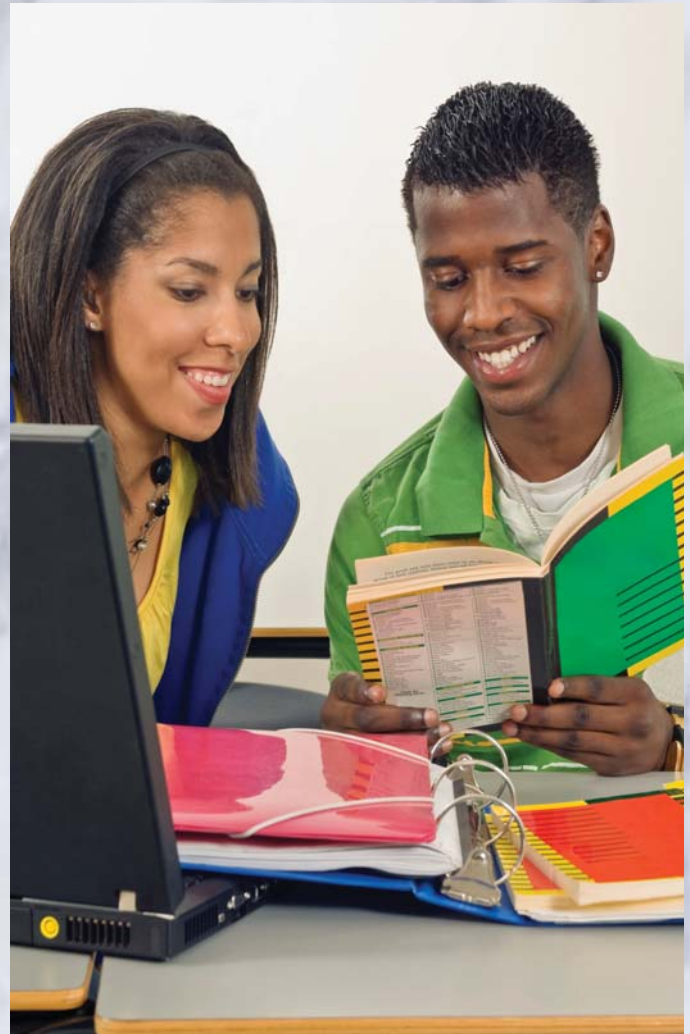


2014 Pennsylvania State Roundtable Report



**“Closing the Gap: A Meaningful Transition into
Independent Living for Youth Aging Out of
the Foster Care System. “**

Transitional Youth Workgroup

Transitional Youth Workgroup Members

Co-Chairpersons

Honorable Michael Sholley
President Judge
 Court of Common Pleas
 Snyder & Union Counties

Vanessa Garrett Harley, Esquire
Deputy Commissioner
 Children & Youth Division
 Philadelphia Department of Human Services

Members

Clay Cauley, Esquire
Hearing Officer
 Court of Common Pleas
 Chester County

Lauren Cummings, MSS
Human Services Program Specialist
 Department of Public Welfare
 Office of Children, Youth and Families

Jonathan Houlon, Esquire
Divisional Deputy City Solicitor
 City of Philadelphia Law Department
 Child Welfare Unit

Cindi E. Horshaw
Acting Bureau Director
 Department of Public Welfare
 Office of Children, Youth and Families

Barbara Huggins
Youth Quality Improvement Specialist / Former Foster Care Youth
 The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center

Lucy Johnston-Walsh, Esquire
Clinical Professor
Director, Children's Advocacy Clinic
 Penn State University Dickinson School of Law

Octavia Lacks
Former Youth Ambassador / Former Foster Care Youth

Todd E. Lloyd, MSW
Child Welfare Policy Director
 Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

Laurie O'Connor
Director
 Montgomery County Office of Children and Youth

Meghan O'Hare
Program Development Specialist
 The Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center

Jennifer Pokempner, Esquire
Supervising Attorney
 Juvenile Law Center

Stephanie Salvatori
Transitional Living Coordinator / Former Foster Care Youth
 Lycoming County Children and Youth

Cynthia Schneider, Esquire
Senior Attorney
 City of Philadelphia Law Department
 Child Welfare Unit

Cindy G. Scott, MSW, LSW
Quality Assurance Manager
 Chester County Department of Children, Youth and Families

Shelley Smith
 BSU Director
 CMSU Behavioral Health & Development Services

Peter E. Vriens, MSW
Director
 Dauphin County Children and Youth

Gail Whitley
Independent Living Program Specialist
 Northumberland County Children and Youth

Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts
Office of Children & Families in the Courts:

Jennifer A. Horn, MSW, MBA
Judicial Program Analyst

Elke Moyer
Administrative Associate / Graphic Designer

Sandra E. Moore, MSW
Administrator

REPORT TO THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE ROUNDTABLE

“We should treat youth that are involved in the court system the same as other youth that are at the same age and developmental level. Too often we place youth "under a microscope" and set different behavioral standards for them because they are under court supervision. Activities such as obtaining a driver’s license, attending a school dance or participating in athletics or extra-curricular activities should be determined on each youth's individual circumstances and not on generalized agency regulations or policies.”

**Michael H. Sholley, President Judge
17th Judicial District of Pennsylvania**

“Hold on, change is coming. I envision a change in the child welfare system where youth in foster care are treated like every other youth. Where they are part of a family and are nurtured, loved and given age appropriate freedoms. Where they develop and maintain lifelong family and personal connections. Where they transition successfully to adulthood and continue to progress and develop into productive members of their community. Where they become your doctors, lawyers, teachers and hopefully, child welfare professionals. To effectuate this change we have to dramatically change our culture and thought process around the provision of services to older youth. This includes understanding that the use of both congregate care and APPLA must be limited. The rightsizing of congregate care is imperative. It should only be used for short term treatment focused intervals. Understanding that APPLA is not a permanent goal and should only be used with active concurrent planning. We should ensure that our child welfare practices are not interfering with the ultimate goal of finding every youth a family.”

**Vanessa Garrett Harley, Esquire
Deputy Commissioner
Children & Youth Division
Philadelphia Department of Human Services**

CLOSING THE GAP: A MEANINGFUL TRANSITION INTO INDEPENDENT LIVING FOR YOUTH AGING OUT OF THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM

BACKGROUND

In May 2011, the Pennsylvania State Roundtable identified the unique needs and challenges of older youth, ages 16 to 21, as a priority issue thus creating the Transitional Youth Workgroup (TYW). The initial State Roundtable charge for the TYW was broad: to examine issues facing older youth in the Pennsylvania foster care system, with emphasis on the unique needs of youth transitioning to adult life.

The Workgroup established the following goals for its initial work: assess recent federal and Pennsylvania laws that have the potential of positively impacting outcomes for older foster care youth, examine issues specific to Independent Living Services and Voluntary Discharge, gather information regarding system issues facing Pennsylvania's transitional youth, identify best practices, and encourage the development of appropriate resources that will help this group of youth successfully transition to adulthood.

The overarching belief of the TYW is that every youth, who must "age out" of the child welfare system, should have sufficient supports and resources to make a successful transition to adulthood. Furthermore, that any youth leaving the foster care system without the needed supports/resources is a failure of the system...not the youth.

In May 2012, the TYW submitted their initial State Roundtable report recommending Pennsylvania expand eligibility for re-entry into foster care of youth up to age 21. TYW was thrilled when it was announced at the 2012 State Roundtable that a re-entry legislative measure (Act 91) was near approval. Act 91 became law on July 5, 2012. Thereafter, resumption of jurisdiction by the court, and all the procedural and substantive questions relating to the implementation of Act 91, became the immediate TYW focus.

The first task assumed by the TYW was to identify the issues that the courts and county agencies would likely face under Act 91. Then the TYW utilized grant funding from Casey Family Programs to develop, design, print and distribute posters and flyers aimed at informing transitional youth of the new option available to them under Act 91.

The TYW next provided support and assistance to the Honorable Charles Saylor, who drafted a proposed Benchbook chapter regarding transitional youth. This proposed chapter was later submitted to the Benchbook Committee for consideration as they revise the Pennsylvania Dependency Benchbook.

Finally, there was the formidable task of initiating review and consideration of older youth in "congregate care" usage. As a result of this review, the TYW

concluded Pennsylvania needed to take a comprehensive approach to “right sizing” that would ensure children and youth receive the highest level of treatment and care within the least restrictive setting. This would require new and better ways of supporting resource families, exploring opportunities to expand the use of supervised independent living settings, and thoughtful analysis of our beliefs related to permanency for older youth, our focus on securing permanent families for these youth and our high usage of APPLA as a permanency goal.

At the 2013 State Roundtable, the following recommendations were presented, amended and approved:

- I. Assume lead on efforts related to congregate care, including congregate care recommendations from other State Roundtable Workgroups (Appendix A).
- II. Continue to examine best practices related to the use of APPLA and provide recommendations to the 2014 State Roundtable.
- III. Develop an Act 91 Guide to assists professionals (agency, court, provider and community) working with these youth and promote best practices associated with this assistance and submit to 2014 State Roundtable.
- IV. Develop strategies that will enhance the voice of youth and families in all phases of child welfare involvement, including but not limited to all levels of decision making, case planning, policy development/revision, and practice reform. Present a set of proposed strategies to the 2014 State Roundtable.
- V. Develop strategies to help youth understand the benefits of staying in care.
- VI. Identify creative aftercare options for youth.
- VII. Examine new Florida law which attempts to “normalize youth experience in foster care” and identify possible actions Pennsylvania might employ.
- VIII. Develop a youth video, using youth, regarding resumption of jurisdiction and services beyond age 18.

PROGRESS ON THE 2013 STATE ROUNDTABLE RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Assume lead on efforts related to congregate care, including congregate care recommendations from other State Roundtable Workgroups.

The State Roundtable approved the TYW’s recommendation that it assume lead on efforts related to congregate care. Based on the SRT’s initial review of this issue and subsequent discussion, the TYW proceeded to take a comprehensive approach to “right sizing” congregate care in Pennsylvania.

Why “right-sizing” congregate care is important for older youth in Pennsylvania?

Foster care is meant to be a temporary strategy to protect children while strengthening the capacity of families. It should be structured in the least restrictive and most family-like manner necessary. The child welfare system is tasked with working quickly to help families resolve areas of concern so families can be reunited with their children. If reunification isn’t possible, the use of concurrent planning assures children will achieve timely permanency through other means. This is true for children, young or old. The Court’s oversight role is crucial in ensuring that permanency is prioritized for youth of all ages.

