



2015 Pennsylvania State Roundtable Report



Transitional Youth Workgroup

Transitional Youth Workgroup Members

Co-Chairpersons

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

Vanessa Garrett Harley, Esquire
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 Human Services
Office of Children, Youth and Families

Jay English
Western Region Technical Assistant
Diakon / State Wide Adoption Network

Alexis Fisher
Youth Involvement Specialist / Former Foster Care Youth
System of Care Partnership

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

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

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

Marsha Landers, Esquire
Court Support Staff
Court of Common Pleas
Allegheny County

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

Michelle Nauman-Brown
Youth Advocate / Former Foster Care Youth
Family Design Resources, Inc.

Meghan O'Hare
Program Development Specialist
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

Gail Whitley
Independent Living Program Specialist
Northumberland County Children and Youth

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

Sandra Moore, MSW
Administrator

Elke Moyer
Administrative Associate/Graphic Designer

Jennifer A. Horn, MSW, MBA
Judicial Program Analyst

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 (SRT) 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 SRT 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 TYW 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 would help 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 its initial State Roundtable (SRT) report recommending Pennsylvania expand eligibility for re-entry into foster care of youth up to age 21. TYW members were thrilled when it was announced at the 2012 SRT 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 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 revised the Pennsylvania Dependency Benchbook.

The TYW (along with all other workgroups) was next asked to review the use of congregate care with older youth and provide feedback to the 2013 SRT. As a result of this review the TYW concluded Pennsylvania needed to take a comprehensive approach to “right sizing” the use of congregate care. This approach needed to ensure children and youth receive the highest level of treatment and care within the least restrictive setting. This would require:

- Thoughtful analysis of our beliefs related to permanency for older youth and our high reliance on APPLA as a permanency goal;
- New and better ways of supporting resource families;
- Expanded use of supervised independent living settings; and a
- Renewed focus on securing permanent families/connections for older youth.

In May 2013, following the annual State Roundtable meeting, the TYW assumed lead efforts related to congregate care, including recommendations from the Educational Success and Truancy Prevention Workgroup, the Visitation Workgroup and the Father Engagement Workgroup. The TYW proceeded to examine a comprehensive approach to “right sizing” congregate care. The TYW learned about the successful work done nationally, including current work occurring in Philadelphia County. The TYW also highlighted the processes and successes seen in Pennsylvania counties that had ten percent or less of children residing in congregate care (2013: Sullivan 0/0%, 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%).

After significant analysis and discussion, the TYW concluded that there is no singular driver or solution to “right sizing” congregate care. Instead there are a number of areas that required attention with the degree and type of change needed varying by local jurisdiction. Finally, the TYW recommended further analysis and work on this complex and critically important issue.

The TYW was also compelled to conclude, following significant and extensive analysis 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. Regardless of the youth’s age or court-ordered goals, the court and county agency should:

- Continue to assure a safe and permanent family relationship for all youth in foster care;
- Offer legal rights and social status of full family membership;
- Provide physical, emotional, social, cognitive and spiritual well-being;
- Assure lifelong connections to extended family, siblings, other significant adults; and

- Assure lifelong connections to family history, traditions, race, ethnic heritage, culture, religion and language.

The TYW also began to examine strategies which would “normalize” the foster care experience. As requested by the SRT, the TYW reviewed Florida’s “Quality Parenting for Children in Foster Care Act”, which defines a caregiver’s “reasonable and prudent parent standard”. This law allows caregivers to make decisions about the children in their home that allow for age appropriate freedoms and developmental opportunities. The TYW also became aware of the normalization work being done by the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB) which included development of a draft document outlining the need for rules to be consistent from placement to placement, including congregate care.

Finally, given the insight and advice provided by former foster care youth that are TYW members, the TYW explored strategies that would enhance the voice of youth in all phases of child welfare involvement. The TYW encouraged other SRT Workgroups to include youth as members of their workgroups; counties to have foster care youth participate in their local Children’s Roundtable meetings; Courts to engage youth in hearings and give youth a stronger voice in the courtroom; and county agencies to have youth actively involved in all levels of decision making such as using youth led Family Group Decision Making.

In May 2014 the State Roundtable approved the following recommendations:

- I. 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. Continue examining best practices on Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA).
- III. 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. Identify strategies that normalize the foster care experience and allow children and youth to be granted age appropriate freedoms, and present to the 2015 State Roundtable.

- V. Identify specific strategies aimed at enhancing the voice of youth in the legal process.

