

## **Promising Child Welfare Practices in Pennsylvania**

### **Community Based Child Abuse Prevention Programs**

#### **Family Center/Parents as Teachers**

For more than a decade, Pennsylvania Family Centers, located in 29 counties, have provided community-based child abuse prevention services to help families become healthy, well-educated and self-sufficient. Family Center programs promote positive child development through effective parenting, early intervention and outreach activities, and they support and preserve the family unit as the child's foundation for success. They provide a seamless, comprehensive, and easily accessed network of services for children and their families. Services are provided on-site in the local family center, in families' homes, and through referral to other agencies and resources in the community. Family Centers represent a philosophy of family support, a process of community collaboration, and a place where children and families come together to learn and grow.

#### **Nurse Family Partnership**

Nurse-Family Partnership is an evidence-based, nurse home visiting program that improves the health, well-being and self-sufficiency of low income, first-time parents and their children. Each mother served is partnered with a registered nurse early in her pregnancy and receives ongoing nurse home visits that continue through her child's second birthday. Independent research proves that communities benefit from this relationship — every dollar invested in Nurse-Family Partnership can yield more than five dollars in return.

#### **Parent-Child Home Program**

The Parent-Child Home Program is a research-based and research validated early childhood literacy and school readiness program. The Program successfully strengthens families and prepares children for academic success through intensive home visiting. This program emphasizes the importance of quality parent-child verbal interaction to promote the cognitive and social-emotional development that children need in order to enter school with the tools they need to become successful students.

### **Court Improvement Projects**

#### **Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts, Office of Children, Families and the Courts**

The Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts is entering the second phase of the Permanency Practice Initiative, which is being led in

partnership with the Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families. Nearly half of the counties in Pennsylvania are participating in this initiative which is aimed at improving the outcomes of children and families involved with the child welfare and court systems. Specifically, the initiative is working to improve the identification and engagement of extended family resources and the collaboration between the county child welfare agency and courts. Family finding, Family Group Decision Making, three-month permanency review hearings and Family Development Credentialing are some of the promising and evidenced-based practices that this initiative promotes.

### **American Bar Association's Barriers to Permanency Project**

This initiative is funded through the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network to identify and remediate delays in achieving permanency for children that relate to court procedure or protocol. The project provides technical assistance and training services at the county level to promote positive judicial reform. A primary strategy of the project is convening comprehensive stakeholder groups to assist local court improvement efforts.

### **Legal Services Initiative**

The Legal Services Initiative is funded through the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network, which is an initiative of the Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families. The goal of the initiative is to expedite permanency for children through identifying and addressing gaps within the court process that slow court decisions. The use of paralegals, based in the county children and youth agency in each of these counties, is the primary strategy of the project. The roles of these paralegals vary by county, but in all cases they enhance and expedite communication between the child welfare agency and the courts.

### **Family Group Decision Making**

Family Group Decision Making is an engagement and practice model utilized to varying degrees to most of the counties in Pennsylvania to ensure that families who are involved in the child welfare system are driving the planning and decision making that impacts their lives. This strengths-based empowerment model typically takes the form of a Family Group Conference where broad extended family members and friends convene with professionals to outline areas of family strength and concern. The primary components of a conference include: extensive preparation; an opening and sharing of strengths, concerns, and resources; private family time; family presentation of their plan and plan acceptance by the referring agency; and plan implementation and monitoring.

## **Independent Living Programs**

Independent Living Programs exist in 65 counties in Pennsylvania to prepare and support youth in foster care to successfully transition to adulthood, as well as maximize their potential as members of the community. Services provided by these programs vary, but typically include: life skills training, housing assistance, promotion of secondary and postsecondary education, employment services, health/prevention education, mentoring, and case management supports.

## **Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN)**

The Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network is a collection of more than 80 private adoption and foster care agencies that provide an array of services to address barriers to children in foster care achieving permanency through reunification, adoption, or guardianship. The network provides direct permanency services to children in foster care, and offers training and technical assistance services to child welfare agencies. These services are funded and coordinated through a large statewide contract through the Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families.

## **Systems of Care/Integrated Children's Service Plan**

### **Systems of Care**

A system of care incorporates a broad array of services and supports for a defined population that is organized into a coordinated network, integrates care planning and management across multiple levels, is culturally and linguistically competent, and builds meaningful partnerships with families and youth at service delivery, management, and policy levels. A system of care is, first and foremost, a set of values and principles that provides an organizing framework for systems change on behalf of children, youth and families. Twenty-two counties in Pennsylvania, some who received grant funds, have been utilizing the systems of care framework in building their collaborative and integrated child welfare systems.

### **Integrated Children's Service Plan**

An Integrated Children's Service Plan is a way of providing services that is inclusive of families, county agencies, community partners and helping agencies who work together to provide culturally competent and coordinated support and services that are child-centered and family focused for all children, youth and families. To build an integrated system, collaborative partners, including families and youth, must first look to the services and functions provided within each agency and then work to build

those services and functions into one comprehensive system. Supporting the integration of services which touch the lives of children and families across Pennsylvania involves organizational and systems assessment, strategic planning for integration, and communication planning. It can dovetail with Systems of Care.

**National Governor's Association - Child Welfare Policy Academy:  
Safely Reducing the Number of Children in Foster Care**

The National Governor's Association, in partnership with Casey Family Programs, is conducting a policy academy in six states (Arkansas, Florida, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina) in an effort to safely reduce the number of children in foster care. Pennsylvania has selected 16 counties to participate in this policy academy to advance the state's goal of safely reduce the number of children in foster care by 20 percent by 2010. The policy academy provides Pennsylvania and the participating counties with technical assistance to support the design and implementation of child welfare policies and initiatives to improve outcomes for children and families