When children have to enter out of home care, for their own protection, placement with family and kin is deemed the most preferred option. Indeed kin placement generally minimizes the trauma that youth experience when in foster care. Pennsylvania law now requires the use of family finding to identify relatives and kin when a child or youth is accepted for child welfare services, that first consideration be given to relatives or kin for placement, and that family finding occur at least annually until permanency is achieved unless the court determines family finding is not in the best interest of the child. Use of kin and family-based foster care placements over group homes and institutions, or congregate care, helps provide greater assurance children will achieve permanency and not linger in foster care. This is especially true for older youth who have been in care for many years, many of whom return to family once they “age out” of care.

1. Congregate care neither produces positive youth outcomes nor is fiscally sound.

Monthly costs of congregate care can be six to ten times higher than foster care and two to three times higher than treatment foster careⁱ

Congregate care settings are not only significantly more expensive than family-based settings, but the treatment they provide can often be obtained efficiently within the community. There are also several studies that speak to poorer outcomes for youth placed in congregate settings, such as:

- A lack of positive family connections after leaving care due to inadequate permanency planning;ⁱⁱ
- Two-and-a-half times greater risk of delinquent behavior;ⁱⁱⁱ
- Less contact with their families^{iv} and poorer relationships with biological siblings;^v
- Lower levels of education;
- More drug and alcohol abuse problems;
- Fewer close relationships and social supports; and
- Lower levels of optimism about their economic future.^{vi}

“There is virtually no evidence to indicate that group care enhances the accomplishment of any of the goals of child welfare services: it is not more safe or better at promoting development, it is not more stable, it does not achieve better long-term outcomes, and it is not more efficient as the cost is far in excess of other forms of care.”^{vii}

2. The poor outcomes resulting from congregate care disproportionately negatively impact older youth.

These poor outcomes have the greatest impact on older youth in Pennsylvania who are more frequently placed in congregate care than younger children. The result is far too many youth “aging out” of foster care without family *and* without the skills needed to successfully transition to adulthood.

When youth “age out” we know their outcomes on a host of indicators are often poor.

- Nearly half of youth who age out of foster care will not complete high school and are twice as likely to drop out of high school as other students.^{viii}
- Almost half of youth in foster care haven’t found a job four years after leaving the system and struggle to pay their bills.^{ix}
- 1 in 4 youth who age out of foster care experiences homelessness for at least one night.^x
- Nearly a third of youth who age out struggle with mental health challenges such as depression, substance abuse, and anxiety disorders.^{xi}
- 1 in 4 youth have been arrested since leaving care.^{xii}
- Young women in foster care are two-and-a-half times more likely to become pregnant by age 19 than young women who were not in foster care.^{xiii}

The data shows that right-sizing congregate care is crucial for improving permanency and transition outcomes for older youth.

Right-sizing and Improving Outcomes for Older Youth

1. What is the “right-size” for Pennsylvania?

For over a decade, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) has worked successfully with a number of jurisdictions around the country to “right-size” the use of congregate care, including current work occurring in Philadelphia County. The TYW had the opportunity to meet with staff from AECF to review progress made in some of these jurisdictions. TYW members, learned about a number of driving principles AECF encourages jurisdictions to use in guiding their reform efforts. These include:

- Systems engaged in best practice should be using congregate care less than 10 percent of the time, and less than 20 percent specifically for teens.

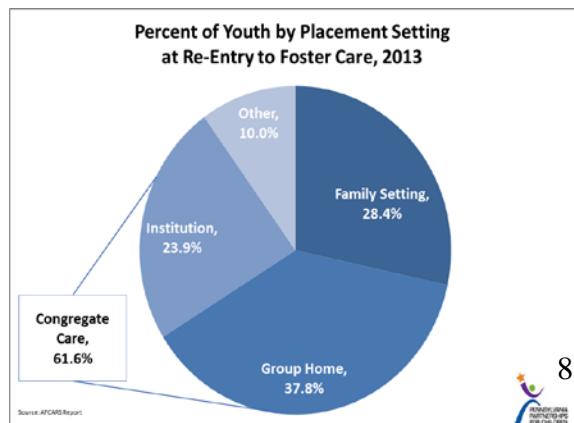
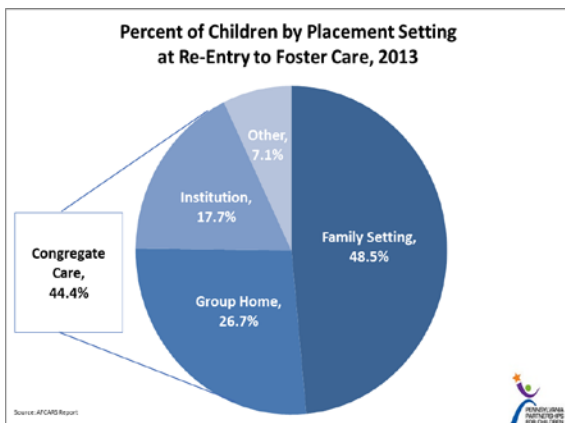
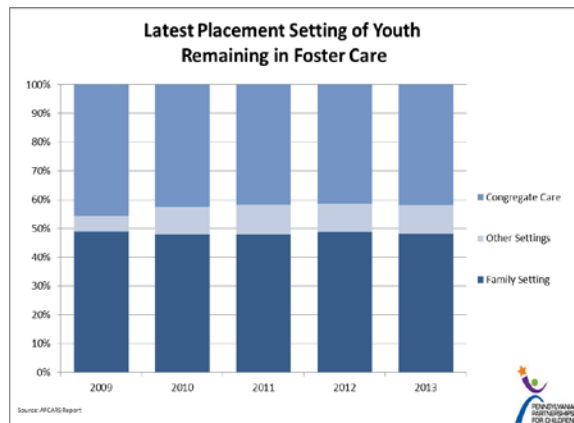
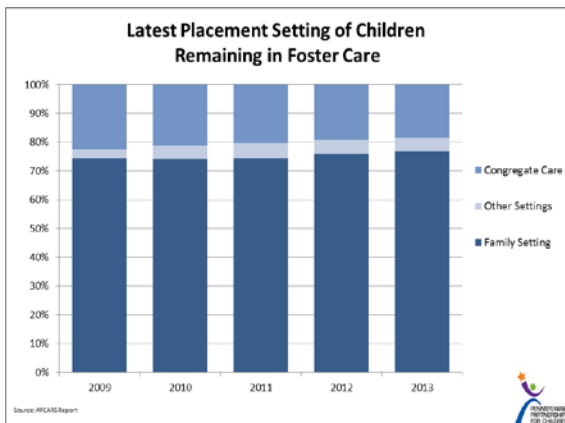
- Use of congregate care should generally be limited to short-term and treatment-focused interventions that involve the family.
- Development of additional foster families should be encouraged, particularly ones willing to support teens.
- Children under age 13 should not be placed in congregate care.
- Children and youth should not be placed in shelter settings.
- Children and youth should not be placed in group homes, which typically provide little treatment.

These principles have spurred the following multi-prong strategy in Philadelphia that is already helping to reduce use of congregate care:

- Executive level approval process for congregate care placement;
- Focused effort to significantly reduce shelter placements;
- Expedited permanency meetings;
- Foster parent recruitment; and,
- A driving philosophy that “all roads lead home – stay home, go home, find home”.

2. What is the “current size” of Pennsylvania?

According to the Administration for Children and Families, Pennsylvania is among the top 10 states for highest use of congregate care for teens – 48 percent of teens compared to the national average of 35 percent.^{xiv}



That said, there are nine counties in Pennsylvania currently meeting AECF's recommended 10 percent benchmark. For congregate care placements in all counties in Pennsylvania, refer to Appendix B.

County	Numbers of children in foster care during 2013	Percentage of all children residing in congregate care
Sullivan	7	0 %
Lackawanna	409	3.2%
Northumberland	234	4.7%
Wyoming	35	5.7%
Huntingdon	60	6.7%
Adams	101	7.9%
Greene	85	8.2%
Clarion	46	8.7%
Monroe	257	10.1%

3. How can Pennsylvania move forward? Lessons from the field:

After considerable analysis and discussion, the TYW concluded that there isn't one driver or solution to Pennsylvania's over-reliance on congregate care. Instead there are a number of areas that will require attention with the degree and types of change needed varying considerably by local jurisdiction.

In AECF's years of addressing this issue, a collection of systemic levers of change have emerged. Paramount in this collection is the experience that a jurisdiction will typically focus on one or two areas, experience success and then move on to others.

<i>System levers of change</i>	<i>Actions</i>
Composition of Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce congregate beds • Increase community foster homes • Increase community-based services • Increase use of kinship placements for children
Front-line practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage young people in talking about their placement preferences • Increase engagement of parents and family • Identify potential kinship homes earlier
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create financial disincentives for congregate care (e.g., require local contributions for institutional placements) • Redirect savings from decreased use of congregate care to community-based services
Performance management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use permanency and well-being outcomes to evaluate congregate care providers • Phase out contracts with providers that have poor performance

Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandate family-based concurrent planning for all children and youth • Limit use of independent living as a case goal • Identify potential kinship homes earlier • Encourage youth to consider open adoption arrangements that permit birth-family contact
Policy (cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require prior authorization and utilization reviews for entry into congregate care

In addition to AECF's impressive national work, the TYW believes Pennsylvania can also learn much from what has already yielded positive results in Pennsylvania. The TYW took the opportunity to learn from Lackawanna County and Northumberland County, who both have less than 5 percent of children residing in congregate care in 2013. Both counties shared their process and successes as described below:

Lackawanna County -

Lackawanna County Children and Youth Services rarely place children and youth in congregate care settings. In fact, over the past year congregate care settings were only used three percent of the time (year ending September 2013). When Mr. Bill Browning became the agency's executive director in 2005 the rate of congregate care usage was above 10 percent. The TYW had the opportunity to interview Mr. Browning to learn how the following strategies were used to accomplish such a low rate:

- Court and agency staff focused on exploring the beliefs that residential care provides greater safety and treatment than what family-based settings provide. Conversations with congregate care providers clarified this thinking was inaccurate, and eventually agency culture shifted in its expectations of what works.
- Data reports covering key indicators, generated on a daily basis, are reviewed by the director, managers, supervisors and quality assurance staff.
- Weekly internal meetings to review data as part of quality assurance efforts.
- Behavioral health integration team meetings held between families, managed care, schools, foster parents, and all professionals involved to discuss services being provided and how services and coordination could be improved.
- Training for staff on the trauma children experience when they are removed from their homes, which influence placement decisions.
- Administrative review and protocol to be followed prior to any out of home placement, which requires discussion between the caseworker, their

- supervisor, the placement coordinator, and a senior administrator for approval.
- Approval process for congregate care placement, which requires the caseworker to make a full presentation to the director and quality assurance staff for why the placement is necessary.
 - Expanded use of foster care, particularly for older youth with challenging behaviors. This involved recruiting foster families willing to do more, but also reimbursing them at higher per diems (up to \$100/day).

