



Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

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Pennsylvania's Strategy on Foster Care is Working, New Statewide Report Finds *PA Partnerships for Children Releases 2011 'State of Child Welfare' Report*

(HARRISBURG, PA) Dec. 6, 2011 – Recent news events have led to an important discussion about how Pennsylvania can better help vulnerable children, and a new state report on child welfare shows one area where the commonwealth is moving in the right direction: foster care.

Pennsylvania's family-focused approach to foster care is helping to reduce the number of children placed in foster care and drive down the overall foster care population, according to the annual State of Child Welfare report issued today by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children.

"We have seen horrifying headlines in recent weeks that we hope will spur Pennsylvania's leaders to make positive, thoughtful changes to better serve children, but it's equally important for them to know what strategies are working," said PPC President and CEO Joan Benso. "When it comes to the commonwealth's approach to foster care, we are making laudable progress."

The annual report shows a marked increase in the number of Pennsylvania children and families being helped through in-home services that allow children to remain with their families and out of foster care. The number of children receiving in-home services increased by more than 4,700 from 2010 to 2011.

"In-home services help families proactively address the root causes of child neglect and abuse and help make vulnerable families stronger," Benso said. "The use of in-home services is important because we know outcomes for children are far better when they can remain in their own homes and out of foster care."

The report also shows state and county officials are moving away from a traditional reliance on group homes or institutions for foster children – often termed "congregate care" - and focusing on family settings instead, which are better pathways for helping

foster children move into permanent families.

During the past two years, the percentage of foster care children placed in family settings has seen a marked increase, while the percentage placed in congregate care has seen a closely corresponding decrease. In 2011, 71.4 percent of children were placed in family settings, up from 68.6 percent in 2010 and 67.7 percent in 2009. One in three of these children were placed with a relative. Meanwhile, the percentage of children in congregate care dropped to 22.4 percent in 2011, down from 25.1 percent in 2010 and 27.2 percent in 2009.

Despite such progress, some notable challenges remain. The state's foster care system needs to do more to better assist older teenagers, especially those 18 and older, in finding permanent homes through adoption or legal guardianship, according to Benso.

"Too many of these young adults end up 'aging out' of the foster care system without the support of a permanent family to help them cope with the often stressful transition to adulthood," Benso said. "We can use common-sense, cost-effective strategies to help these older teens strengthen their family bonds and boost their chances of becoming self-sufficient adults."

Benso said efforts to better assist older teens in foster care will be among PPC's priorities in 2012.

PPC began issuing its annual State of Child Welfare report in 2009 to gauge the performance of Pennsylvania's child welfare system in meeting the needs of the children and families it serves. The report includes comprehensive data for each of the 67 counties, including information on foster care placements, children leaving or re-entering foster care, and efforts to reunify children with parents or relatives.

The State of Child Welfare statewide report, as well as county reports, can be found online at www.porchlightproject.org.

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