PROGRESS ON THE 2014 STATE ROUNDTABLE RECOMMENDATIONS:

During the past year, the TYW continued exploring issues related to the use of congregate care; APPLA, as a permanency goal; youth voice; and normalization of the foster care experience. In addition, the TYW partnered with the Juvenile Law Center in the development of two Resumption of Jurisdiction Informational Videos for youth. Specific TYW activities are highlighted below:

I. Continue exploring potential strategies for “right sizing” congregate care.

After extensive analysis and discussion, it became clear to TYW members that the creation of congregate care placement alternatives has become a priority of many states. These placement alternatives may assist in the “right sizing” of congregate care, which is a focus of many Pennsylvania counties and national foundations/advocacy efforts (Attachment A).

Pennsylvania’s Use of Congregate Care in 2014:

During 2014 the number of foster youth ages 13+ declined as did the use of congregate care (Attachment B). The recently released “State of Child Welfare 2015” Report (created by the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC) using AFCARS data) highlights a slow but steady reduction in the use of congregate care and an increase in children being placed in more family-type settings. Counties with less than 10% of their overall placements being congregate care increased from nine (9) counties in 2013 to fifteen (15) counties in 2014 (Attachments C & D). The data shows about 1 in 6 foster care placements now involve congregate care, compared to 1 in 4 placements (2010). This is a reduction from approximately 25% of foster youth living in congregate care (2010) to 17% living in congregate care settings (2014). The full report can be accessed at the following link: <http://www.porchlightproject.org/socw15.shtml>

While the above data is promising in terms of a reduced reliance on congregate care usage, it does little to explain why children with very similar issues are placed in congregate care and others are not. In an attempt to answer this question, the TYW examined available Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data for the period of 10/1/13 – 9/30/14. According to AFCARS data, the primary reason cited for a child being in a congregate care placement was “child’s behavior problem” (64%). “Parental drug abuse” was the second highest identified reason (31%) for congregate care placements.

Unfortunately there are significant structural flaws in the data collection process for this particular section of AFCARS data. While all reasons for a child's placement should be included in AFCARS reporting, only one reason is required of the system. As such, there are caseworkers who routinely enter all reasons and some who only enter one reason. This inconsistency in data entry can and, most likely does, impact the accuracy of placement reason statistics.

Additionally, this data still does not provide the specific rationale as to why some children within very broad categories (i.e. child behavior problems) are placed in family foster care and others in congregate care facilities. What are the specific issues, experiences, policies, beliefs/values or other items impact the use of one type of placement over another, in this instance congregate care? AFCARS data alone cannot provide the answer.

Clearly more analysis in much greater detail is needed to fully understand the issue. The TYW discussed this lack of clear, concise data and its impact on the development of potential strategies to address the issue. Without a clear understanding of how and why children are placed into congregate care settings, it is nearly impossible to suggest well-reasoned and effective "right sizing" alternatives. ***The TYW has provided a recommendation specific to this issue which is detailed in section a. below.***

a. In collaboration with other Judicial Program Analysts, 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.

In May 2014 the TYW recommended working with the Educational Success and Truancy Prevention Workgroup and the Visitation Workgroup to conduct focus groups with children and youth in congregate care facilities. As the TYW developed desired focus group discussion outcomes it became evident that the focus groups, while interesting, would most likely only serve to validate what is already known. Children and youth placed in congregate care settings have poorer outcomes when compared to children placed in settings that are less restrictive and more family like. Rather than validating information already known, the TYW decided to focus efforts on gathering information not yet known about why and how youth are placed in these restrictive placements.

Again, after extensive discussion, TYW members concluded that data currently available does not provide enough specificity to fully understand the issue or make recommendations regarding solutions or strategies. Instead, TYW members believe much more information needs to be gathered and that the information needs to be child and county/court specific.

As such, the TYW is recommending an “in-depth analysis” of congregate care youth cases in 5-7 volunteer counties. This “in-depth analysis” would include a review of the case file for each youth placed in congregate care within the identified county to elicit pre-determined factors/information yet to be determined. This analysis would provide incredibly useful information to the volunteer counties but more importantly provide a process by which other like-sized counties could conduct similar reviews of their own congregate care population. The analysis would also enhance our overall understanding regarding how and why congregate care is used. Once the issue is clearly understood, alternative strategies to address concerns and challenges can be developed.

II. Continue examining best practices on Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA).

In May 2014, SRT members agreed with the TYW’s assessment that the use of APPLA should be significantly minimized. The SRT charged the TYW with the task of developing strategies that could be helpful in this endeavor.

To that end, the TYW created a tool entitled, “Key Questions / Decisions when Establishing Permanency Goals for Older Youth and when a Request is Made to Change the Goal to APPLA.” This tool was designed to promote an extensive 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. Ironically, as the TYW was developing the tool, the issue of APPLA overuse was simultaneously being discussed at the federal level.

