

# CHILD WELFARE OVERVIEW FOR LINKAGES TEAMS - PART 2

## Placement, Permanency & the Role of Linkages

### OVERVIEW

This session continues our look at California's child welfare system, focusing on placement, permanency, and how Linkages supports families navigating the system. As with other videos, please note that California's child welfare system is county-administered. Practices may vary across counties.

### Trends in Placement

- Fewer Children in Foster Care: A 10-year downward trend in California.
- Greater Placement Stability: Fewer placement changes per child.
- Reduced Time in Care: Children spend fewer days in foster care overall.

### Placement Types

- **Resource Families** are county approved foster families who have completed an assessment and training. They can provide emergency placement, foster placement, guardianship, or adoption. They may be:
  - Relatives: Blood, marriage, or adoption.
  - Non-Related Extended Family Members (NREFMs): Family friends or people with an existing close bond to the child or family.
  - Unrelated caregivers: Traditional foster/adoptive homes.
- **Foster Family Agency Homes (FFAs)** are also approved foster families who have completed an assessment and training. They have agency social workers who provide additional support to the caregivers. They may support children with specialized needs.
- **Intensive Services Foster Care (ISFC)** is a specialized level of care within foster homes that support children with more complex emotional, behavioral, or medical needs. ISFC caregivers receive advanced training and support.
- **Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTPs)** are residential placements providing therapeutic care for youth. STRTP placement is intended to be short-term and treatment-focused with the goal of transitioning the child to a family setting.

## Levels of Care (LOC) & Support

- The current foster care rate process involves identifying the child's level of care needs (levels 1-4). The level of care is based on the child's needs and determines the foster care payment amount.
- ISFC & STRTP placements receive higher specialized rates.
- Some counties provide a Specialized Care Increment (SCI) based on the child's needs.
- There is a new tiered rate structure coming in 2027 that will be based on an assessment of the child's strengths and needs and will include funding for child well-being activities.

## Support Services

- **Wraparound** provides team-based support tailored to the child and family and seeks to stabilize placements and help with the transition from STRTP to family settings.

## ICWA – Indian Child Welfare Act

- The Indian Child Welfare Act prescribes specific priorities for Native American children's placement. The placing agency must seek placement first with extended family. If no extended family is available, they must seek placement with Tribal members. If no Tribal members are available, they must seek placement with other Native families. The law also specifies that the Tribe must be included in placement decisions for children who are Tribally affiliated. These placement preferences acknowledge that cultural connection is critical for identity and long-term stability for Native American children.



## Resource Family Approval (RFA)

- The RFA process is required for relatives, NREFMs, and unrelated caregivers who want to be resource parents (AKA foster parents).
- The RFA process includes background checks, specialized training, home/environment assessments and a permanency assessment.
- Emergency placements are allowed before the full RFA process is complete, but foster care payments are delayed until approval. Temporary financial support may be available via CalWORKs. This can become complicated if a parent is receiving FR Cash Aid as only one party (parent or caregiver) can receive CalWORKs cash aid at a time.

## Permanency Options

- Reunification is the primary goal for children in foster care. If reunification is not possible, the child welfare agency must work toward another form of permanency:
  - **Adoption** is the most permanent of these non-reunification options as the adoptive parents become the child's legal parents and there is no ongoing court or child welfare involvement (other than financial support - see AAP below).
  - **Legal Guardianship** is considered a permanent outcome, but guardianship can be revoked and in some cases will include ongoing child welfare or court involvement. Legal guardians are eligible for financial assistance (see below).

- **Tribal Customary Adoption (TCA)** is a legal permanency option for Native American children. Unlike traditional adoption, parental rights are not terminated in a TCA. The adoption is ordered by the state court but based on the tribal custom, tradition, or law of the child's tribe.
- **Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)** is a court-ordered permanency plan for youth in foster care when other permanent options like reunification, adoption, or legal guardianship are not possible.

### Post-Permanency Financial Supports

- Adoption Assistance Program (AAP)
  - Monthly financial support for adoptive parents (based on care level)
  - Includes Medi-Cal coverage
  - Can continue up to age 21 under certain conditions
- Kin-GAP
  - For relatives granted legal guardianship who meet specific requirements.
  - Offers foster care-equivalent payments up to age 21 (under certain conditions) and Medi-Cal

### Transition Age Youth (TAY)

- Eligible for Extended Foster Care (EFC) up to age 21.
- Must meet participation criteria (e.g., school, work, program).
- Linkages can help TAY access housing, education, and CalWORKs supports.

### Want to Learn More?

- Discuss this handout with your team
- Contact your Linkages coordinator
- Add your questions to CalPrevents
- Review Part 1 of this video series for court processes and reunification timelines