CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF CALIFORNIA YOUTH CONNECTION
The mission of California Youth Connection (CYC), a youth-led organization, is to develop leaders who empower each other and their communities to transform the foster care system through legislative, policy, and practice change. Our vision is that all foster youth will be equal partners in contributing to all policies and decisions made in their lives. All youth in foster care will have their needs met and the support to grow into healthy and vibrant adults.

30 YEARS OF CYC

1988

CYC is founded by 17 young people in foster care with the support of ILP coordinators (Volunteer Supporters). The youth write to the governor seeking his support. Within the first year, CYC grows to 85 members in 5 counties.
Youth meet with the California Department of Social Services. As CYC’s reputation begins to grow, youth present at child welfare trainings and conferences.

1990
CYC holds its first statewide conference: a forum for youth to create community and discuss reform of the foster care system. The Sacramento chapter receives nonprofit status.

“CYC is a national model for what it is to get youth involved, both current and former foster youth, to take their rightful seat at the table in making policy and making change so the system can do better for future kids. Here’s to you, CYC, to another spectacular 30 years.”

—BOBBY CAGLE, DIRECTOR, LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES
October 9, 1988

Governor George Deukmejian
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Deukmejian,

We are a group of youths aged fourteen to twenty-four who are now in or have been in foster care. We are in the process of developing an organization to provide foster youths and former foster youths an opportunity to share their thoughts, problems and ideas with other young adults their ages, and to build youth support networks statewide.

Our goal is to assist foster youths and former foster youths in their educational, emotional, cultural, social and vocational development. We call ourselves California Youth Connections. The purpose of California Youth Connections is to develop youth support groups, to build a family type bond between foster youths and to help those youths with problems that they would not feel comfortable in telling adults. We listen to what they have to say and help them out on a level on which they understand.

The California Youth Connections (CYC) is modeled after the Canadian National Youth In Care Network (NYICW) which was created in November, 1985. Representatives from the Canadian Youth Network were invited to Sacramento by the Community College Independent Living Program on June 27 and 28, 1988. Their program, which is organized for and by youths, features a strong local effort to provide mutual support to foster youths with a support structure from appropriate adults and agencies. The network provides an opportunity for youths to gain skills which will help them become independent and productive adult citizens.

A number of teenagers in foster care, foster parents and social workers from several counties participated in a workshop presented by the Canadian youths in June. Participants not only learned about the Canadian experience but decided that California needs such a youth-directed organization.

Since the June meeting fifteen counties have set up local youth networks and have already recruited one hundred fifty members. These counties include Sacramento, Los Angeles, Ventura, Butte, Solano, Mendocino, Santa Barbara, Fresno, Sonoma, Glenn, San Luis Obispo and Yolo.

We know there is a great need for a youth organization here

1992

CYC youth propose their first piece of legislation to make the process of obtaining a driver’s license more equitable for youth in foster care. The “driver’s license bill” passes into law.

1993

CYC hosts its first Day at the Capitol: Youth meet with legislators and hold a press conference. Assemblymember Tom Bates’ transitional housing bill passes, creating transitional housing as a foster care placement category.
Youth vote to become a statewide nonprofit organization with a central office. CYC members create the Group Home Bill of Rights. It passes the legislature but is vetoed by the governor. The Community College Foundation becomes the umbrella organization for the new CYC statewide office.

1995

The first CYC statewide office opens with two staff. Two youth staff are hired by the end of the year. CYC proposes the Foster Care Bill of Rights. It passes the legislature but is vetoed by Governor Wilson. CYC advocates for increasing federal funding for ILP.
Dear Community,

In my role as the Executive Director of California Youth Connection, I have the honor of magnifying the wisdom and passion of young people who most recently experienced foster care. Their voices join and build upon the dreams and advocacy of CYC members across three decades. We work as a community to ensure that those most impacted by systems are the ones at the center of the solution.

The leadership of our members is fundamental to a better world. Thirty years into our journey of building a powerful youth-centered network applauding authentic voice and leadership, we also provide a welcoming community and safe spaces to explore beliefs and understandings about oneself and others in the process of building relationships.

As our community grows, these connections multiply and strengthen, and CYC’s transformative work becomes increasingly impactful. CYC members have obtained internships, employment, lifelong friendships, and family. So many who joined CYC as youth have gone on to become community leaders.