In September 2014, House Resolution (HR) 4980, Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (P.L. 113-183) was passed by Congress. The Act specifically addresses the use of APPLA as a primary and concurrent permanency goal, prohibiting its use for any child less than 16 years of age and initiating new requirements for those youth over age 16 with the goal. The Act enumerates specific findings which must be documented for older youth when given an APPLA goal. This provision of the Act will become effective September 1, 2015, unless an extension is requested and granted to January 1, 2016.

In response to HR 4980, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services’ Office of Children, Youth and Families (DHS/OCYF) convened a workgroup with very broad representation (which includes TYW members) to develop a HR 4980 Implementation Plan. The TYW plans to share the draft tool, discussed above, with the DHS/OCYF Workgroup for input. Based upon feedback received, the tool will be revised and provided to the 2016 SRT for consideration/approval.

Once approved, the document will be disseminated to child welfare professionals, attorneys, hearing masters and judges to aid in securing meaningful permanency for older youth.

III. 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.

The TYW was very excited to receive SRT support for this recommendation. To accomplish this task the TYW partnered with the Juvenile Law Center, which had obtained a grant from the Skadden Law Firm to create just such a video. In addition, a TYW sub-committee was created. Sub-committee members provided guidance for the video and ongoing feedback to the full TYW regarding production developments.

Through this collaboration two videos were created. Both videos seek to educate current and former foster youth regarding options available under Act 91. This first video focuses on remaining in care beyond a youth's 18th birthday. The video features youth who highlight the pros and cons of staying in care. The video also highlights aftercare services and benefits for which youth are eligible, such as health insurance, aftercare IL services, and the Chafee Education and Training Grant. The second video describes the Resumption of Jurisdiction provision of Act 91. In this short video, youth describe the provision and how it may be helpful.

The TYW has provided a recommendation regarding the distribution and use of these videos in the final section of this report.

Both videos can be accessed at the following links:

Act 91 Extension of Care Video: <http://youtu.be/jFbUTZVf5XQ>

Act 91 Resumption of Jurisdiction Video: <http://youtu.be/uadTBMeo8Es>

IV. Identify strategies that normalize the foster care experience and allow children and youth to be granted age appropriate freedoms, and present to the 2015 State Roundtable.

The TYW began its examination of “normalization” with the realization that being placed in foster care is not the “normal” experience of most children in this

country. As such, the mere act of being placed in the foster care system, in and of itself, impacts the ability for children and youth to live a “normal” childhood.

Even so, TYW members believe much can be done to help foster youth have a “more normal” life with the same types of activities and opportunities as those experienced by non-foster care youth. Indeed youth need developmentally appropriate opportunities (i.e. being involved in extracurricular activities, attending school dances or field trips, learning how to drive or simply going to a sleepover at a friend’s house) to develop healthy decision-making and social skills.

With this understanding the TYW reviewed the experiences of other jurisdictions that had addressed the issue, including Florida’s “Let Kids Be Kids” law. This law provides caregivers the authority to make decisions regarding age appropriate freedoms and developmental opportunities for children placed in their home. Additional states reviewed by the TYW included California, Utah and Washington, all of which passed legislation establishing prudent parent standards.

Finally, TYW members reviewed the normalcy provisions of HR 4980 (Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act). Specific provisions of the Act that support normalcy for foster youth include:

- ❖ Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard:
 - Shall use when determining whether to allow a child in foster care under the responsibility of the State to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities.
 - Including sports, field trips, and overnight activities lasting 1 or more days and to decisions involving the signing of permission slips and arranging transportation for the child to and from extracurricular, enrichment , and social activities.

- ❖ Normalcy for Children in Child Care Institutions:
 - Shall permit use of the reasonable and prudent parenting standard.
 - Training in how to use and apply the reasonable and prudent parent standard in the same manner as prospective foster parents are provided the training.

- ❖ Supporting Participation in Age-Appropriate Activities:
 - To ensure children who are likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age have regular, ongoing opportunities to engage in age or developmentally-appropriate activities.

- ❖ Demonstration of Support for Engaging in Age or Developmentally-Appropriate Activities and Social Events:
 - At each permanency review hearing held with respect to the child, the State agency shall document the steps the State agency is taking to ensure that –
 - The child’s foster family home or child care institution is following the reasonable and prudent parent standard; and
 - The child has regular, ongoing activities to engage in age or developmentally appropriate activities (including by consulting the child in an age-appropriate manner about the opportunities of the child to participate in activities).

Recognizing HR 4980 and its provisions would present a significant change in Pennsylvania practice, the TYW coordinated a panel presentation for the 2014 Children’s Roundtable Summit. Panel members included three foster care alumni, a Transitional Living Aftercare Caseworker, a Resource Parent and an Agency Solicitor. Panel members discussed the connection between well-being and normalizing the foster care experience.