What has resulted from Lackawanna County's work? Use of congregate care is no longer part of the agency culture, and the only youth in these programs today are ones for which they couldn't find any other placement. Agency staff recommends alternatives to congregate care to the courts, and when youth are in these settings judges are asking service providers more questions and scrutinizing whether continuation in such a program is necessary.^{xv}

Northumberland County -

Prior to 2003, Northumberland County Children and Youth Services (NCCYS) policy prohibited the use of congregate care under any conditions. The change of agency administrator in 2003 also brought a change in the approach to congregate care use. The agency culture from 2003 to the present maintains that congregate care placement is indicated in certain instances and can be pursued but it is still viewed as the placement of exclusion. NCCYS' rate of congregate care use for the year ending September 2013 was four percent and this rate of usage has been relatively consistent since the 2005. The TYW interviewed Jennifer Willard, Administrator, and Catherine Gemberline, Director of Social Services, and learned that the following strategies were applied at NCCYS in an effort to maintain a continued low rate of congregate care use:

- A placement protocol requirement ensures that a pre-placement meeting be held prior to all placements except for those deemed emergent in nature. Placement possibilities are considered from least restrictive to most restrictive. An "icebreaker" meeting that engages all parties involved in the case must occur within 72 hours of placement. Administrative approval is required for all congregate care placements.
- Monthly data reports reflecting placement settings are reviewed and discussed by the management team.
- Each case is staffed by a dependency team of caseworkers one month before the next court review hearing to determine the status and direction of the case, to include whether or not the placement setting continues to be appropriate.
- A special rate is available to resource homes willing to maintain children with challenging behaviors or medical conditions in the home.

- Resource parent engagement and support is a huge focus of NCCYS. A bi-monthly resource parent meeting is held at the Family Center. A monthly newsletter filled with timely useful information is distributed to resource parents. Frequent communication between agency personnel and resource parents is encouraged and supported. A private resource parent Facebook page is available. Quarterly resource home visits offer another opportunity for meaningful discussions. Monthly resource parent “coffee hour” sessions are held in the community. Resource parents struggling with maintaining a child in the home are assisted in arranging respite.^{xvi}

4. How can Pennsylvania move forward? Lessons from adolescent development and the voices of youth.

In addition to considering best practice from the field, the TYW has continued to pay attention to how reforms impact older youth in their daily lives both by listening to youth and taking into consideration their developmental needs as adolescents and emerging adults. Right-sizing the system for older youth means not just developing family resources and moving them from congregate care, but also creating support and program standards that are age-appropriate and meet the needs of *young adults*.

Older youth consistently report being treated as children and not being given the freedom and responsibility they need to become the adults we want them to be. Their frustration can result in strained relationships, acting out, and sometimes opting out of the system altogether. The TYW believes that families who care for teens must be adequately trained and supported in parenting older youth. For those youth who have special needs, including behavioral health, appropriate supports must be available so that families are able to meet the challenges special needs may pose.

In addition to developing the capacity of families to support older youth, the TWY concluded that an array of placements in the community must be made available for older youth. These youth must still be assisted in making supportive adult connections, but should be provided the opportunity to live in such less restrictive settings as supervised independent living and transitional living while working towards a more traditional version of permanency. Finally, as counties seek to reduce congregate care, the input of youth must be considered at all stages. Without this, at best, counties risk reducing congregate care without improving youth outcomes. At worst, they risk older youth opting out of the system completely and into the many poor outcomes previously described.

Potential Strategies for Pennsylvania

Last year the TYW recommended Pennsylvania take a judicious and comprehensive approach to “right-sizing” that would ensure children and youth

receive high quality treatment and care within the least restrictive and most family-like setting. To accomplish this for every child and youth within the foster care system our state will need to continue improvements on a number of fronts. Fortunately progress in Pennsylvania and in other jurisdictions around the country is being made. The TYW would like to continue identifying effective “right-sizing” strategies, and bring that information back to inform the work of the Courts and county agencies.

The following areas are potential strategies the TYW believe hold promise and are worthy of further exploration and prioritization:

- Analyze practitioner beliefs related to permanency for older youth and our practices related to securing permanent families for them.
- Develop new and improved ways of supporting resource families, particularly formal and informal kinship families.
- Develop an array of age and developmentally appropriate alternative placement resources that promote permanency and independent living skill building.
- Enhance agency and court oversight and gate keeping so when youth are appropriately placed in congregate care, the time is short and utilized well to address acute needs.
- Develop guidelines to assist in ensuring meaningful involvement of youth in court, and to ensure consideration of a youth’s wishes, strengths and needs in determining placement type and array of services.
- Provide youth an opportunity for their voices to be heard and gain insight from youth that are placed in congregate care settings.
- Reduce usage of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) as a permanency goal.
 - The workgroup has discussed this issue in depth and developed some resources described in the next session of this report.

II. Continue to examine best practices related to the use of APPLA and provide recommendations to the 2014 State Roundtable.

The Pennsylvania Juvenile Act, at 42 Pa.C.S. § 6351 (f.1), requires the following tiered list of permanency goal options for all youth from the most preferred option to least preferred:

1. Return the child to the parent, whenever this course is “best suited to the safety, protection and physical, mental and moral welfare of the child.”
2. Place the child for adoption where reunification is not best suited to the safety and welfare of the child.
3. Place the child with a permanent legal custodian, where adoption is not best suited to the safety and welfare of the child.
4. Place the child permanently with a fit and willing relative, where legal custodianship is not suited to the safety and welfare of the child.

5. Place the child in some other court-approved and permanent living arrangement, in instances where the agency has shown a “compelling reason” for ruling out all of the above four options.

More preferred options should be specifically examined and ruled out (based on case specific evidence) before moving into a lesser desired permanency goal (i.e. reunification should be ruled out before moving to adoption; adoption should be ruled out before moving to permanent legal custodian; permanent legal custodian should be ruled out before moving to fit and willing relative; and fit and willing relative should be ruled out before another planned permanent living arrangement).

After significant and extensive topic analysis and discussions, the TYW was compelled to conclude that: ***APPLA should be discouraged as a goal and should not be used except when all other permanency goals have been thoroughly explored and are not presently feasible. When APPLA is a goal, all other permanency goals should be investigated and considered continuously. APPLA should not mean all other efforts for permanency should stop or not be regularly considered.***

In addition, the TYW concluded that regardless of the youth’s age or court-ordered goal, the court and county agency should continue efforts to assure a permanent family relationship for all youth in foster care that is safe and meant to last a lifetime; offers the legal rights and social status of full family membership; provides for physical, emotional, social, cognitive and spiritual well-being; and assures lifelong connections to extended family, siblings, other significant adults, family history and traditions, race and ethnic heritage, culture, religion and language.

In those rare instances when APPLA is the court-ordered goal, it is imperative that the county agency continue to engage in permanency efforts as part of concurrent planning to help assure youth have a life-long family connection, and at the very least, one permanent relationship with a non-paid caring adult. APPLA is to be a deliberate, enduring, lasting and stable living arrangement. The term “living arrangement” includes not only the physical placement of the youth, but also the quality of care, supervision and nurturing the youth will receive.^{xvii}

To assist the courts and county agencies in reducing the use of APPLA as a permanency goal, the TYW created a tool, “Key Questions / Decisions when Establishing Permanency Goals for Older Youth and when a Request is Made to Change the Goal to APPLA” (Appendix C). This tool was designed to promote an extensive critical analysis regarding how permanency can be provided to every youth and to consider the services, supports, and technology available to make this possible. While useful for all cases involving older youth, the TYW especially hopes the tool can be of great assistance to achieve meaningful permanence in

cases thought to be the most challenging. The tool, in essence, provides a “guide” which supports the most permanent plan possible for older youth. The TYW will be asking in its recommendations that the SRT members endorse the tool. If accepted by the State Roundtable, this APPLA tool would be available at <http://www.ocfcpacourts.us/childrens-roundtable-initiative/state-roundtable-workgroups/transitional-youth-workgroup>.

Finally, in recognition that the Pennsylvania Dependency Benchbook is a valuable resource for not only Judges and Hearing Officers but also accessed by Solicitors, GAL’s, Parents’ Attorneys, and Agency Caseworkers, the TYW recommended changes to the current “Permanency Options” and “Permanency Hearing: To Consider Change of Goal (Goal Change Hearing)” chapters. In addition, for the latter chapter the TYW developed a draft Checklist of Key Questions and a Benchcard of considerations that should be made in “Goal Change Hearings.” These proposed documents were submitted to the Bench Book Committee in April 2014 for consideration.

III. Develop an Act 91 Guide to assists professionals (agency, court, provider and community) working with these youth and promote best practices associated with this assistance.

The TYW is requesting to be relieved of this recommendation. The Workgroup no longer believes there is a need for an Act 91 Guide. In response to the enactment of the Act 91 on July 5, 2012, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania adopted amendments to the Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Procedural Rules 1120, 1150, 1151, 1200, 1608, 1609, and 1613, and renumbered Rule 1613 to Rule 1631, and adopted new Rules 1610, 1611, 1634, and 1635. These changes were effective December 1, 2013. In addition, the TYW is aware that the Pennsylvania Dependency Benchbook Committee is drafting a new Benchbook Chapter regarding Resumption of Jurisdiction in anticipation of the revised Pennsylvania Dependency Benchbook. Finally, the Department of Welfare (DPW) will be issuing a Special Transmittal which provides county agency guidance on Act 91. The TYW believes these developments provide sufficient guidance to child dependency system professionals.

IV. Develop strategies that will enhance the voice of youth and families in all phases of child welfare involvement, including but not limited to all levels of decision making, case planning, policy development/revision, and practice reform.

Since of its creation, the TYW has recognized the importance of including the voice of foster care youth in its work. Initially the TYW had two members who are former foster care youth. This year the Workgroup were delighted to add a new member, a Pennsylvania Child Welfare Resource Center Youth Ambassador. The TYW will be seeking additional youth members and additional strategies to strengthen the voice of youth in future discussions.

