

Expansion of Family Finding

Background:

At the initiation of the Permanency Practice Initiative, a commitment was made to provide training and technical assistance related to Family Finding solely to counties participating in the initiative. This decision was jointly made by the Office of Children & Families in the Courts (OCFC) and the Office of Children, Youth & Families (OCYF).

Since making the original decision, 14 PPI Phase One counties have implemented Family Finding with an additional 13 PPI Phase Two counties currently receiving Family Finding training. Additionally, 1 county that is not currently enrolled in PPI is receiving Family Finding training. These counties represent approximately 80% of children placed in out-of-home care throughout Pennsylvania. In addition to Family Finding training in 28 counties, the Accurint search engine tool has been provided to all counties in an effort to facilitate locating parents and relatives.

In the most recent Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) serious gaps in Pennsylvania's work to engage families in case planning and decision making were identified. The lack of searching for non-custodial parents and their involvement in case planning was of significant concern. The CFSR results also noted that Pennsylvania needed to improve efforts related to concurrent planning rather than sequential planning.

The Juvenile Court Bench Book also contains guidance to underscore the importance of searching for additional family members that can be valuable resources to support the safety and permanency of children involved within the child welfare system.

Finally, the Federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act was enacted in 2008 to require that relatives be notified within 30 days of a child's removal from their home to further support the use of relatives as resources.

These changes necessitate a revision to the original understanding between the OCFC and OCYF specifically related to the use, support and expansion of Family Finding.

Expansion Components:

Consistent with an increased use of evidence-based programs and recognizing that Family Finding is a strategy that could lead to improved outcomes in the areas noted in the CFSR, as well as, fulfilling the statutory relative notification mandate; it is recommended that we expand the use of Family Finding statewide. At the same time, we recognize that not all counties are positioned to become fully involved in the PPI. Because counties are very excited about finding family connections for children, we are developing an expansion plan to provide counties with an opportunity to "jump start" their PPI involvement. Through this expansion, non-PPI counties will have an opportunity to obtain Family Finding training.

However to maintain the integrity of our joint commitment and expand statewide capacity while ensuring fidelity to the Family Finding Model, non-PPI counties will be provided an opportunity to begin a “phased-in” PPI implementation through the following activities:

- Child Welfare Training Program, in consultation with OCFC staff, will develop curricula to provide both the Family Finding Overview and the Family Finding Expert series.
- PPI Phase One and Phase Two counties will be given first priority to Family Finding Training.
- Family Finding trainers will be county employees well versed in the Family Finding philosophy and practice. Trainers will be jointly selected and approved by CWTP, OCYF and OCFC.
- Non-PPI counties wishing to receive CWTP Family Finding training will request such in writing, sign a Memorandum of Understanding (Child Welfare Administrator, Dependency Judge and County Commissioner), commit to entering a future phase of PPI and be approved by both OCYF and OCFC.
- The county would be required to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which includes, but is not limited to:
 - Committing the court and the county children and youth agency leadership to attend the overview training and to support staff as necessary in implementation of these efforts;
 - Training staff consistent with the model through the curriculum developed in partnership with Kevin Campbell and the Child Welfare Training Program; and
 - Participating in technical assistance and transfer of learning activities with OCYF, CWTP and judicial support from OCFC; and
 - Submitting a Letter of Interest to become a PPI Phase Three or Phase Four County signed by the Dependency Judge, CYS Administrator and County Commissioner.
 - Becoming a future PPI County by implementing all elements of the PPI by an agreed upon date.

If at any point, the county wishes to withdrawal from the MOU or does not comply with the MOU the county will be expected to refund the cost of expenses incurred in the delivery of the training, technical assistance and transfer of learning activities. The refund would occur through the deduction of the costs from reimbursement to the county through the quarterly invoicing process.

This approach affords the Commonwealth with the opportunity to impact the lives of more children and families while promoting consistent evidence based programs and supporting original commitments made regarding Family Finding.