We do not romanticize the realities of foster care and long-term effects of trauma. As a solution, CYC members developed #fosterstability, a multi-year campaign that demands that we are transformational and dream beyond the system that currently exists.

Founded on the fundamental principles that youth in foster care must be empowered and experience unconditional love in order to thrive, the campaign focuses on legislation, policy, practice, and public education calling for youth to be at the center of all decisions impacting their stability. This is not a far-fetched idea—this is how we protect and heal children and youth through loss, neglect, and abuse.

Every person needs a loving, nurturing community and family throughout childhood and beyond; through heartaches and celebrations; through mistakes and accomplishments; through testing boundaries and seeking structure; through trauma and healing. It is through love that we all are set up to thrive and see the beauty of our whole selves.

As we move into our next era, we will continue to thrive as a youth-centered movement to transform the experience and outcomes of foster care. We will engage families and caregivers to ensure we are creating policies and practices that support stability and love. In addition, we will incorporate adolescent development and positive impacts for healing and goal setting as we continue to strengthen our programs.

Together, we are on a journey of innovation and steadfastness where we nurture community and love.

Sincerely,

Haydée Guza, Executive Director, Founding Member, Connected to CYC since 1988
CONNECTIONS

The 17 youth who founded CYC knew they wanted above all to connect with each other. They set out to summon their collective voice and power to transform the foster care system but also to meet and form relationships with other young people around the state with whom they shared the foster care experience.

“‘Connection’ was actually the main word we all agreed on. When you’re living in foster homes that’s the main thing you’re missing: a lost connection. Everyone’s trying to find some kind of connection to something. We’re trying to connect back with our family, our loved ones. Some of us are just trying to connect with ourselves. So we knew that ‘connections’ was going to be a big part of it. We needed to find that connection. We also knew we were going to use our connections to further ourselves. Every resource or connection was going to help us out in the future.”

—IDA LOCKETT, FOUNDING CYC MEMBER, SACRAMENTO CHAPTER, CONNECTED TO CYC SINCE 1988

“What’s most special to me about CYC is what the name says: California Youth Connection. The connections that I’ve made with the other youth have been amazing. They don’t make assumptions about me. They really support me and push me to go further. CYC encourages me to look outside of where I’ve been. Now I can see further so when I come back to my home county I can make an impact. All those firsts I’ve had with CYC—first time on a plane, first time staying in a college dorm, first time standing on a stage before a crowd— it’s been a game changer. CYC has given me a new sense of hope, and it’s not a fake sense of hope. It’s real.”

—RAYSHAUN WILBURN, CYC MEMBER & ACTING CO-CHAIR, RIVERSIDE CHAPTER, CONNECTED TO CYC SINCE 2017
In 1988, when the child welfare policies that defined their lives had long been developed without them, a small group of youth in foster care decided to speak up. Inspired by a youth advocacy model in Canada, these 17 youth, with the support of Independent Living Program staff who volunteered their time, organized their peers from across California to improve the foster care system as only they could.

The youth who founded CYC knew firsthand that far too many young people were exiting foster care at 18 without long term connections, stable living conditions, and little if any chance of going to college or maintaining employment. Determined to change these outcomes for generations of foster youth, they convened their peers to educate policymakers and advocate for the needs of youth in care.

Beginning as an all-volunteer group of youth currently in foster care and a few volunteer supporters, CYC developed five local chapters in the first year with 85 members in Los Angeles, Butte, Solano, Sacramento, and Ventura. The youth soon met with leaders from the California Department of Social Services to inform them about concerns related to their care, and began presenting at child welfare conferences and trainings. CYC’s reputation quickly grew.

CYC is proud of our 30-year legacy of youth leadership transforming the foster care system. Our youth organizing model has provided a template for other groups in California, nationally, and around the world. Throughout our history, CYC has kept youth voice at the center of our work, and propelled it to the heart of policymaking in child welfare and other systems impacting the lives of youth.

**HISTORY OF CYC**

1996

CYC’s chapters now number 15. CYC begins defining itself as an advocacy organization separate from ILP. Members travel to Washington, D.C., to attend a national youth leadership conference and meet with members of Congress.

1997

CYC conducts its first focus groups and publishes the results to educate policymakers and the public about the experiences and concerns of youth in foster care. Four more youth staff are hired. CYC is propelled to the forefront of child welfare advocacy on the national level.
1997
CYC members meet with First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton at U.C. Berkeley. Clinton would go on to speak in various forums about the needs of youth in foster care that she had learned during that meeting, and referred to the important youth-led advocacy work being done by CYC.