In addition, the TYW would like to encourage other State Roundtable Workgroups to include youth as members of their workgroups; counties to have foster care or former foster care youth participate in their local Children's Roundtable meetings; Courts to engage youth in hearings and give youth a voice in the courtroom; and county agencies to have youth actively involved in all levels of decision making (i.e. policy development, hiring/promotion interviewing, staff training, etc.).

One strategy being used by county agencies to empower and engage families in decision making is the use of Family Group Decision Making (FGDM). Typically, the family group leads the FGDM process while the children and youth are engaged in this process. Given the importance of the youth's voice some counties have begun to hold youth led FGDM for developing the child permanency plan or transition planning.

On April 23, 2014, members of the TYW presented a workshop at the 2014 Pennsylvania Family Group Decision Making Conference in Hershey. The workshop was titled, "Youth Led Family Group Decision Making: Strategies for Successful Engagement." The following handouts were provided at the workshop, "Tips for Facilitating Youth-Led FGDM (Appendix D) and "Tips for Making Youth-Led FGDM Successful (Appendix E). There were approximately 50 individuals who attended this workshop and the TYW is hopeful that this practice will spread throughout Pennsylvania.

V. Develop strategies to help youth understand the benefits of staying in care.

Please refer to Section VIII below for an update.

VI. Identify creative aftercare options for youth.

The TYW is requesting to be relieved of this recommendation. This recommendation was originally intended to target youth who have "aged out" of care. Instead the Workgroup would prefer to focus on youth currently within the foster care system. Because the Workgroup strongly believes in the concept of "right sizing" the use of congregate care, alternatives to this level of care are critically needed. As such, the Workgroup would prefer to seek out alternative options and resources that have proven successful for these youth.

VII. Examine new Florida law which attempts to "normalize youth experience in foster care" and identify possible actions Pennsylvania might employ.

The TYW spent time reviewing Florida's "Quality Parenting for Children in Foster Care Act," which defines a caregiver's "reasonable and prudent parent standard."

This law allows caregivers the opportunity to make decisions about the children in their home that allow for age appropriate freedoms and developmental opportunities for the youth. This led to a discussion regarding how the current experience for youth in Pennsylvania foster care is anything but normal. An example was given of how difficult it is for a foster care youth to simply spend the night at a friend's home.

During this discussion it was learned that the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is currently working on efforts to normalize the youth experience in foster care. YAB is in the process of creating a document that outlines the need for rules to be consistent from placement to placement; including any stays in a congregate care setting. The TYW in collaboration with YAB would like to continue to explore ways to normalize the foster care experience and allow children and youth to be granted Age Appropriate Freedoms.

VIII. Develop a youth video, using youth, regarding resumption of jurisdiction and services beyond age 18.

The TYW would also like to collaborate with YAB to develop a video for youth by youth identifying the benefits of staying in foster care, resumption of jurisdiction and services available beyond age 18. There was a discussion of making the video clip available on YouTube, the YAB website and other sites visited by youth.

CONCLUSION:

Issues facing older youth in foster care are extensive, complex, varied and critically important. After two years of analysis, thoughtful discussion and the development of multiple tools, the TYW believes it is just beginning to truly understand the needs of these youth and identify promising strategies that will make a sustained and positive impact. The TYW is excited about the many accomplishments already made and is eager to continue work in the coming year.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Transitional Youth Workgroup respectfully submits to the Pennsylvania State Roundtable the following recommendations:

- I. To continue exploring potential strategies for "right sizing" congregate care.
 - a. In collaboration with other Judicial Program Analyst, through the Office of Children and Families in the Courts, several State Roundtable workgroup topics will be explored through planned

focus groups of children and youth in congregate care throughout Pennsylvania. The findings and recommendations from these focus groups shall be presented to the State Roundtable 2015.

- II. To continue examining best practices on Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) and provide a listing of such to the 2015 State Roundtable.
- III. To explore the development of a youth video, using youth, regarding resumption of jurisdiction, services available and the benefits of staying in care after age 18.
- IV. To identify strategies that normalizes the foster care experience and allows children and youth to be granted age appropriate freedoms, presenting such to the 2015 State Roundtable.
- V. To identify specific strategies aimed at enhancing the voice of youth in the legal process.

REFERENCES

ⁱ Barth, R.P. (2002). *Institutions vs. Foster Homes: The Empirical Base for the Second Century of Debate*. Chapel Hill, NC: UNC, School of Social Work, Jordan Institute for Families.

ⁱⁱ Freundlich, M. & Avery, R. J. (2005). Planning for permanency for youth in congregate care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 27, pp. 115-134.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ryan, J. P., Marshall, J. M., Herz, D., & Hernandez, P. M. (in press). Juvenile delinquency in child welfare: Investigating group home effects. *Children and Youth Service Review*.

^{iv} National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW) Research Team. (2002). *One Year in Foster Care: Draft Report*. Research Triangle Park and Chapel Hill, NC: RTI International and University of North Carolina, School of Social Work

^v Festinger, T. (1983). *No one ever asked us...A postscript to foster care*. New York: Columbia University Press.

^{xvi} McDonald, T., Allen, R., Westerfelt, A., & Piliavin, I. (1996). *Assessing the long-term effects of foster care: A research synthesis*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

Jones, M. A., & Moses, B. (1984). *West Virginia's former foster children: Their experiences in care and their lives as young adults*. New York: Child Welfare League of America.

^{vii} Barth, R.P. (2002). *Institutions vs. Foster Homes: The Empirical Base for the Second Century of Debate*. Chapel Hill, NC: UNC, School of Social Work, Jordan Institute for Families.

^{viii} *Families for Life: Powerful, Possible and a Priority for Youth in Foster Care*. The 2008 National Convention on Youth Permanence. Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Services and Casey Family Programs.

^{ix} *Improving Outcomes for Older Children*. Casey Family Programs. p. 3. www.casey.org.

^x Ibid.

^{xi} *Improving Outcomes for Older Children*. Casey Family Programs. p. 4. www.casey.org.

^{xii} Ibid.

^{xiii} Ibid.

^{xiv} Administration for Children and Families, *Child Welfare Outcomes Report*, 2011

^{xv} Lackawanna County Interview with Bill Browning, Executive Director of Children and Youth Services, February 21, 2014

^{xvi} Northumberland County Interview with Jennifer Willard, Administrator of Children and Youth Services, and Catherine Gemberling, Director of Social Services, on March 31, 2014.

^{xvii} Office of Children, Youth and Families Bulletin, 3130-11-04.

Recommendations on Congregate Care from State Workgroups

Father Engagement Workgroup:

Recommendation 1: Diligent review of contractual obligations with congregate care providers must occur to determine compliance regarding each child placed in the facility by the court. The agency and GAL must diligently advocate for congregate care compliance in regard to services, visits, education, medication, discharge planning, family involvement, length of stay.

Recommendation 2: Children placed in congregate care should receive more frequent periodic judicial review to determine father and paternal family to the 5th degree resource availability. This will avoid placement and ensure community based services.

Recommendation 3: Paternal family should be part of the decision making process from the very start to avoid placement in congregate care.

Recommendation 4: Court and agency shall hold the facility responsible for communicating directly with both parents regarding treatment, medication, education, and behavioral issues.

Visitation Workgroup:

Recommendation 1: Continue to explore the impact of congregate care on enhancing visitation.

Educational Success & Truancy Prevention Workgroup:

Recommendation 1: Prior to recommending or placing a child in congregate care, the child welfare agency and the Court should consider the impact of the placement on the quality of the child's education and educational trajectory. Specifically, the child welfare agency and the court should consider whether the child will stay in the same school, receive educational services of comparable quality, receive appropriate special education services, and acquire the credits needed to graduate on time.

Recommendation 2: The court should not place a youth in a congregate care setting in order to address truancy by compelling his attendance at an on-site school. This will not solve the child's underlying truancy issues and may set the youth back academically.

Latest placement setting (2009-2013) – Total use of congregate care (latest placement in group homes and institutions)

