



NATIONAL CENTER FOR ENHANCED
Post-Adoption Support

THE CALIFORNIA IMPACT STORY

How targeted technical assistance with the National Center for Enhanced Post-Adoption Support helped California build a stronger, more coordinated post-permanency system for adoptive and guardianship families.

AT-A-GLANCE



Two trainings were developed and conducted to provide post-permanency staff across the state with knowledge on how best to serve adoptive and guardianship families.



The largest known statewide scan of California post-permanency services was completed which entailed interviews with 36 counties, 5 Federally Recognized Tribes and contracted providers.



Opened dialogue between the state and counties related to post-permanency, laying the foundation for a model that can be implemented to provide more equitable services across the state.



An on-line learning hub was created that provides post-permanency staff with up-to-date resources, peer learning sessions and training.



The Impact

Technical assistance provided the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) critical guidance in the transition of a broad vision to a more concrete understanding of the post-permanency services landscape across California. The TA highlighted common needs, county strengths, and created a foundation for more consistent support for adoptive and guardianship families. Additionally, it assisted CDSS to begin an active dialogue with counties regarding how to better serve adoptive and guardianship families which ultimately will result in a proposed model of practice that counties can adapt to strengthen service provision. Practical tools were developed to help lay a foundation of post-permanency knowledge including:

- A statewide report on services offered in counties and with federally recognized tribal nations
- Trainings developed to enhance adoption staff's knowledge related to effectively serving this population of children and families
- A website developed that created a 'one stop shop' of all the information, tools, forms and resources professionals working with adoptive and guardianship families need.

“California had a ‘preliminary’ vision for our post-permanency services and the Post-Adoption Center was able to expand, finalize and assist in executing.”

*Laurel A. Cima, Children and Family Services Division,
California Department of Social Services, Chief Adoption
Services Branch*

As a Result of Technical Assistance

- **Created the clearest statewide picture of post-permanency services.** The Post-Adoption Center contacted 40 counties, completed interviews with 36, and gathered input from 97 county staff members as well as contracted providers offering post-permanency services.
- **Produced a comprehensive statewide report.** Interview data were analyzed and organized into a report describing services offered across 36 counties, major themes in service provision, unmet needs, and opportunities for post-permanency enhancement.
- **Elevated tribal perspectives.** An addendum to the comprehensive statewide report incorporated feedback from five federally recognized tribes in California related to guardianship, customary adoption, and adoption.
- **Shared findings statewide.** The full report and executive summary were distributed to county offices and stakeholder groups across California, and findings were presented in statewide forums, including to the County Child Welfare Directors Association.

- **Built training capacity for the field.** A two-hour training course, *Understanding Adoptive Families*, was developed for post-permanency staff, along with a train-the-trainer approach to support ongoing delivery in California.
- **Strengthened pre-permanency practice.** A 1.5-hour training was delivered twice to help staff understand why support before permanency matters and how to prepare families before adoption or guardianship is finalized.
- **Launched a practical learning hub.** A comprehensive Learning Center was developed to give post-permanency professionals a centralized place to access resources, learning opportunities, forms, policies, and best practices.

Why This Work Mattered

CDSS has the nation's largest Adoption Assistance Program, with thousands of children moving into adoption and guardianship each year. As of September 1, 2025, 84,438 children were on the Adoption Assistance Program caseload and 16,766 were receiving guardianship assistance. Behind those numbers are families who need timely, informed, and consistent support after permanency is achieved.



California's county-administered structure adds complexity. Its 58 counties vary widely in size, culture, population, and service infrastructure. The counties also vary in the services provided to post-permanency families. All but a handful of counties manage their own post-permanency services resulting in varying degree of services being offered.

The technical assistance partnership focused on helping California move from uneven local practice toward a more shared, statewide approach to post-permanency support. CDSS goals for technical assistance were to:

1. Equip county adoption professionals with the knowledge, skills, and approaches needed to support adoptive and guardianship families across the post-permanency continuum.

2. Build greater quality and consistency in service provision across California.
3. Foster collaboration and shared learning among adoption professionals statewide.
4. Support continuous improvement and responsiveness to the needs of adoptive and guardianship families.



Looking Ahead

CDSS plans to continue enhancing the Learning Center so it becomes a one-stop resource for professionals supporting adoptive and guardianship families. Planned enhancements include a listserv for post-permanency professionals, newsletters, peer groups that allow counties to share resources and learn from one another and a tool kit that supports counties in enhancing their own post-permanency programs. The intent is to create a collaborative learning environment where counties are learning from one another. It also provides a platform for CDSS and counties to jointly identify challenges and solutions for serving this target group.

The Learning Center is an important first step toward a shared understanding of the service array families need after permanency. Over time, the goal is to support a more structured, consistent process for how counties respond when adoptive and guardianship families seek help in addition to a more structured process regarding how counties seek assistance from CDSS.

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