1999
The White House invites CYC to attend the signing ceremony for the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, legislation propelled by the 1997 meeting with First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton.

1998
CYC proposes legislation on the importance of post-adoption contact with siblings. The bill is passed and signed into law.

1999
CYC assumes the nonprofit status of the Sacramento chapter. A new board of directors for the statewide organization is formed. CYC secures its first contract with the California Department of Mental Health to coordinate focus groups on the mental health needs of youth in foster care.

“I think for a lot of the young people who have participated in CYC, the personal impact for them of getting to redefine themselves as leaders and as visionaries and agents of change has just as much impact on changing the world as the systems change that CYC accomplishes.”

—JENNIFER RODRIGUEZ, JD, FORMER MEMBER AND STAFF, CONNECTED TO CYC SINCE 1998
Over the next decade, CYC gained increasing visibility and recognition, expanding to 15 chapters throughout the state. Working in collaboration with local agencies serving transition age youth, CYC began establishing and strengthening networks with state policymakers. In 1992, the first piece of CYC sponsored legislation passed and was signed into law, making the process of obtaining a driver’s license more equitable for youth in foster care by allowing social workers or probation officers (in addition to parents and guardians) to sign their driver license applications.

Since then, CYC has created and refined a sophisticated system of youth-led policy development, securing passage of crucial laws, and helped implement countless local and statewide child welfare policies. Youth have informed and engaged thousands of policymakers and community stakeholders. Our annual statewide leadership and policy conferences, attended by hundreds of youth each year, provide dynamic forums for putting into action our dual goals of empowering youth and improving foster care.

By the time it was established as an independent nonprofit in 1999, CYC had solidified its reputation as a model of youth development that blends leadership training with powerful legislative advocacy to transform the California foster care system.

2000

CYC separates from the Community College Foundation, becoming its own nonprofit. Language is adopted in the California budget stating that the state promotes the participation of youth who have experienced foster care in the development of child welfare policy, naming CYC as the vehicle for that input. CYC begins training Community Care Licensing (CCL) staff on issues related to their care.
The following year, language was adopted in the budget committing the state to facilitating the participation of youth who have experienced foster care in child welfare policymaking, and naming CYC as the vehicle for that input. This represented a profound shift in power and a philosophical victory.

Our offices in Los Angeles, Sacramento, Shasta, Fresno, and the Bay Area serve as regional hubs for trainings and support of chapters throughout California. A founding partner of the national Foster Youth in Action Network, CYC continues to work toward the development of a national foster care system that allows all children and youth to thrive.

By investing in the leadership of thousands of young people who have experienced California’s foster care system, CYC has led a fundamental paradigm shift in child welfare policy in California and beyond, placing the experience of young people at the center of policymaking for the first time in history.

Since our founding in 1988, the foster care system in California has been transformed, and so too have the thousands of youth who have joined CYC, becoming confident, effective advocates for themselves and generations of youth who experience foster care. Our work has resulted in the passage of dozens of new laws that have profoundly improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of young people in California. Meanwhile, the thousands of youth who have participated in CYC have gained confidence, job skills, education and career connections, and most importantly, have found in their peers a strong, supportive community.

2001

The Foster Youth Bill of Rights is inscribed in law: All foster and group homes are required to display the rights, and social workers must share them with youth. MediCal coverage is secured for foster youth up to age 21. A stronger policy for sibling contact is established. Educational supports are improved. Support for emancipated youth is established. CYC collaborates with San Francisco State University to develop curricula to train social workers on the needs of emancipating youth, launching the Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project.
Youth in foster care obtain groundbreaking rights to education support and school stability. Youth are no longer forced to change schools unnecessarily. Each district has a foster youth education liaison.
CYC serves on influential county and statewide policy committees, including the Co-Investment Partnership, the Child Welfare Council, the Blue Ribbon Commission, and the Breakthrough Series Collaborative. Members work with Majority Leader Karen Bass to inform the Select Committee on Foster Care as they develop child welfare reforms.
“For 30 years, CYC has allowed young people to be part of a story of hope. Our participation in CYC gives us the hope we didn’t have growing up. It’s hope for yourself and hope for the next generation. CYC allows young people to be immortal. We get to see that immortal stamp: I did that. We always know we’ve made that change in the world.”