To emphasize the subtle and sometimes not so subtle ways in which foster youth are routinely denied normal experiences, the TYW partnered with students from the Selinsgrove Area High School’s Tolerance Troupe and Pittsburg-based Youth Advocate Program, creating a video that depicts real life experiences of foster youth and lost opportunities. Displayed in two three-minute vignettes, the video provides a poignant depiction of the struggles and lost opportunities that many foster care youth experience.

TYW members strongly recommend the use of this short but powerful video with agency and legal staff as well as local Children’s Roundtables. TYW members believe use of the video could foster local conversation to begin or enhance policies and practices that support rather than hinder opportunities for foster youth. The video can be accessed at the following link:
<http://www.ocfcpacourts.us/childrens-roundtable-initiative/state-roundtable-workgroups/transitional-youth-workgroup>

In addition to the video, panel members were asked the following questions:

1. How did being placed in the foster care system impact normalcy for you?
2. How does a normalcy decision play out in your professional role?
3. Why should we seek normalcy for foster care youth in Pennsylvania?
(Why is normalcy important?)

The purpose of the panel presentation was to generate conversation regarding age appropriate opportunities and experiences for foster youth. Summit participants were asked to evaluate the extent to which their local policies and practices encourage or discourage foster care youth opportunities to pursue their

interest, gain responsibilities, build independence for their future, and just be normal.

The TYW believes, while powerful and effective, the panel presentation and video are only first steps in the process of increasing understanding, challenging long-held beliefs, confronting real and perceived concerns, and ultimately providing age appropriate opportunities for foster youth. As discussed by most panel members, critical to this issue is the need to have youth physically present in court.

This was underscored by the panel moderator, Honorable Michael Sholley (Court of Common Pleas of Union/Snyder Counties), who noted,

“A judge can’t learn anything from an empty chair. Youth need to be in court and we need to ask them what they need. Each youth on the panel likely had well-intentioned caseworkers and legal representatives (some had many), but each youth described years of missed opportunities, the impacts of which have followed them into their adult lives. There are many issues beyond our control; this is not one of them. The system can and simply must support age appropriate opportunities for youth, who through no fault of their own, are in the foster care system.”

Given this understanding and the passage of HR 4980, ***the TYW is recommending continued development of strategies aimed at assisting judicial officers, attorneys, caseworkers and others to identify situations in which foster youth are denied the opportunity to engage in age appropriate activities, understand the impact this has on normal development, and eliminate barriers to those opportunities.*** If approved, the TYW will utilize the provisions of HR 4980 to guide its discussions and bring additional recommendations to the 2016 SRT.

VI. Identify specific strategies aimed at enhancing the voice of youth in the legal process.

Court is one of the key forums where important decisions are made about the life and future of a dependent youth. Because of its authority and its ability to make significant decisions in the lives of older youth, the court occupies a unique position. Not only does the law require that youth participate in their court reviews, but better decisions are made possible when youth are involved and the court receives the fullest and most accurate information.

While youth engagement in court and case planning is not only important but also required through statute and procedural rules, county led focus groups and interviews with individual youth have shown that youth often do not feel engaged in the court process. Barriers to participation come from multiple sources. For

example, some youth feel their voices will not be heard or that they will be punished for speaking the truth. Other barriers include busy court dockets and lack of training among judges, lawyers and child welfare professionals regarding how to effectively engage youth. Finally, some youth have not been given the skills and knowledge that would support meaningful participation.

In an effort to address these and other concerns, counties and courts have implemented a number of local strategies, including:

- Focused preparation of the youth for court by the caseworker, GAL, and/or caretaker;
- Provision of the child welfare agency's recommendations before the hearing, with time for the youth to highlight areas which they would like to discuss with their attorney or guardian ad litem prior to the hearing;
- Provision of a document that describes the rights of the youth with respect to education, health, visitation, and court participation, the right to be provided with the documents specified in law, and the right to stay safe and avoid exploitation;
- Inclusion of the GAL and Parent Attorney Practice Standards into service contracts; and
- Implementation of routine mechanisms for youth feedback regarding the court process including focus groups and youth surveys.

In addition, some strategies used by Pennsylvania Judges and Hearing Masters to encourage meaningful youth involvement include:

- Beginning each permanency review hearing with an opportunity for the youth to speak first;
- Asking youth directly what they need;
- Asking if the youth has met with their attorney prior to the hearing;
- Taking a brief recess if the youth needs additional time to consult with his/her attorney;
- In chambers discussion with youth (with counsel);
- Coming off the bench to sit with the youth for the discussion of needs; and
- Keeping notes regarding a youth's interest and referencing such at future review hearings;

In addition to the above Pennsylvania activities, many courts across the country have addressed the issue of youth voice in the court process. One tool that TYW members believe may help is a short brochure (created in Washington State) which explains the court process in a comprehensive yet easy-to-understand manner (Attachment E). ***The TYW recommends such a document be developed for Pennsylvania youth.***

While the above is clearly not an all-inclusive list, the activities were selected by the TYW because they are activities that could have great benefit but require little time, no additional money and can be easily implemented. The TYW offers the above examples in an effort to enhance good practice already occurring in many jurisdictions.