County	2009		2010		2011		2012		2013		Rate of Change 2009 to 2013					
	Total Congregate Care	%	Total Congregate Care	%	Total Congregate Care	%	Total Congregate Care	%	Total Congregate Care	%	Total Congregate Care	%	Group Home	Institution		
Pennsylvania	3,718	22.4%	3,120	21.0%	2,779	20.3%	2,600	19.2%	2,557	18.7%	-1,161	-31.2%	-261	-14.9%	-900	-45.7%
Adams (Rural-Mix)	9	11.1%	10	13.5%	14	19.4%	6	8.6%	4	6.8%	-5	-55.6%	0	-	-5	-55.6%
Allegheny (Urban)	403	19.8%	346	18.4%	296	18.0%	342	22.6%	401	25.6%	-2	-0.5%	131	63.9%	-133	-67.2%
Armstrong (Rural-Mix)	11	25.6%	12	33.3%	12	30.8%	7	29.2%	13	54.2%	2	18.2%	-1	-14.3%	3	75.0%
Beaver (Urban-Mix)	14	18.2%	4	8.7%	5	11.1%	7	13.0%	5	13.5%	-9	-64.3%	-9	-75.0%	0	0.0%
Bedford (Rural-Mix)	10	20.0%	10	22.2%	9	21.4%	10	32.3%	7	28.0%	-3	-30.0%	-3	-37.5%	0	0.0%
Berks (Urban-Mix)	100	16.9%	101	20.9%	90	17.9%	72	12.3%	97	16.3%	-3	-3.0%	12	21.4%	-15	-34.1%
Blair (Urban-Mix)	26	23.0%	18	19.8%	21	18.9%	21	16.4%	11	10.0%	-15	-57.7%	-11	-68.8%	-4	-40.0%
Bradford (Rural)	26	21.0%	21	16.4%	11	13.1%	7	8.3%	12	21.8%	-14	-53.8%	-4	-57.1%	-10	-52.6%
Bucks (Urban)	104	26.7%	78	23.1%	69	22.1%	87	22.8%	76	20.1%	-28	-26.9%	-25	-33.3%	-3	-10.3%
Butler (Rural-Mix)	20	13.4%	20	16.8%	15	12.7%	17	14.0%	9	8.4%	-11	-55.0%	-9	-50.0%	-2	-100%
Cambria (Rural-Mix)	23	24.5%	16	24.6%	25	30.1%	20	23.5%	20	19.8%	-3	-13.0%	-6	-31.6%	3	75.0%
Cameron (Rural)	2	100.0%	1	50.0%	1	50.0%	3	50.0%	3	60.0%	1	50.0%	0	0.0%	1	-
Carbon (Rural-Mix)	11	21.2%	15	24.6%	17	28.8%	9	25.0%	9	30.0%	-2	-18.2%	0	0.0%	-2	-20.0%
Centre (Urban-Mix)	25	36.2%	20	29.0%	23	28.0%	24	31.2%	18	25.7%	-7	-28.0%	-1	-7.1%	-6	-54.5%
Chester (Urban)	54	29.3%	34	23.3%	33	24.8%	21	18.6%	39	25.0%	-15	-27.8%	-4	-18.2%	-11	-34.4%
Clarion (Rural)	9	30.0%	3	14.3%	6	24.0%	2	9.1%	4	16.0%	-5	-55.6%	-2	-40.0%	-3	-75.0%
Clearfield (Rural)	8	9.4%	16	23.9%	15	18.1%	13	23.6%	4	6.6%	-4	-50.0%	0	0.0%	-4	-80.0%
Clinton (Rural)	10	21.7%	11	30.6%	7	17.1%	6	20.7%	6	21.4%	-4	-40.0%	-2	-25.0%	-2	-100%
Columbia (Urban-Mix)	12	17.9%	10	16.1%	12	17.4%	13	22.4%	6	9.8%	-6	-50.0%	-1	-14.3%	-5	-100%
Crawford (Rural)	34	25.6%	38	33.3%	24	21.8%	23	23.7%	34	36.6%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Cumberland (Urban-Mix)	26	17.8%	22	17.6%	25	21.2%	22	18.0%	22	14.7%	-4	-15.4%	4	36.4%	-8	-53.3%
Dauphin (Urban)	84	22.4%	77	22.3%	92	25.4%	85	26.8%	73	26.9%	-11	-13.1%	-17	-32.1%	6	19.4%
Delaware (Urban)	96	16.8%	61	12.0%	74	15.9%	95	18.5%	83	17.1%	-13	-13.5%	21	80.8%	-34	-48.6%
Elk (Rural)	1	33.3%	2	50.0%	5	62.5%	1	50.0%	3	42.9%	2	200%	1	-	1	100%
Erie (Urban-Mix)	102	24.5%	71	22.9%	61	21.0%	47	16.0%	60	21.0%	-42	-41.2%	-22	-33.3%	-20	-55.6%
Fayette (Rural-Mix)	25	21.6%	17	15.5%	16	11.8%	19	12.3%	26	19.3%	1	4.0%	3	16.7%	-2	-28.6%
Forest (Rural)	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	2	66.7%	2	100.0%	0	0.0%	-1	-100%	0	-	-1	-100%
Franklin (Rural-Mix)	11	19.0%	17	19.5%	23	30.3%	18	21.7%	18	18.0%	7	63.6%	5	55.6%	2	100%
Fulton (Rural)	0	0.0%	2	18.2%	3	33.3%	4	36.4%	4	30.8%	4	-	1	-	3	-
Greene (Rural)	4	11.1%	1	2.6%	3	6.8%	1	2.6%	0	0.0%	-4	-100%	-2	-100%	-2	-100%
Huntingdon (Rural)	7	17.5%	3	8.6%	4	12.1%	3	8.8%	3	8.3%	-4	-57.1%	-3	-60.0%	-1	-50.0%
Indiana (Rural)	12	22.2%	12	20.3%	15	24.6%	19	26.8%	18	25.7%	6	50.0%	4	36.4%	2	200%
Jefferson (Rural)	11	28.2%	8	17.8%	7	18.9%	8	40.0%	3	14.3%	-8	-72.7%	-7	-77.8%	-1	-50.0%
Juniata (Rural)	2	40.0%	1	16.7%	2	16.7%	2	22.2%	1	11.1%	-1	-50.0%	-2	-100%	1	-
Lackawanna (Urban)	9	3.7%	16	6.6%	11	3.9%	7	2.8%	8	3.7%	-1	-11.1%	-1	-50.0%	0	0.0%
Lancaster (Urban)	112	21.4%	93	18.0%	75	15.8%	71	16.4%	79	18.8%	-33	-29.5%	-7	-41.2%	-26	-27.4%
Lawrence (Rural-Mix)	37	20.7%	29	18.7%	20	15.0%	35	21.3%	21	12.7%	-16	-43.2%	-11	-34.4%	-5	-100%
Lebanon (Urban-Mix)	33	27.0%	21	21.9%	18	18.9%	20	25.3%	15	19.7%	-18	-54.5%	-1	-12.5%	-17	-68.0%
Lehigh (Urban)	27	9.1%	37	15.5%	22	10.3%	20	10.0%	22	10.8%	-5	-18.5%	-10	-71.4%	5	38.5%
Luzerne (Urban)	72	11.8%	55	10.1%	56	13.4%	60	14.4%	45	9.9%	-27	-37.5%	-12	-35.3%	-15	-39.5%
Lycoming (Rural-Mix)	29	29.3%	13	24.1%	9	23.1%	12	30.8%	5	16.7%	-24	-82.8%	-11	-84.6%	-13	-81.3%
McKean (Rural)	23	30.3%	20	29.0%	19	28.8%	13	19.7%	15	25.0%	-8	-34.8%	-5	-25.0%	-3	-100%
Mercer (Rural-Mix)	31	31.0%	25	23.1%	34	28.8%	27	31.8%	12	17.1%	-19	-61.3%	-14	-56.0%	-5	-83.3%
Mifflin (Rural)	10	15.6%	12	17.4%	9	15.3%	8	17.0%	7	14.0%	-3	-30.0%	0	0.0%	-3	-42.9%
Monroe (Rural-Mix)	32	13.2%	18	9.1%	16	10.5%	17	10.0%	16	10.4%	-16	-50.0%	-1	-50.0%	-15	-50.0%
Montgomery (Urban)	73	24.1%	88	25.8%	69	21.4%	49	16.3%	69	23.5%	-4	-5.5%	7	20.0%	-11	-28.9%
Montour (Rural-Mix)	2	28.6%	2	33.3%	1	11.1%	2	33.3%	0	0.0%	-2	-100%	-1	-100%	-1	-100%
Northampton (Urban)	55	23.2%	49	23.2%	47	21.0%	44	20.2%	48	22.4%	-7	-12.7%	11	55.0%	-18	-51.4%
Northumberland (Rural-Mix)	7	4.7%	6	3.9%	8	4.9%	6	3.7%	9	6.4%	2	28.6%	1	-	1	14.3%
Perry (Rural-Mix)	7	22.6%	7	24.1%	8	28.6%	5	26.3%	2	16.7%	-5	-71.4%	0	-	-5	-71.4%
Philadelphia (Urban)	1,541	28.3%	1,277	26.1%	1,047	24.6%	921	21.6%	880	19.7%	-661	-42.9%	-195	-32.9%	-466	-49.1%
Pike (Rural)	6	26.1%	2	5.7%	4	14.3%	7	26.9%	2	11.8%	-4	-66.7%	0	0.0%	-4	-80.0%
Potter (Rural)	2	28.6%	2	66.7%	1	100.0%	1	33.3%	1	25.0%	-1	-50.0%	-1	-50.0%	0	-
Schuylkill (Rural-Mix)	66	22.6%	50	20.8%	52	24.2%	24	14.4%	21	11.3%	-45	-68.2%	-38	-67.9%	-7	-70.0%
Snyder (Rural)	1	6.7%	1	5.3%	4	19.0%	2	8.0%	2	11.1%	1	100%	0	-	1	100%
Somerset (Rural-Mix)	25	37.3%	15	23.4%	18	39.1%	14	31.1%	12	24.0%	-13	-52.0%	-11	-52.4%	-2	-50.0%
Sullivan (Rural)	1	33.3%	2	50.0%	2	66.7%	1	25.0%	0	0.0%	-1	-100%	0	-	-1	-100%
Susquehanna (Rural-Mix)	6	14.0%	7	20.0%	9	19.1%	8	20.5%	6	13.0%	0	0.0%	3	-	-3	-50.0%
Tioga (Rural)	13	16.9%	16	25.8%	9	13.2%	9	11.8%	12	16.9%	-1	-7.7%	-3	-33.3%	2	50.0%
Union (Rural)	9	39.1%	5	25.0%	7	29.2%	6	27.3%	5	38.5%	-4	-44.4%	-2	-66.7%	-2	-33.3%
Venango (Rural)	13	20.0%	18	31.6%	16	28.6%	9	22.0%	5	13.2%	-8	-61.5%	-10	-83.3%	2	200%
Warren (Rural)	8	27.6%	9	37.5%	11	28.2%	3	11.5%	6	23.1%	-2	-25.0%	0	0.0%	-2	-28.6%
Washington (Urban-Mix)	44	14.0%	55	22.3%	50	22.9%	59	17.5%	28	8.6%	-16	-36.4%	-6	-35.3%	-10	-37.0%
Wayne (Rural-Mix)	14	46.7%	3	12.0%	6	23.1%	6	19.4%	13	30.2%	-1	-7.1%	1	100%	-2	-15.4%
Westmoreland (Urban-Mix)	44	19.0%	46	20.3%	50	19.3%	43	17.8%	45	19.8%	1	2.3%	14	51.9%	-13	-76.5%
Wyoming (Rural-Mix)	2	10.0%	2	11.1%	2	13.3%	0	0.0%	1	5.9%	-1	-50.0%	-1	-100%	0	0.0%
York (Urban-Mix)	71	20.1%	41	16.2%	32	11.9%	55	16.9%	53	14.5%	-18	-25.4%	-8	-16.0%	-10	-47.6%
Rural	213	21.5%	206	22.2%	187	20.4%	153	18.8%	150	19.4%	-63	-29.6%	-37	-27.2%	-26	-33.8%
Rural-Mix	378	19.9%	294	17.5%	314	19.4%	262	17.0%	224	15.0%	-154	-40.7%	-94	-40.5%	-60	-41.1%
Urban-Mix	497	19.9%	409	20.3%	387	18.8%	383	16.6%	360	15.6%	-137	-27.6%	-29	-10.2%	-108	-50.7%
Urban	2,630	23.5%	2,211	21.7%	1,891	20.8%	1,802	20.2%	1,823	20.0%	-807	-30.7%	-101	-9.2%	-706	-46.0%

Source: AFCARS longitudinal file produced by Hornby Zeller Associates for Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families.

Note: Latest placement setting was unknown for one record in 2013.