—PATTERSON EMESIBE, VOLUNTEER SUPPORTER, PEER MENTOR, FORMER MEMBER, CONNECTED TO CYC SINCE 2011

2009
CYC launches the National Foster Youth in Action Network (FYA), dedicated to providing training and technical assistance to states wanting to develop or expand their own youth-led advocacy organizations. CYC sponsored legislation creates prioritized housing for youth in foster care on college campuses.

2010
CYC’s co-sponsored bill, the California Fostering Connections to Success Act (AB12), passes into law, allowing youth to remain in care up to their 21st birthday and making significant changes to California’s support for relative caregivers in the Kin-Gap program.
CYC invests in youth leadership to transform foster care to a structure built on love, compassion, and community support for young people.

To accomplish this, CYC engages in:

- Peer-to-peer community organizing
- State and local policy and legislative advocacy
- Training in best practices for child welfare and other professionals working with youth in foster care
- Local community outreach and education on topics identified by young people

2012

Y.O.U.T.H. Training Project returns to CYC, where it originated, bringing with it the Foster Youth Museum, which utilizes art and artifacts donated by youth to provide an intimate look into the experience of foster care.

2015

Laws are passed to provide support for parenting foster youth and to improve social worker visits. On CYC’s recommendation, the minimum age requirement for group home staff rises from age 18 to 21.
Collaboratively identify key issues and strategies in chapter meetings

Take leadership roles in chapter meetings

Join Legislative and Policy Committees to collaboratively develop advocacy priorities

 Participate in Youth Governance for the organization

Receive peer-led training in curriculum development, facilitation skills, and policy topics

Develop recommendations through strategic sharing and process

Testify before legislative committees and county boards of supervisors

Provide trainings to local, statewide, and national policy makers to impact child welfare and mental health practice implementation

“California Youth Connection is a shining star of what makes this state great, and we want to follow your lead in what we need to do to support young people...Keep up the great work. Here’s to the next 30 years of CYC!”

—ASSEMBLYMEMBER TONY THURMOND (D-RICHMOND), REMARKS AT DAY AT THE CAPITOL 2018

2017
CYC secures funding through the Mental Health Oversight and Accountability Commission to bring transition age youth perspective to the forefront of mental health advocacy.

2018
CYC’s current bill sets the foundation for a youth-centered process for planning stability.
“When you hear ‘youth led’ it really means members are holding high positions that you don’t see in other organizations. Having members on the Statewide Membership Council and the Board of Directors, CYC sets you up for success and prepares you for other leadership roles in your career. CYC can inspire youth to do more, to do something they’ve never before seen themselves doing.”

—CINDY BARRERA, MEMBER, CYC STATEWIDE MEMBERSHIP COUNCIL, MEMBER, CYC LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE, CONNECTED TO CYC SINCE 2015
Our youth-led model succeeds through the dedication of our staff as well as our volunteer supporters, who provide a foundation for county-based chapters by ensuring members have a place to meet, assisting with transportation and meals for meetings, attending conferences, and being of general support as young people transform the foster care system and step up as leaders.

“CYC develops leadership and helps youth find their voice. I am amazed to see how outspoken the members are in talking with legislators or sharing their stories with youth from other chapters at Day at the Capitol. It gives them an opportunity to feel confident in their leadership skills and proud of themselves.”

—VICKIE KLASSEN, CYC VOLUNTEER SUPPORTER, CONNECTED TO CYC SINCE 2015
“Those founding members were really excited to lead each other across the state so the first conference was developed. The youth got to know and learned to depend on each other. These young people, who held the keys to the ideas about how things needed to change, created a lot of change in their own counties as well as for all foster youth in the state.”

—DELIA JOHNSON, FOUNDING VOLUNTEER SUPPORTER, CONNECTED TO CYC SINCE 1988

“Being in CYC is advocating for your brothers and sisters and cousins and people coming behind you who are going to enter the foster care system. It’s about making it easier and better for them.”