Additional Work Beyond 2014 SRT Charge

Youth Survey:

In addition to the 2014 SRT approved recommendations, the TYW believed more extensive feedback from youth was needed as work was being done on their behalf. Specifically, the TYW wanted to hear directly from youth regarding their court experience and what youth believe would best prepare them to participate in their court hearings.

The TYW worked with Dr. Clark Peters, University of Missouri and expert in the field of survey development, to create a Pennsylvania youth survey. A TYW subcommittee was formed to work with Dr. Peters. The subcommittee reviewed existing surveys and developed a Pennsylvania specific survey tool. TYW members then tested the survey with current foster youth. Feedback from youth in the test counties resulted in revisions. The revised survey is included for SRT review and approval (Attachment F). ***If approved, a method for utilization will be developed, the tool will be implemented and survey results will be provided with recommendations, as needed, to the 2016 SRT.***

The TYW strongly believes implementation of a Pennsylvania specific survey would provide useful information to local courts. The Workgroup also believes information gained could greatly inform SRT efforts. TYW members believe the information could gather baseline data to measure the impact of strategies aimed at enhancing youth voice and meaningful youth experiences in the court process. Finally, the TYW believes this method of gathering youth feedback (given the challenges of focus groups and committee representation) would provide an ongoing process for youth voice in overall system reform efforts.

Resumption of Jurisdiction Data Report:

Finally, work continued with the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts' Information Technology Department regarding previous Resumption of Jurisdiction data requests. As a result, counties will soon be able to generate Common Pleas Case Management System (CPCMS) reports specific to dependent children age 18 and older, which will include Resumption of Jurisdiction information.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

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

- I. Implementation of an in-depth analysis process for 5-7 volunteer counties' congregate care youth cases.
- II. Finalization and implementation of youth court survey to identify potential strengths/concerns regarding youth involvement in the court process and possible solutions to identified concerns.
- III. Creation of a Youth Court Information Guide/Brochure for review and consideration by the 2016 SRT.
- IV. Finalization of the draft APPLA Tool, "Key Questions / Decisions when Establishing Permanency Goals for Older Youth and when a Request is Made to Change the Goal to APPLA." which will incorporate new provisions of HR 4980 with presentation to 2016 SRT.
- V. Distribution of the youth experience video used at the 2015 Children's Summit with accompanying discussion guide (to be developed).
- VI. Development of strategies aimed at assisting judicial officers, attorneys, caseworkers and others identify situations in which foster youth are denied the opportunity to engage in age appropriate activities, understand the impact this has on normal development, and eliminate barriers to those opportunities and maximize the provisions of HR 4980.

Key Strategies for Rightsizing Congregate Care being used Nationally - Attachment A

States	Key Strategies for Rightsizing Congregate Care
California	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invested existing resources into the most effective strategies through the Child Welfare Demonstration Project. • Four counties partnered with provider agencies to create a Residentially Based Services model and a new payment system linked to performance. • Combined short-term residential intervention with an extended period of intensive home and community based services being provided by the same team of professionals.
Connecticut	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kinship Process Mapping helped to identify rules, regulations and practices that were barriers to placing children with family members. • Implemented modified versions of Team Decision Making to be used for cases involving emergency placement, prior to the proposed placement, and for children ages 12 and under already in congregate care to be moved to a more family-like setting. • Reviewed all children in out-of-state placements to determine whether the child could return to Connecticut or back home.
Florida	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passed SB 940 that made numerous changes to statutes related to residential group home placements for the child welfare system. • Bill required the child welfare system to develop a continuum of care for children in out of home care that would address their placement and service needs. • Bill also required that placement of children of certain ages in residential group home settings use a shift-care model, be subject to certain restrictions and requires periodic review of those placements.
Louisiana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changed front line practice to involve youth identifying possible placement resources. • Expanded community and family resources to support and ensure that the needs of children leaving congregate care would be met. • Strengthened their foster home development strategy to recruit more foster families, streamline licensure, and improve retention rates among family-based care providers.
Maine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placement of youth into congregate care requires extensive review by multiple child welfare professionals who must give authorization prior to placement. • Worked with providers to prepare for shift from congregate

Key Strategies for Rightsizing Congregate Care being used Nationally - Attachment A