Key Questions/Decisions when Establishing Permanency Goals for Older Youth and when a Request is Made to Change the Goal to APPLA

Introduction and Purpose

The purpose of this form is to help the court gather the information needed to determine if the permanency plan presented for an older youth is acceptable and if the goal can remain the same or be changed to Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA). The obligation to provide permanency for youth in care is the same regardless of the age of the youth so all tools and guides included in the Pennsylvania Dependency Benchbook should be used. This tool is being introduced to address the reality that too often permanency for older youth is addressed differently than for younger children and sometimes a goal change to APPLA occurs without sufficient scrutiny.

APPLA should be used rarely and in exceptional situations. This tool will help the court think critically about how permanency can be provided to every youth and consider the services, supports, and technology available to assist with achieving permanency in cases thought to be challenging. If the court does rule out the preferred permanency goals, this tool proceeds to guide the inquiry to ensure the planned permanent living arrangement presented is acceptable to the court and provides permanency to youth.

The Structure of this Tool

To find the permanency goal can be changed to APPLA, the court should:

1. **Insure that the County Agency has Documented Compelling Reasons to Rule out the Preferred Permanency Goals:** According to the Pennsylvania Juvenile Act, “If and when the child will be placed in another living arrangement intended to be permanent in nature which is approved by the court in cases where the county agency has documented a compelling reason that it would not be best suited to the safety, protection and physical, mental and moral welfare of the child to be returned to the child's parent, guardian or custodian, to be placed for adoption, to be placed with a legal custodian or to be placed with a fit and willing relative (42 Pa.C.S. § 6351 (f.1)(5)). **Compelling reasons** are forceful and convincing facts and evidence that are case specific. Evidence that is not current or reflects generalizations (e.g. “He is too old for adoption.” “She does not get along in family settings.” “The youth is too disabled to be adopted.”) should not be accepted as compelling reasons. Because the legal obligation to provide permanency is ongoing, compelling reasons and reasonable efforts should be revisited at every Permanency Review Hearing.
2. **Ensure that the Permanency Goal Presented is Appropriate, Provides the Youth Permanency and Is In the Youth’s Best Interest:** The goal cannot just be changed to “APPLA.” The exact mix of placement, services, and relationships must be presented to convince the court that the specific plan presented will achieve the goal of providing the youth with permanency through a viable “another planned permanent living arrangement,” that is in the youth’s best interest.

Text boxes provided throughout the document list some considerations when determining whether sufficient efforts have been made to achieve one of the preferred permanency goals for the youth and to help the court determine if reasonable efforts have been made to finalize the permanency plan. The court may want to consider ordering some of the services or actions in the text boxes if it determines that more work should be done before changing the goal to APPLA or before accepting a plan as an acceptable APPLA. Terms marked by an * are defined in the glossary/resources section at the end of this document.

Part I: Determine and Rule Out the Preferred Permanency Goals

A. Reunification

1. Has the County Agency presented a compelling reason that it would not be best suited for the youth to be returned to the parent, guardian or custodian?
2. Is the compelling reasons presented current, convincing facts and evidence that are case specific? Yes___ No___

If no, this goal cannot be ruled out. This opportunity should be provided through efforts that can include suggestions in the accompanying text box.

3. Is the youth currently in contact with his or her biological parents/caregiver of origin and interested in reunification? Yes___ No___

If yes, has the agency been involved in facilitating or supporting that contact?

Yes ___ No___

4. Have the services listed in the text box been considered or provided to facilitate reunification?

Yes___ No___

If no, has reunification or the re-development of a relationship with the youth’s biological parents/caregiver of origin been considered and discussed with the youth?

Yes___ No___

If no, Is the court satisfied that the reasons for not doing reunification are reasonable?

Yes___ No___

If no: Opportunities for exploration of this option should be provided through efforts that may include suggestions in the accompanying text box.

Considerations/Potential Orders if it appears that reunification should be further explored before ruling it out as a permanency plan:

- Discussion with youth about reunification and their feelings about pursuing it, including time lines that may be more comfortable for the youth (counseling and/or Child Preparation* may also be of benefit).
- Discussion with biological parent(s)/caregiver(s) of origin to determine if parent(s)/caregiver(s) are in the position to be a placement resource with or without services.
- Discussion about supporting structured contact, including visitation.
- Discussion of any support services that the youth would need to support reconnecting with parent(s)/caregiver(s) of origin.
- Discussion of any supports the parent(s)/caregiver(s) of origin would need to assist with re-establishing the relationship.
- Discussion of whether Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)* or some other type of youth led conferencing should occur.
- Discussion of Family Finding* and engagement efforts.
- Consider referral for Child Profile*, Child Preparation* and/or Child Specific Recruitment (CSR)*.

If these activities have not been attempted, reasonable efforts may not have been made.

B. Adoption

1. Has the County Agency presented a compelling reason that it would not be best suited for the youth to be placed for Adoption?
2. Is the compelling reason presented current, convincing facts and evidence that is case specific?

Yes ___ No ___

If no, this goal cannot be ruled out. This opportunity should be provided through efforts that can include suggestions in the accompanying text box.

3. Has the youth been given an opportunity to consider adoption?

Yes ___ No ___

If no, this goal cannot be ruled out. This opportunity should be provided through efforts that can include suggestions in the accompanying text box.

If yes and the youth is interested in adoption, the plan should remain and proceed to the text box for suggested services that could be ordered to facilitate adoption.

If yes but the youth is NOT interested in adoption,

- a. Is the court satisfied that the youth understands that adoption can include an agreement for continued contact between the youth and the birth relative (Act 101 of 2010 agreements), options for adoption subsidy, provision of ETG* and IL services*?

Yes ___ No ___

If no, this goal should not be ruled out. Additional opportunities should be provided through efforts that may include suggestions in the accompanying text box.

Considerations/ Potential Orders if it appears that adoption should be further explored before ruling it out as a permanency goal:

- Have an adoption professional discuss with the youth what adoption is, including
 - Act 101 of 2010* agreements (relationships can continue)
 - Adoption subsidy extension until age 21 in certain cases
 - Provision of IL services* and ETG* in certain cases
- Work with SWAN* or the county child welfare agency to identify an older youth who was adopted and can speak to the youth about adoption.
- Consider referral for Child Profile*, Child Preparation* and/or CSR*.
- Discussion of family finding* and engagement efforts.
- Consider referral for initiating or continued counseling services to address any grief and loss issues that may be barriers to considering adoption.

If these activities have not been attempted, reasonable efforts may not have been made.

C. Legal Guardianship

(Permanent Legal Custodianships—PLC)

1. Has the County Agency presented a compelling reason that it would not be best suited for the youth to be placed with a Permanent Legal Custodian?

2. Is the compelling reason presented current, convincing facts and evidence that are case specific?

Yes___ No ___

If no, this goal cannot be ruled out. This opportunity should be provided through efforts that can include suggestions in the accompanying text box.

3. Has the youth been given an opportunity to consider finding a PLC arrangement?

Yes___ No___

If no, this goal cannot be ruled out. This opportunity should be provided through efforts that can include suggestions in the accompanying text box.

If yes, and the youth is interested in PLC, the plan may remain. Proceed to the text box for suggested services that could be ordered to facilitate a PLC arrangement.

If yes, but the youth IS NOT interested in PLC:

a. Is the court satisfied that the youth understands PLC and that it may include options for a subsidy, provision of ETG* and ILP services* and a court ordered visitation agreement?

Yes___ No___

If no, this goal should not be ruled out. Additional opportunities should be provided through efforts that may include suggestions in the accompanying text box.

b. What is the youth's reason for not wanting to find a PLC arrangement?

Considerations/Potential Orders if it appears that permanent legal custodianship should be further explored before ruling it out as a permanency goal:

- Have a permanency worker discuss with the youth what guardianship is, including
 - PLC subsidy extension until age 21 in certain cases
 - Provision of IL services* and ETG* in certain cases
 - Relationships with the biological family, including parents and siblings can continue
- Work with SWAN* or the county child welfare agency to identify an older youth who entered PLC and can speak to the youth about PLC.
- Consider referral for Child Profile*, Child Preparation* and/or CSR*.
- Discussion of family finding* and engagement efforts
- Refer for FGDM* or some other youth lead conferencing.
- Consider referral for initiating or continued counseling services to address any grief and loss issues that may be barriers to considering permanent legal custodianship.

If these activities have not been attempted, reasonable efforts may not have been made.

D. Placement with a Fit and Willing Relative

1. Has the County Agency presented a compelling reason that it would not be best suited for the youth to be placed with a Fit and Willing Relative?
2. Is the compelling reason presented current, convincing facts and evidence that are case specific?
Yes___ No___
3. When was the youth last asked to identify any relatives or kin? _____
(Date)
4. What Family Finding* and engagement efforts have been made to date?
5. How many relatives/kin were identified?
6. What efforts were made to connect with those relatives/kin?
7. Are any of the identified relatives/kin viable placement resources to explore with the youth?
Yes___ No___
8. If family/relative/kin has been identified and the youth has not yet been placed with that relative/kin, what are the barriers preventing or services and supports needed to facilitate the placement?
9. When was FGDM* or a youth led conference last attempted? _____
(Date)
10. When was a Child Profile*/Child Preparation*/Child Specific Recruitment* last completed?
Child Profile* _____
(Date)
Child Preparation* _____
(Date)
Child Specific Recruitment* _____
(Date)

Considerations/Potential Orders if it appears that placement with a fit and willing relative should be further explored before ruling it out as a permanency goal :

- Have a permanency worker discuss with the youth what placement with a relative would mean and what services he or she could continue to receive, including extended foster care.
- Work with SWAN* or the county child welfare agency to identify an older youth who is placed with relatives to provide peer support of discussion.
- Consider referral for Child Profile*, Child Preparation* and/or CSR*.
- Discussion of family finding* and engagement efforts.
- Discussion of whether FGDM* or some form of youth led planning should occur.
- Consider referral for initiating or continued counseling services to address any grief and loss issues that may be barriers to considering placement with a fit and willing relative.

If these activities have not been attempted, reasonable efforts may not have been made.

PROCEED TO PART II :

When the preferred permanency goals A—D have been ruled out to the court’s satisfaction.