—CHRISTINA PARKER, CYC MEMBER, SAN BERNARDINO CHAPTER, CONNECTED TO CYC SINCE 2016
KEY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

CYC’S LEGISLATIVE & POLICY ADVOCACY IN CALIFORNIA HAS LED TO:

- The Foster Youth Bill of Rights, developed by CYC, is written into law.
- Youth have the option to remain in foster care up to age 21.
- Siblings can maintain their relationships.
- Youth in foster care gained greater access to healthcare.
- Youth in foster care ages 16–24 have access to transitional housing.
- Resource parents’ training is improved and more relevant, taking into consideration the individual youth in their home.
- Youth currently or previously in foster care have priority in securing student housing on college campuses.
- The process of applying for a driver’s license is more equitable for youth in foster care.
- Judges ensure that youth aging out of care have all of their documents in their possession, including birth certificates and social security cards, by utilizing a checklist.

“I’ve seen so many youth over the years grow by participating in CYC—not only their leadership skills but their sense of community, their awareness, and their sense of power, knowing they can make a change, and that in turn creates a self-esteem that’s out of this world. When you have self-esteem and belief in yourself, you can do great things.”

—DON GRAVES, VOLUNTEER SUPPORTER, CONTRA COSTA COUNTY CHAPTER, CONNECTED TO CYC SINCE 1996
“Of all the groups we work with day in and day out, CYC both inspires because of your courage but because of your honesty and the way you share reality in your stories, you create blinding insights that don’t come from anywhere else. Thank you. Make me one promise—you will always keep coming back.”

—WILL LIGHTBOURNE, DIRECTOR, CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES, REMARKS AT DAY AT THE CAPITOL 2018
by Sade Daniels, Former Member, connected to CYC since 2004

30 claps for the world changers.
Those with tattered boots laced
Steps filled with purpose
Love to those with perfectly placed anger
Those who’ve lived what they fight
Those who give with their might
While holding on to mere slivers through the night
This is for the tenacious
Posted with signs of truths
Armed with experience as proof
And solutions fused at the roots
I hope you see the necessity in your words
Your ideas create realities that allow for
Salves of healing
This unsalaried advocacy that challenges
Ill balanced allowances
That should’ve never been allowed
Happenings that should’ve never happened
We’re here fighting against moments that weren’t supposed to be had
And days of peace some of us are still owed
You know hard and dope it is to speak despite the request and expectation of silence
Discerning malnourished courage and using it to disturb the norm and curb that which has never worked
That’s more than a skill; ya’ll are more than mere members
This is for those who shout above utterance
Fight for the better on our streets and through governments
No longer accepting of crumbs and staunch in the upliftment of others

30 shots for the front runners who do it all while still motherless
For the orphans still struggling with the pain from past existences
Yet resolute in ensuring that those coming up have better living
Don’t ignore the significance in your choice to confront, shift, and amend
To take stakes and dismantle them until they provide real and quality answers
And when they ask what’s the diagnosis; be clear: our knowledge includes the antidote
We know the coldest of homes, perseverance, and learning ropes alone; we can tell you the importance of positive youth focuses and futility of seven day notices
When they ask who you are; don’t be scared to let them know
I pray you feel empowered by the raised fist
Rooted in struggle and embedded in black audaciousness
Raise ‘em high; cadence on loud until we felt above the clouds
We here demanding the quality of life already expected and provided for the masses
And I promise you; once it’s been established; this fight; part of our legacy will reach all across the atlas.
The positive impact we’re steadily making will be felt for more years than we ourselves will see
So I’ma tell you what my ancestors told me; “Power to the people”
GET INVOLVED!

JOIN A CHAPTER AS A MEMBER
Youth and young adults ages 14-24 with experience in foster care run our chapters throughout California with the support of volunteers. Chapters focus on leadership development and local community education and policy implementation. Members also participate in statewide activities, including conferences, legislative implementation, and CYC governance.

BECOME A VOLUNTEER SUPPORTER FOR A LOCAL CHAPTER
Dedicated people who believe in the power of youth leadership to effect change, our supporters uphold the mission of CYC through practical support for chapters at the local level and in statewide activities.

SUPPORT OUR WORK
Donations of any amount help us provide transformative experiences for youth with experience in foster care. Letters to legislators in support of our advocacy campaigns help us succeed in creating lasting change.

www.calyouthconn.org
CONNECTIONS
“I’m in CYC because there’s that part of every human that you have to be part of something bigger than yourself. CYC aligns with my life story and with my desire to be part of something bigger than myself.”

—MIGUEL ALMODOVAR, MEMBER AND BOARD MEMBER, CONNECTED TO CYC SINCE 2010