	<p>care to community-based services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinvested dollars that were saved from group home placement into home based services while offering transition funds to group placement providers.
Maryland (Baltimore City)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implemented the Place Matters Initiative, which promotes safety, strengthening families, permanency and community based services. • Practice is now driven by data. • Shifted resources from the back-end to front-end of services.
Tennessee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved recruitment and retention efforts by providing training and support to enhance their use of Therapeutic Foster Care and specialized foster homes for teenagers. • Created Practice Model Standards pertaining to the use of congregate care. • Worked with providers to implement a Continuum model and performance based contracting.
New York (New York City)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminated the weakest group home providers by evaluating the quality of each congregate care provider based on placement stability and permanency outcomes of children in care. • Designed an innovative case review process to find family placements for youth. • Engaged youth in the planning process.
Virginia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Created the Council on Reform to serve as a steering committee for improving statewide efforts on child welfare. • Provided information and technical assistance including a performance measurement system called, “Safe Measures” to easily monitor progress using existing data. • Implemented Team Decision Making for all children being considered for a step down from congregate care.

Sources:

“Back on Track: Transforming Virginia’s Child Welfare System” <http://www.aecf.org/resources/back-on-track/>

“Fixing a Broken System: Transforming Maine’s Child Welfare System” <http://www.aecf.org/resources/fixing-a-broken-system/>

“Implementing Group Care Reform in California: The RBS Case Study” [RBS California Case Study Final_March 2015.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/resources/rbs-california-case-study-final-march-2015.pdf)

“Place Matters – Nothing Matters More to a Child than Home” http://www.dhr.state.md.us/blog/?page_id=7864

“Rightsizing Congregate Care” <http://www.aecf.org/resources/rightsizing-congregate-care/>

“The Connecticut Turnaround” <http://www.aecf.org/resources/the-connecticut-turnaround/>

The Florida Senate Bill Analysis and Fiscal Implications <http://www.flsenate.gov/Session/Bill/2015/0940/Analyses/2015s0940.pre.cf.PDF>

“What Works in Child Welfare Reform: Reducing Reliance on Congregate Care in Tennessee” http://www.childrensrights.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/2011-07-25_what_works_reducing_reliance_on_congregate_care_in_tn_final-report.pdf

Children in Foster Care on September 30th in Pennsylvania

Indicator	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	% Change 2010-2014
Children in Foster Care	14,826	13,701	13,566	13,697	14,162	-4.5%
Number of months children have been in care	14.2	13.6	13.0	13.1	12.6	-11.6%
Youth (age 13+)	45.3%	44.4%	41.9%	40.7%	37.8%	-16.5%
Congregate Care	21%	20.3%	19.2%	18.7%	17.3%	-17.7%
▶ Group Home	10.6%	10.7%	11.0%	10.8%	10.6%	0.7%
▶ Institution	10.5%	9.5%	8.2%	7.8%	6.7%	-36.3%

Source: Pennsylvania Partnership for Children using AFCARS data

http://www.porchlightproject.org/reports/socw15/2015_SOCW_Pennsylvania.pdf

**Total Use of Congregate Care as of September 30, 2014
(Latest Placement in Group Homes or Institutions)**

<i>County</i>	<i>Number of Children in Foster Care</i>	<i>Percentage of Children Residing in Congregate Care</i>
Union	15	0%
Sullivan	1	0%
Lackawanna	236	2.5%
Greene	62	3.2%
Clarion	28	3.6%
Wyoming	26	3.8%
Butler	101	6.9%
Northumberland	166	7.8%
Beaver	47	8.5%
Washington	286	8.7%
Monroe	196	9.2%
Huntingdon	40	10.0%
Adams	49	10.2%
Columbia	78	10.3%
Clinton	28	10.7%
Pennsylvania	14,162	17.3%

Source: Pennsylvania Partnership for Children using AFCARS data
<http://www.porchlightproject.org/socw15.shtml>

Important Numbers

My Family

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE #: _____

My Social Worker

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE #: _____

My CASA or GAL

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE #: _____

My Lawyer

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE #: _____

Your Rights

You have the right to be notified of the date and time of your court hearings.

You have the right to be at your court hearings and to talk about your case plan.

You have the right to speak with the judge about your case plan.

This brochure is a collaborative publication of the Washington Administrative Office of the Courts and DSHS Children's Administration. To obtain additional copies, go to: www.courts.wa.gov/newsinfo/publication/ and scroll to "Foster Youth Court Hearing Brochure"



WASHINGTON
COURTS



Washington State
Department of Social
& Health Services

CA Children's Administration

Foster Youth and Court Hearings

What do I need to know?
Is it even worth it to go?



Do I have to show up for my court hearings?

It all depends on the kind of hearing.

If it is a hearing about where you will live or services you might receive, you are not REQUIRED to go but it's probably a good idea. If it is a court hearing about an offense that you were involved in, you MUST attend the hearing.

If I don't have to go then why bother?

People at your court hearings are making decisions about YOUR life. You have a right to know what is being said and to speak up for yourself. The judge and others may want to know...

