



MAKING AN IMPACT

CALIFORNIA YOUTH CONNECTION
ANNUAL REPORT 2007

POLICY & LEGISLATION

STATE AND LOCAL POLICY

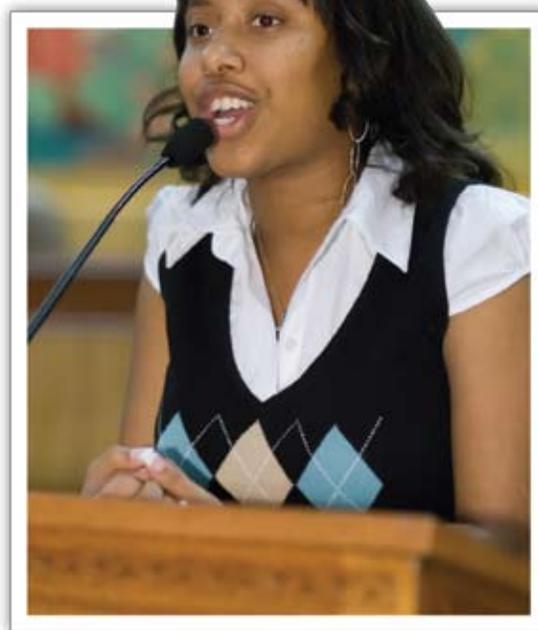
The California Legislature continued to make foster care an important priority in 2006 and 2007, and CYC was front and center. The Assembly Select Committee on Foster Care, chaired by Majority Leader Karen Bass (D-Los Angeles), held three hearings on issues related to improving foster youth outcomes. The first hearing, held jointly with the Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care, focused on improving child welfare court processes. CYC members presented compelling testimony and in-depth recommendations on how the court process can be improved for foster youth. The second hearing addressed implementation of the previous year's child welfare legislation and budget allocations, with CYC members advocating for inclusion of foster youth in the implementation process. The final hearing was a joint hearing with the Assembly Select Committee on Youth Violence Prevention, and focused on foster youth / juvenile justice issues. CYC members presented heart-wrenching testimony about their experiences



Partnering with policymakers.

crossing over from the foster care system into the juvenile justice system and not being able to receive the same services. They gave profound recommendations on how to improve the lives of foster youth who face this arduous experience. CYC member testimony and recommendations in all three hearings increased legislators' understanding of real-life experiences of foster youth.

CYC members continued to be tireless advocates in other areas related to the child welfare system, including sitting on: the Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care; the Child Welfare Co-Investment Partnership; the National Governor's Academy on Youth Transitioning from Foster Care; California Summit on Foster Youth Education; and a Department of Social Services steering committee reexamining the role of congregate care facilities in foster care.



Testifying at hearings.

LEGISLATION

CYC members decided that their sole legislative focus would be to advocate on behalf of foster youth who cross over from the foster care to the juvenile justice system. CYC members used all of their talents and energies raising awareness and building interest among the child welfare community about addressing the needs of this population. This population of foster youth is



Working closely with Majority Leader Karen Bass, Chair of the Assembly Select Committee on Foster Care.

“The California Youth Connection is committed to improving the foster care system, social policy, and its accomplishments come from the hard work of our members and partners.”

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

CONFERENCES & TRAININGS

LEADERSHIP/POLICY CONFERENCE

CYC held our largest and best ever Policy Leadership conference in Oakland. From August 4-7, over 120 foster youth discussed education, emancipation, placement, court and juvenile justice issues and developed creative recommendations for improvement based on their experiences. CYC presented their recommendations for change to an audience of over 100 policymakers and a panel of Blue Ribbon Commission members. Larry Bolton from the California Department of Social Services, Judge Dean Stout from the Inyo County Superior Court, and Dr. Jill Duerr Berrick from UC Berkeley responded to members' recommendations and questions and promised to include youths' ideas in their work.



Developing recommendations.



Commitment to take action.

DAY AT THE CAPITOL CONFERENCE

CYC's member-led Advisory Board selected one priority issue for the Day at the Capitol conference in January 2007: the need to provide important services to youth who "cross over" from the child welfare to the juvenile justice system. Over 170 youth members and adult supporters from 21 chapters across the state spent two days learning how to advocate on behalf of this vulnerable population, drawing upon their own experiences.

Members met with staff or legislators from nearly every district and were overwhelmed by their interest in working closely with CYC on this issue.