PART II. Determine if APPLA (as presented) is Acceptable

1. Where is the youth living?
Yes___ No___
2. Is this a living arrangement expected to continue past the youth exiting the child welfare system?
Yes___ No___
3. Does the APPLA presented include the identification of at least one adult individual who the youth has a supportive relationship with that will continue past exiting the child welfare system?
Yes___ No___
If yes: has the relationship been formalized in any way, such as a Permanency Pact*?
Yes___ No___
4. Does the APPLA presented include a schedule for sibling visitation?
Yes___ No___
5. Are any identified special needs met by the APPLA?
Yes___ No___

Considerations/Potential Orders if there are concerns that the APPLA presented is not adequate:

- Consider referral for Child Profile*, Child Preparation* and/or CSR*.
- Consider referral for initiating or continued counseling services to address any grief and loss issues that may be barriers to considering the goal of APPLA.
- Consider whether a youth-led FGDM* or conference meeting should be held to assist in identifying and developing a support system.
- Consider whether a less restrictive placement is appropriate for youth
- Consider sibling/family/relative/kin visitation arrangements
- Discussion of family finding* and engagement efforts that may be of help (child welfare file review, interviews, etc.)
- Consider whether youth should be referred to a mentoring program or community activities such as participating in the Youth Advisory Board (YAB)*.

If these activities have not been attempted, reasonable efforts may not have been made.

Glossary/Resources:

Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN)

What is it?

SWAN is a partnership among the Department of Public Welfare (DPW), the Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange, public and private adoption agencies, organizations, advocates, judges, the legal community, and foster and adoptive parents. The network is administered by DPW through a prime contractor who assigns county requests for services to affiliate agencies for completion. As the mission statement reflects, the purpose is to build a better collaborative adoption and permanency process in Pennsylvania.

How can it be helpful to older youth?

The SWAN program serves children in the custody of county children and youth agencies. The design of the network is to support the work of county agencies in expediting permanency services. SWAN services can connect older youth with a caring adult who may become a permanent placement resource or, at least, a permanent connection to assist them as they prepare for the transition to independence. The available SWAN services are described below.

Child Preparation

What is it?

This SWAN unit of service is available to any child or older youth, in the legal custody of children and youth and in out of home placement, regardless of their permanency goal. Child Preparation is the intense preparation designed to assist youth in making the transition from foster care to a permanency goal (reunification, adoption, legal guardianship, kinship, placement with a fit and willing relative or APPLA) selected for them. Child Preparation includes the development of a written plan outlining the preparation activities conducted through a minimum of 10 meetings with the child over a six-month period of time. It requires highly skilled and qualified affiliate staff using techniques such as the life book, timelines, genograms, and support via individual intervention and/or preparation groups. It is used in hopes of preventing placement disruption, reducing the time to reach the permanency goal or finalization. A detailed description of this SWAN unit of service to include activities and required timelines for completion can be found in the SWAN bulletin. Referrals for this service must come from the county having legal custody of the child.

How can it be helpful to older youth?

This service can be very helpful in helping youth process their feelings, identify their wants/needs and smooth the transition from foster care to permanency. This service can be used for youth with a permanency goal of APPLA and for youth who are discharging from the child welfare system. The service can be delivered in an individual or group format. Creative case workers have used this unit of service to assist in the development of a comprehensive transition plan and to process some of the feelings of loss and anxiety that can come with leaving foster care and/or aging out.

Child Profile

What is it?

This SWAN unit of service is available to any child or older youth, in the legal custody of children and youth and in out of home placement, regardless of their permanency goal. A Child Profile is a comprehensive summary of the child's life history current functioning and special needs. The child profile assists in making decisions about selection of a resource family and provides a history the child may review with their resource, kinship, custodial or adoptive family when they reach the age of majority. It also provides a summary for older youth with the goal of APPLA so they can review the sequence of their time in out of home care and what happened to them when. A detailed description of the contents of this SWAN unit of service and the required timelines for completion can be found in the SWAN bulletin. Referrals for this service must come from the county having legal custody of the child.

How can it be helpful to older youth?

It can be helpful in clarifying the youth's needs and also can assist in identifying permanency resources that may not yet been considered, such as a former teacher, coach, or caregiver. A child profile can also help a youth who is aging out foster care understand his or her history and prepare for discharging and being on his or her own. Some youth have found it a helpful activity for beginning to address grief and loss issues.

Child Specific Recruitment (CSR)

What is it?

This SWAN unit of service is available to any child or older youth, in the legal custody of children and youth and in placement, regardless of their permanency goal. CSR is requested for children who have no identified family resource or permanency connections. To receive CSR, a referral must be made to SWAN for assignment to the selected affiliate agency. All children being referred for CSR must be registered with Pennsylvania Adoption Exchange (PAE) if their goal is adoption, otherwise the PAE registration is waived in order to assist the children and youth agency and older youth to locate permanent connections. It is expected that the affiliate agency will work closely with the child or older youth and the children and youth agency to locate and/or develop a family or person who can serve as a permanent connection or locate and/or develop an adoptive family for the child.

How can it be helpful to older youth?

CSR can be very effective for finding permanency resources for older youth because resources can be sought who are especially interested in caring for an older youth. While the goal of CSR is to find a permanency resource, that permanency resource can be a mentor or supportive adult who is committed to youth even if they do not become a placement resource.

Education and Training Grant (ETG)

What is it?

The ETG was established by the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP) to assist eligible current and former foster care youth in pursuing post secondary education or training. The ETG

is administered by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) and funded by the PA Department of Public Welfare. Eligible youth must have been adjudicated dependent at the age of 16 or older.

How can it be helpful to older youth?

The ETG can provide up to \$4,000 per year as of 2014 to eligible youth pursuing post secondary education or training. The eligible youth qualifies to receive the ETG until the age of 23 provided the youth received the ETG by the age of 21. ETG funds are awarded based on need. The award amount may be less than the available amount based on the total cost of attendance. The school of attendance determines the amount of the award based on the youth's financial need after application of any state or federal grant monies. Additional information and the ETG application can be found at <http://www.pheaa.org>.

Family finding

What is it?

Act 55 of 2013 amended the Public Welfare Code and took effect on September 9, 2013. The law requires that the child welfare agency conduct family finding for all youth accepted for service at least annually until the youth's involvement with the child welfare system is terminated, or family finding is discontinued by the Court or agency.

Family finding is defined as "the ongoing diligent efforts of the county agency, or its contracted providers, to search for and identify adult relatives and kin, and engage them in the county agency's social service planning and delivery of services, including gaining commitment from relatives and kin to support a child or guardian receiving county agency services."

How can it be useful for older youth?

Family finding can be useful to older youth in the same way as it can for younger children: locating permanency resources. Some older youth who have been in the system for many years may have not had the benefit of this fairly new practice that has been aided by advances in technology. As with several of the permanency services discussed in this glossary, even if family finding does not result in a placement resource, it may result in establishing a supportive relationship with a caring adult that can provide support to the youth as he or she transitions.

Act 101 agreements

What is it?

Act 101 of 2010 amended the Adoption Act, effective April 25, 2011, to provide the option for adoptive parents and birth relatives to enter into an enforceable voluntary agreement for ongoing communication or contact between the youth and the birth relative or between the adoptive parent and the birth relative.

How can it be useful for older youth?

The intent of Act 101 is to expedite and promote permanency through adoption of children in foster care. In order to be freed for adoption, the parental rights of the parent must be terminated. The U.S. General Accounting Office reports that a common reason parental rights are not terminated is resistance

on the part of an older child to agree to be adopted. The expectation that the youth would have to completely sever contact with the birth family in order to be adopted often causes fear and opposition to the process. Act 101 provisions for an enforceable voluntary agreement for ongoing communication between the youth and birth relative serve to help more youth in foster care find a permanent, adoptive family who would be open to allowing them contact with a birth relative.

Source: Office of Children, Youth and Families Bulletin #3350-11-01 Entitled Implementation of Act 101 of 2010

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)/Family Group Conferencing (FGC)

What is it?

FGDM and FGC are methods of bringing family members together in a family-focused, culturally-sensitive approach to develop a safety/reunification/alternate permanency plan for children who are in foster care or who are at risk for entering foster care or who are already in care and in danger of aging out without a permanent resource. FGDM/FGC involves meeting with immediate and extended family members, and any parties important in the youth's or families' lives. Unlike the traditional child welfare case conferencing, the family is "in charge" of the meeting and responsible for creating the recommended plan and identifying the attendees. (If this is a youth-led meeting, the youth would take the lead in identifying attendees and setting goals.) The children and youth caseworker's participation primarily involves the sharing of information/resources and acceptance of the family's plan (if safety concerns are adequately addressed). Unique to this practice is private family time that excludes any non-family members.

Upon receipt of a referral, a trained coordinator who is independent of the case brings together the family group, their friends and professional support personnel to create and carry out a plan. The conference is divided into three basic components. First, each participant has an opportunity to reflect on and state their impression of the family's strengths and concerns. Next, a meal is served for all participants in order to regroup and build relationships. Finally, the family and participants, with the exception of the service providers, come together to produce a plan showing the tasks to be accomplished, by whom and by when, to address the specific concerns. A copy of the finalized plan is distributed to all participants so everyone knows what is expected of them and the plan is supported by participants including agency personnel. A post-conference is provided to discuss implementation of the plan and monitor progress.

Source: Office of Children, Youth and Families Bulletin #3130-12-03 Entitled Concurrent Planning Policy and Implementation

How can it be helpful to older youth?

The FGDM/FGC approach can be an invaluable process for older youth. A youth-driven FGDM/FGC process can assist older youth with

- Identifying and engaging the community supports and resources available to them;
- Identifying and engaging their permanent connections
- Making decisions about who they feel the best out of home placement resource is for them
- Supporting the youth in self-determining and expressing who they feel the best permanent family resource is for them

- Supporting the youth in self-determining and expressing what they feel are the most appropriate/desired primary and concurrent permanency plan goals and objectives for them
- Developing a solid and sustainable Discharge/Transition Plan

Using the FGDM/FGC approach to transition planning can be very helpful in developing concrete elements of a transition plan that is personalized and includes specific options on housing, health insurance, education, continuing supports and employment. The FGDM conference can be individually tailored to empower youth to determine and set transition goals. This youth led conference can serve as a transition plan meeting whereby the youth determines who should be in the room to discuss options and the plan is youth driven. The conference can provide an opportunity for the youth to reconnect with family when appropriate, prepare the youth for a transitional phase to independent living, identify who is in the support system and explore a variety of resources in one place.

Independent Living Services (IL)

What is it?