- Do you like where you live? If not, what could be better?
- Are you visiting with siblings and how are the visits going?
- Are you visiting with your parent(s) or legal guardian(s) and how are those visits going?
- Do you want to go home and if so, do you know what must be done to keep you safe?
- What do you think should happen in your case?
- Do you have a copy of your Individual Service and Safety Plan (ISSP) and were you notified of your next court hearing?

Things I'd like to know

? I don't want to go to court alone. Who will go with me or take me to court?

A Ask your caregiver, social worker, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) or lawyer to arrange transportation and go with you to court.

? I would feel better just talking with the judge about my case, can I do that?

A Yes, before your court date, talk with the people involved with your case to arrange a meeting with the judge.

? How do I ask for a lawyer if I want one?

A If you are at least 12-years-old, you can ask your social worker, CASA, GAL or the judge directly to help you get a lawyer to represent you in court.

It's your life and you have a say in the decisions that are made. Speak up and be heard!

? I don't want to go to court but I want the court and judge to hear what I have to say about my case plan. What else can I do to let the court know my views?

A You can write a letter and ask your social worker, CASA, GAL or lawyer to deliver it to the court. Or, you can ask for the address and mail your letter to the court where it will be put in the official court record.



Pennsylvania Youth Hearing Participation Survey

This survey asks about your experiences in court hearings. The purpose of this survey is to help courts and child welfare agencies learn how to do a better job of helping young people in foster care.

The survey is voluntary. You do not have to fill it out if you do not want to. The survey does not ask for your name. If you choose to participate, your responses will be completely anonymous and confidential.

It will take about 15 minutes to finish. If you have questions about the survey, please contact Jennifer Horn of the Administrative Office of the Pennsylvania Courts at 717.231.3300, extension 3825.

By taking this survey, you are agreeing to share your responses in order to better serve young people in foster care.

Directions: The questions in this survey do not have right or wrong answers. For multiple choice questions, mark the answer that most accurately reflects your experience.

This first section asks you about your experiences attending court hearings.

1. How often have you attended court hearings while in foster care?

I have always or almost always attended court hearings.

I have sometimes attended court hearings.

I have rarely attended court hearings.

I have never attended court hearings.

2. Who told you about the last hearing you heard about? (Check all that apply.)

My lawyer/GAL/attorney/advocate/guardian ad litem

My county child welfare worker

- My private provider social worker
- My foster parent
- My parent
- The staff at my group home or placement
- My Independent Living Worker (IL)
- I got a notice of my hearing mailed directly to me
- Other

3. Did you want to attend your court hearings in the last year (whether you did or did not)?

Yes, I wanted to attend my hearings

No, I did not want to attend my hearings

I wanted to attend at least one, but not all my hearings

4. What are the reasons that make you want to avoid some (or all) hearings?
(Check all that apply).

- I do not want to miss school
- I do not want to miss work
- I have trouble getting transportation
- Hearings are boring
- No one listens to me when I am there
- I have to wait for too long **for my case to be heard**
- I do not like having to see my parents or other relatives
- I do not like having to talk about the past
- I might get in trouble at court
- I trust the people representing me in court and don't feel I need to attend
- Other

5. Did you attend any court hearings in the last year?

Yes

No

6. Why didn't you attend the hearing(s) that you wanted to attend? (Check all that apply.)

I couldn't get transportation.

I found out too late to go.

I was told that I wasn't allowed to go by (identify person)

Others

7. When you attended court hearings . . .

Never/ Rarely/ Sometimes/ Often/ All the Time

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I understood what took place

I got to speak my mind

I felt that people listened to me

What I said made a difference in what the court did

The next questions are about your lawyer/GAL.

Definition: In Pennsylvania, you have a right to be represented by a lawyer. He or she is appointed by the court to represent you. In your county, you may call this person a lawyer, attorney, GAL, Guardian ad litem, or child advocate. Below, we call this person lawyer/GAL.

8. Do you have a lawyer/GAL?

Yes

No

Don't know

9. Do you have the contact information of your lawyer/GAL so that you can call, text or e-mail him or her?

Yes

No

10. Please move the bar to respond to each question, answering about this last year.

(There is a bar that can be moved to select their choice on the scale)

Never /Rarely/ Sometimes/ Often/ All the Time

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I feel comfortable talking to my lawyer/GAL

My lawyer/GAL listens to me

My lawyer/GAL makes sure my thoughts and opinions are heard in court

My lawyer/GAL has made things better for me

My lawyer/GAL talks to me using my name

My lawyer/GAL helped me prepare for hearings I attended.

11. In the last year, how many times have you had contact with your lawyer/GAL?

Once a month

Every 2 to 3 months

2 times a year

Once a year

I was not in contact with my lawyer/GAL in the last year.