Preparing for meetings.

often ignored by the child welfare system, and juvenile justice agencies and facilities lack knowledge of the specific needs and challenges faced by youth in their system from foster care.

As a result of CYC's advocacy, Majority Leader Karen Bass and Assembly Member Bill Maze authored AB 638, which focuses on ensuring that foster youth who cross over to the juvenile justice system continue to receive critical child welfare services such as permanency support, independent living skills, mental health services, and eligibility for transitional services for foster youth. Thanks to CYC's leadership on the issue, the legislation is now a two-year bill that will be addressed by the 2008 legislature.

DECISION TO LAUNCH A NEW NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

To meet the increasing demand from advocates and foster youth around the country seeking to create their own foster youth advocacy organizations, CYC launched a pilot training and technical assistance program in six states in 2005 with successful results. As interest grew, it was crucial to define the scope of the national work. In the fall of 2006 the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation funded a feasibility study designed to define the best organizational structure to address the national work.

In June 2007, the CYC Board of Directors approved moving forward on incorporating a national organization separate and apart from CYC. After the national organization is separately incorporated, CYC will become one of its affiliates, along with other states. The new national organization will develop in two primary stages: (1) creation of an initial group of between 5 and 10 statewide organizations trained by existing CYC curricula; and (2) creation of a national affiliation of organizations focused on federal legislation, a national convening of those organizations, and continued capacity building and cross training for member states. Work is currently in progress to develop a founding board and a fundraising strategy for the new national organization.

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—Tonya Hightower, President



San Diego

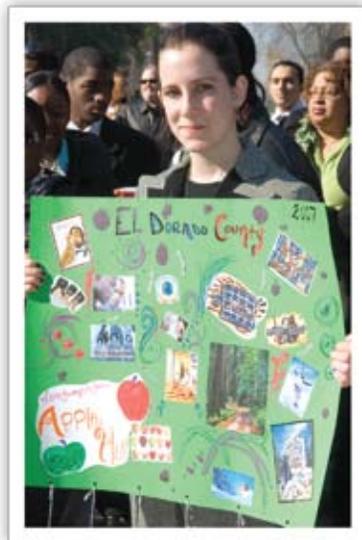


San Bernardino

CHAPTERS

The foundation of CYC is our local chapters because that is where our members learn how to speak out and organize to improve the system. This year we launched new CYC chapters in El Dorado, Madera, and San Bernardino, bringing our total to 26. Outreach and policy teams also implemented a comprehensive technical assistance strategy to strengthen all chapters. We promoted membership growth, stabilized chapters' operations and leadership, and provided the necessary skills for chapters to reach their highest potential for creating positive changes in state and local child welfare policy.

Participation in CYC also has a profound personal impact on each member. A professional evaluation in April 2007 by Korwin Consulting showed that CYC chapters are highly effective at providing opportunities for community involvement, fostering meaningful youth participation, encouraging relationship building, creating learning experiences that build skills, and promoting a sense of safety. All of these elements contribute to the increased personal capacity and development of foster youth and also to successful adulthood.



El Dorado



Sacramento

TRAINING CHILD WELFARE WORKERS

Over the past seven years, the Y.O.U.T.H. (Youth Offering Unique Tangible Help) Training Project has trained more than 2,000 child welfare workers throughout California and the United States. Utilizing our "practice what you teach" philosophy, the project continues to educate and build the capacity of current and former foster youth (all CYC members) to join with practitioners of the child welfare system to create a better support system for youth in California. In the last year, the Project developed a new curriculum geared toward child welfare workers serving the needs of LGBTQ youth, and trained 136 child welfare supervisors.

PROMOTING YOUTH VOICES



Speaker's bureau training

Ensuring that foster youth have the tools they need to effectively communicate their personal experiences and policy recommendations is the consistent theme of CYC's work. We focus on the importance of using personal experiences and stories to enhance the youth's advocacy efforts. When youth are able to clearly convey their foster care life to an audience, their stories have the power to change the hearts and minds of all who listen. The strategies we use to engage the public and policymakers include:

- EMPOWER! CYC's statewide newsletter reaches over 2,000 readers. Our network consists of current and former foster youth, policy makers, child welfare professionals, and the general public.
- Members of the speaker's bureau act as ambassadors for CYC and spread the mission and goals of the organization throughout the state via keynote addresses, workshops, and trainings.
- Encouraging chapters to take advantage of local media when planning speak outs and community dinners has increased CYC's visibility to media. As a result, CYC's media network



Speaking to the media.

continues to expand. For example, CYC was deeply involved in the recent San Francisco Chronicle editorial series, "No Refuge."

