRESIDENT LaNell Williams, VICE PRESIDENT
 Tonya Hightower, SECRETARY Deryk Clark, TREASURER

MEMBERS:

Brian Bartolome	Diana Buchbinder
Kathleen Crandall	Erric Garris
Myeshia Grice	

We thank and acknowledge these individuals for their countless volunteer hours to CYC in this leadership capacity. A special "thank you" to our officers for their service. We also wish to thank outgoing Board member Myeshia Grice for her time on our Board and her dedication to foster youth issues.

CALIFORNIA YOUTH CONNECTION

California Youth Connection (CYC) is a statewide foster youth empowerment and advocacy organization that is guided, focused and driven by current and former foster youth, ages 14-24. With 23 chapters and 450 members statewide, CYC is a microcosm of California's foster care youth.

CYC members are foster youth from every lifestyle with every foster care experience represented: long term care, guardianship, adoption, youth with children, youth receiving mental health services, youth in the juvenile justice system and more.

To improve the lives of California's 82,000 foster youth, we focus our advocacy on:

LEGISLATION & POLICY



COMMUNICATION



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



DEAR FRIENDS & SUPPORTERS

In 2006 California Youth Connection turned 18. It is a true coming of age in every respect.

When CYC was founded in 1988, the idea of policymakers seeking input from foster youth about their experiences was considered preposterous. The idea that foster youth were experts precisely because of their experience in the system was revolutionary. The idea that foster youth could develop policy recommendations and engage in shaping child welfare policy reform was unheard of.

Because of CYC, the unthinkable has become reality: foster youth are now movers and shakers in transforming the foster care system in California.

How did we do it? We defied convention. We created an organizational model that includes foster youth leaders at every level. We started conversations among foster youth and policymakers—and policymakers began to listen. In 18 years, we trained 2,000 foster youth on complex legislative and policy issues, and gave them support to tell their powerful stories. They developed smart policy and legislative recommendations, brought them to leaders, and pushed hard for change. And they kept on winning.

The momentum CYC created has led to unprecedented participation of foster youth in policy reform in 2006, and a momentous leap forward in public understanding of the issues:

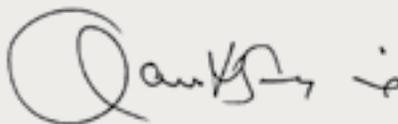
- CYC members were invited by the Chair of the new Assembly Select Committee on Foster Care to organize foster youth input and testify at all six hearings. This Committee will shape foster care policy for the state for years to come.
- The County Welfare Directors Association has offered to collaborate with CYC members on the implementation of existing laws and building stronger partnerships in counties.
- Because of CYC's increasingly effective media advocacy, millions of adult readers and listeners throughout the state heard the voices of foster youth. They realized they could join foster youth in demanding change.

We are proud to celebrate CYC's coming of age with you. Just as individual young people need support as they grow to become movers and shakers so too does a non-profit organization. CYC's generous community of collaborating partners, volunteers, funders, and individual donors are the bedrock of our success. We thank you for your unwavering commitment to our vision.

Sincerely,



Penny Sandhu, PRESIDENT



Janet Knipe, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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