12. How do you connect with your lawyer/GAL? (Check all that apply.)

On the phone

In my placement

At school

Some place in the community, like a restaurant or park

- In his or her office
- In or near the court house right before my hearing
- Other

13. Overall, my feeling for my lawyer/GAL is . . .

(There will be a smiley face where the youth can move the image to a frown or smile – scale 0-4.)



The next few questions once again ask about hearings you may have had in the past year.

14. For hearings this year, did anyone explain to you what happened in your hearing(s) afterward?

Yes

No

I don't recall

15. Who explained to you what happened? (Check all that apply.)

My lawyer/GAL

My county child welfare worker

My private provider social worker

My foster parent

My parent

The staff at my group home or placement

My Independent Living Worker (IL)

Other

16. In the last year, did you have any trouble getting transportation to any of your court hearings?

Yes

No

Sometimes

The next questions are about your experiences with judges in your case.

Note: When you attend court, while usually a judge hears your case, a master or hearing officer may also hear your case. In the following questions, we use the term "judge" for all these people: judge, master, and hearing officer.

17. Have you known the name of the judge or judges who have presided over your case in court?

Yes

No

18. The following questions about the judge that you had in court in the past year.

Never/ Rarely/ Sometimes/ Often/ All of the Time

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I have felt comfortable talking to my judge

My judge listened to me

My judge makes sure my thoughts and opinions are heard in court

My judge made things better in my case

19. In the future, how would you like to participate in your court hearings? (Check all that apply.)

I would like to speak directly to the judge or master in the court room

I would like to speak to the judge in his or her office

I would like to write a letter to the judge

I would like to fill out a form that tells the judge how I am doing

I would like my lawyer/GAL to ask me questions that I have practiced with him or her.

I would like my lawyer to say what I think and what I want after talking to me

I would like to participate by phone

I would like to participate by Skype

Other

20. Have you ever asked for a hearing to be scheduled?

Yes

No

21. When you asked for a court hearing, did a court hearing get scheduled?

Never/ Rarely/ Sometimes/ Often/ All of the Time

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Hearing(s) scheduled

The next questions are about your experiences with any Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) in your case.

Note: A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) is a volunteer appointed by a judge. Not all Pennsylvania counties have CASA programs, and not all youth have a CASA. A CASA tells the judge what he or she thinks is in your best interests, and if you are getting what you need.

22. Do you have a CASA now, or had one in the past year?

Yes

No

Don't know

23. Do you have the contact information of your CASA so that you can call, text or e-mail him or her?

Yes

No

24. Please move the bar to respond to each question, answering about this last year.

(There is a bar that can be moved to select their choice on the scale.)

Never/ Rarely/ Sometimes/ Often/ All the Time

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

I feel comfortable talking to my CASA

My CASA listens to me

My CASA makes sure my thoughts and opinions are heard in court

My CASA has made things better for me

My CASA talks to me using my name

My CASA helped me prepare for hearings I attended.

25. Is there anything else you would like to share that was not asked in this survey?

Demographics

26. What is your age?

14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22

27. What is your gender?

Male

Female

FTM (female to male)

MTF (male to female)

Please specify

Prefer not to say

28. What is your race?

White/Caucasian

African American

Hispanic

Asian

Native American

Pacific Islander

Other

Prefer not to say

29. In which county did you have your court hearings?

Adams Allegheny Armstrong Beaver Bedford Berks Blair Bradford Bucks Butler Cambria Cameron Carbon Centre Chester Clarion Clearfield Clinton Columbia Crawford Cumberland Dauphin Delaware Elk Erie Fayette Forest Franklin Fulton Greene Huntingdon Indiana Jefferson Juniata Lackawanna Lancaster Lawrence Lebanon Lehigh Luzerne Lycoming McKean Mercer Mifflin Monroe Montgomery Montour Northampton Northumberland Perry Philadelphia Pike Potter Schuylkill Snyder Somerset Sullivan Susquehanna Tioga Union Venango Warren Washington Wayne Westmoreland Wyoming York

30. Are you still in placement?

Note: Answer yes if you are in a family foster home, kinship foster home, group home, residential treatment center, transitional living placement, supervised living placement, or with your parents under court supervision.

Yes

No

Not sure

31. Where are you currently living?

Family foster home

Kinship care

Group home

Residential treatment center

Transitional living placement

- Supervised Independent Living Placement
- In a dorm of campus housing
- With my parent(s)
- Other

32. What was your last placement?

- Family foster home
- Kinship care
- Group home
- Residential treatment center
- Transitional living placement
- Supervised Independent Living Placement
- In a dorm of campus housing
- With my parent(s)
- Other

Thank you very much for your time. Your responses will help improve the way Pennsylvania provides support for young people in care. If you have any questions about this survey, please contact Jennifer Horn at 717.231.3300, extension 3825.