STAFF LIST 06-07

Kenneth Brown, Southern Region Outreach Coordinator
 Lynette Cox, Bookkeeper
 Haydee Cuza, Southern Region Policy Coordinator
 Kristina Gelardi, Northern Region Policy Coordinator
 Tiffany Johnson, Associate Director
 Janet Knipe, Executive Director
 Jude Koski, Northern Region Supervisor
 Jacque Lindeman, Southern Region Supervisor
 Kristal McCoy, Communications Coordinator
 Miko Nadel, Office Manager
 Jonathan Pearson, Legislative and Policy Coordinator
 KaNica Richard, Youth Led Evaluation Project Assistant (outgoing)
 Jennifer Rodriguez, Legislative & Policy Manager
 Hemal Sharifzada, Trainings and Conference Coordinator
 Janay Swain, Northern Region Outreach Coordinator
 Kate Teague, Bay Area/Central Valley Outreach Coordinator

CYC would like to acknowledge outgoing staff Ka'Nica Richard for her dedication, commitment, and passion for foster youth advocacy.

CYC NEWSLETTER STAFF

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

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Darryn Green	Feven Seyoum
Richard Haines	Remy Todd
Nerissa James	Alex Tran
Susan Manzi	Maggie Tuazon
Nikki McGovern	Kevin West
Cassandra Mitchell	Nicky Wu
Ulili Onovakpuri	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
 Tonya Hightower, Vice President
 Erric Garris, Secretary
 Kathleen Crandall, Treasurer
 Brian Bartolome
 Diana Buchbinder
 Deryk Clark
 Jody Marksamer
 LaNell Williams
 Mara Zeigler

We would like to acknowledge these individuals for their countless hours of service and dedication to CYC. We could not do what we do without you. A special "thank you" to outgoing Board member, Mara Zeigler, for all she contributed to our Board.

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 26 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 77,500 foster youth, we focus our advocacy on:

POLICY & LEGISLATION



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT



PROMOTING YOUTH VOICES



DEAR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

Penny Sandhu: In looking back over this past year, we can say that CYC has been successful on so many levels. In thinking about the Board in particular, several board accomplishments come to mind. This year, we brought on three new members: one former foster youth employed in the State Senate and two community members: a professor in social work and an attorney with a national civil rights program. The new and current board members renewed their personal commitments to the organization and donated more than ever before. Board members spent countless hours working on a strategic plan for a national focus, while strengthening CYC from the inside out in our journey forward.



As we look ahead towards further growth and development, it seemed most appropriate to also make room for a new leader on the Board.

While I have truly enjoyed my experience as the Board President for the last two years, I believe that our next leaders deserve the opportunity to develop their skills as I have. From my experiences in CYC as a member and building up my voice, to being on the Board and advocating on behalf of the organization, to taking on the Presidency and leading us to a stronger and more organized Board, I can truly say I have gained so much. I now have the confidence as a leader to motivate people to think critically about CYC's future. Tonya Hightower, also a former foster youth, brings endless drive and dedication to CYC and believes fully in youth empowerment and advocacy, which are capabilities clearly necessary to move our organization forward. It is my pleasure to introduce to you, our next Board President, Tonya Hightower.

Tonya Hightower: As the new President of the California Youth Connection, it is my privilege to lead an organization with such a renowned history and one that has had a direct impact on my life. I remember being amazed at the accomplishments of CYC, the commitment of its members and the level of support that came from community members. In the time that I have been a part of this organization, I have grown as an individual, an advocate and a leader, and I have been directly affected by CYC's legislative accomplishments.

The California Youth Connection is devoted to empowering youth, improving the foster care system, social work practice and child welfare policy, and its accomplishments continue to amaze me. Instituted 19 years ago, CYC continues to serve as a competent, benchmark organization for other youth advocacy organizations around the state and country. The Board of Directors is looking forward to continued growth and development as well as celebrating our 20th anniversary next year. I personally thank you for your support and invite you to advocate for foster youth at every opportunity.

Sincerely,



Penny Sandhu
Immediate Past President



Tonya Hightower
President

El Dorado

San Francisco

Merced

Tehama

Contra Costa

Alameda

San Bernardino

Glenn

Stanislaus

Los Angeles

San Mateo

Placer

Santa Clara

Mendocino

Siskiyou

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