IL services is a term of reference for the broad array of services and supports that youth receive to improve safety, permanency and well being outcomes and promote successful transition to adulthood. IL services are provided to youth involved with county children and youth agencies (CCYA) utilizing a combination of funding streams. In general, youth eligible to receive IL services must be younger than 21 years of age at the beginning of the State fiscal year and adjudicated dependent at the age of 16 or older. The following services may be offered through the CCYA IL Program (ILP): needs assessment and case planning; life skills training; prevention services; education services; support services; employment services; mentoring; housing; aftercare services and stipends. This list is not exhaustive and justification can generally be found for payment for items/services that contribute to an outcome of successful independent living. Youth can be referred for services by caseworkers, foster parents, the ILP Coordinator or staff. All youth in substitute care must be provided with IL services. Furthermore, CCYA is required to make aftercare services available to youth formerly in foster care. Aftercare services are defined as IL services available to any youth who exited substitute care on or after his or her 16th birthday and prior to his or her 21st birthday. Aftercare services may include the full range of services available to IL participants. The CCYA ILP Coordinator can provide a more accurate description of the IL services offered in a particular county.

Source: Office of Children, Youth and Families Bulletin #3130-11-04 Youth Independent Living Services Guidelines

How can it be useful for older youth?

IL services assist current and former foster care youth in acquiring the life skills, employment skills, education, housing and support services needed to achieve successful independent living. These services also provide a type of safety net for participating youth as they experiment with age-appropriate freedoms and attempts at independent living. Historically, youth discharged from care have been over-represented in the welfare system, homeless shelters, psychiatric hospitals and the penal system. Youth participation in IL services should result in a better outcome for the youth served. Although CCYA is mandated to provide IL services to all youth in substitute care, it is a voluntary service. For this reason it is especially important for youth to become engaged in IL services prior to discharge from care so that the youth will be familiar with available IL services and inclined to reach out to ILP personnel for IL aftercare program services to assist with living independently.

Permanency Pact

What is it?

This is a tool, developed by the youth led advocacy group Foster Club, designed to encourage life-long, kin-like connections between a youth and a supportive adult to formalize the connection. It is a written agreement/pact between the youth and the permanency resource that demonstrates their commitment to one another. Several states require the use of this form in APPLA cases to ensure that there is a permanency resource or adult connection in the youth's life.

The form can be down loaded at <http://www.fosterclub.com/transition/article/permanency-pact>

How can it be useful for older youth?

Documenting the existence of an important relationship is a helpful way to make it real and meaningful for a youth and the permanency resource. The tool gives the youth and the resources and those working with the youth a chance to talk about permanency and what it means for the youth. This tool is very youth friendly and provides youth an accessible way to discuss relationships and expectations about permanency that can be helpful the youth's team in general. As mentioned above, some jurisdictions require the use of this tool both to ensure youth engagement in the process and to document that a caring adult has formalized their commitment to the youth. Judges may want to consider using this tool as a way to discuss permanency with youth and to provide the court concrete assurances that a youth does have a permanency resource and that meaningful efforts are being made to support this relationship.

Post Permanency Services

What is it?

Post-Permanency services are offered through SWAN. Comprised of advocacy, support groups, and respite services, these services are used to support the child/youth and family after permanency has been achieved. All adoptive families are eligible for Post-Permanency Services; whether or not they adopted a child from the child welfare system. SWAN Post-Permanency services are also available to families who have provided permanency to children/youth who were in the legal custody of the county children and youth agency as Permanent Legal Custodians or Kinship Care providers. Families self-refer for Post-Permanency Services by calling the SWAN Helpline at 1-800-585-SWAN (7926).

Advocacy is a management function to ensure that families receive or get connected to appropriate services; it includes an initial assessment for all families receiving services as well as a case advocacy function.

Support groups are structured meetings to build a community of support for all parties – the adopted children, the birth children and the permanent adoptive/legal custodian or kinship families.

Respite or family support services allow the parents/guardians/caregivers and children involved to take a break from each other and then return to parenting our children with special needs. Think of it as a visit for the children to the home of an aunt or uncle or very good family friend while the parents/guardians/caregivers take a needed break to re-energize to provide on-going parenting.

How can it be useful to older youth?

They can be very helpful in ensuring a stable and smooth adjustment from the child welfare system to permanency. Post permanency services can provide the youth and the family the extra attention and support that can go a long way to ensuring a smooth transition and addressing issues that come up that without support could de-stabilize the permanency arrangement.

Youth Advisory Board

What is it?

The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB) is comprised of current and former substitute care youth ages 16-21. Youth leaders on the YAB educate, advocate, and form partnerships to create positive change in the substitute care system.

The YAB is funded by the PA Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families and is supported by the University of Pittsburgh, PA Child Welfare Resource Center. The YAB is divided into 6 regional Youth Advisory Boards. Each regional YAB is led by youth officers and at least one staff regional YAB coordinator.

How can the YAB be useful to youth in your court and to you?

Having peers educate and discuss issues related to being in the child welfare system and permanency with each other can be an important tool to ensuring that youth understand their permanency options and are able to provide input. The court can seek the assistance of the YAB in identifying youth leaders who may be able to speak to groups or individual youth in their counties on issues such as permanency. For example, a judge may want to ask the YAB to see if they can identify a YAB member who has been adopted to talk to a youth about what adoption is and what it can provide.

In addition, a judge may want to periodically request to join a regional or state YAB meeting to get a better sense of what older youth are doing and are interested in to better inform his or her work. Similarly, a judge may ask the YAB's assistance in gathering a group of youth together to ask for advice or tips on how to best work with older youth or to provide trainings to court and child welfare personnel.

To find out more about the YAB and regional contacts, use this link:

<http://www.independentlivingpa.org/about.htm>

Please note that all descriptions of SWAN units of services are from:

http://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/curriculum/207%20Family%20Finding/Day%201_2/Appndcs/APP03_SWANUnitsOfSrvcdmntns.pdf

TIPS FOR FACILITATING YOUTH-LED FGDM

Factors:

There are a few factors that the FGDM professionals may want to consider to determine how best to facilitate a youth's leadership role in FGDMs.

- What is the youth's emotional readiness?
- Is the youth willing to help lead the FGDM?
- What preparation might the youth need to feel that he or she can play a key role in the meeting?
 - Would writing down some key points and concerns be helpful?
 - Would practicing speaking or doing a mock meeting help them prepare?
 - Would talking to another youth who has been through FGDM be helpful?
- Have you presented various options for how the youth can participate? (See below for more tips).
- Have you assessed whether the youth feels safe and secure with the participant's in the room?

Tips to Facilitate Youth Leadership and Participation:

- Set the standard of the youth running the meeting
- See if a peer mentor could assist the youth throughout this process.
- Be creative with food & location.
- Help family to focus on the youth's future rather than past behaviors or history. This will enable youth to feel open enough to take control of their life.
- Create a checklist/agenda for the meeting that you can go over with the youth. They can volunteer or check off activities they would like to take more control of for their FGDM.

Tips to Help Youth take Ownership and Create a Comfortable Setting:

- Consider if there artwork, food, awards, dances, report cards, pictures, "favorites," "interest," college brochures youth is interested in, etc. that can be displayed during FGDM?
 - Does the youth wish to share their SWAN life book or child profile?
- Consider if music could be played in the background as family members and friends enter the room?

- Recommend that family members bring pictures or memorabilia of youth.
- Are there any family and cultural traditions that can be infused into this FGDM? What would the youth like to see the family do?
- Continue to ask youth if they are okay with moving onto the next section of the FGDM process.

Tips for Youth Involvement at Different Phases of FGDM

Here are some concrete examples of ways to involve the youth:

- Allow youth to lead **introductions**
 - This could be a round robin style introduction or an ice breaker activity that youth has chosen to do.
- Youth should be allowed to say in their words, their **bottom line concerns**. Having them write up key concerns or issues before the meeting can be good preparation.
- Use flip charts to track key decisions or resolutions made during the meeting. Let the youth relay the information from flip charts after each section.
- Ask the youth if there is anything else he or she wants to add as issues are discussed during the meeting if you believe the prompting will be helpful.
- Have the youth report out the plan to service providers at the **end of private family time**.

Tips for Making Youth-Led FGDMs Successful

Prior to an Older Youth-Led FGDM

- Consider this forum for all youth regardless of whether “family” is already identified.
- Allocate sufficient time to work with the youth to identify family or other important individuals to participate.
- Make sure the youth, family, caring adults, and other professionals invited understand the forum, and the youth’s central role in it.
- Spend adequate time preparing youth for family and the meeting:
 - Help the youth understand what permanency is and identify how he or she wants to achieve it.
 - Help the youth identify issues that he or she wants to address as well as those that may be difficult and require extra support.
 - Help the youth be prepared to speak and participate in the manner he or she chooses.
- Spend adequate time preparing family for the youth and the meeting.
 - Help them understand how the following things may impact the youth’s presentation and attitude:
 - adolescent development
 - trauma and placement history
 - Help them understand youth’s point of view.
 - Make sure they are prepared to let the youth take the lead.
- Take time to focus on issues, such as custody or visitation, prior to the meeting so this does not take over the center of the meeting.
- Prepare family members to be open-minded, and give them the tools to cope with stress during the meeting.
- Know the case:
 - Have a good sense of any worries or anxiety the youth has about the meeting itself or issues such as the transition from foster care.
 - Work out conflicts and misunderstandings in smaller meetings prior to formal FGDM.

During an Older Youth FGDM

- Be creative with food and location.
- Set the standard of the youth running the meeting.
- Plan for adequate time for the meeting and schedule it at times that accommodate the youth's schedule.
- Let the youth speak about how they feel without interruption.
- Understand the youth's perspective and their goals for the meeting.
- Support the youth with expressing their views and goals. This also means making sure that all of their concerns are addressed.
- Value all participants' goals and perspectives.
- Be prepared to accommodate and engage different personality types (ie. introvert vs. extrovert personality types).
- Be prepared to respond to participants getting upset, sad or frustrated and have a plan to constructively address these emotions.
- Make sure a concrete plan that describes what was resolved, agreed to and what the action steps that should have follow through is created. Include a few steps describing how parties will communicate with each other, i.e. phone calls, meetings, Facebook or texts.
- Keep the focus on the youth and their goals, plans, and wishes.
- Be prepared to quickly address diversions that could disrupt from the focus of the meeting.

After an Older Youth FGDM

- Check in with all participants:
 - Send copies of the plan to all parties that attended.
 - Check to see how participants are feeling about the meeting.
 - Check to see if participants are following through with any commitments or action steps that they agreed to.
- Make sure everyone sticks to deadlines.
- Schedule follow up meetings.
- Make sure the youth and participants have the support they need to follow-through with any actions steps they agreed to.
- Make follow up phone calls with all involved. Reiterate the plan and discuss their progress.
- Check in with the Youth with what went well, and what areas need to be improved with the FGDM process. This will aid in improving the process for all youth.