



Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

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NEW REPORT SHOWS 20,000 CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE IN PA *PA Partnerships for Children Releases Findings on Child Welfare System* **Twenty-five percent of youth placed in group homes and institutions**

(HARRISBURG), Sept. 10, 2008 – Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC) today released a new report on child welfare in the Commonwealth designed to address a system that needs fixing while highlighting some encouraging strategies to promote permanency being implemented across the state. The report exposes some startling statistics in counties' child welfare systems – such as the high rate of re-entry for children released from foster care who then bounce back into the system, and the prolonged time it can take to move children from foster care to adoption – but also shines a light on promising practices in use by many county children and youth agencies.

At any given time, there are 20,000 children and youth in the foster care system in Pennsylvania spending about 16 months in placement. However, some counties experience as many as 40 percent of children who have been discharged from the foster care system returning to placement. These data show that more support must be provided to a child's birth family while he or she is in foster care to address the issues that forced the removal of the child from the home in the first place.

Children from birth to age five make up 30 percent of the foster care system; children six to 12 equal 24 percent; while the vast majority or 46 percent of children living in foster care are teenagers 13 and older. Challenges are present for children at every age in placement, but older youth who traditionally “age out” of the system at 18 face a unique set of difficulties when they don't have a permanent family or home to call their own. Roughly 1,600 youth age out of the system each year to unknown circumstances.

“Every child deserves a forever family. No child should languish in the system without a safe, nurturing and permanent place to call home,” said Joan L. Benso, president and CEO of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children. “While there are many things broken in the current child welfare system that must be addressed, there are family strengthening, reunification and adoption strategies in play, too, that deserve mention – and, hopefully, further replication across the state.”

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While 22 percent of children in the system have been placed with their relatives, 47 percent are in non-relative foster homes. But 25 percent of children in the foster care system live in institutions and group homes. These children – primarily older youth - are less likely to develop the traditional social and emotional skills necessary to move successfully to adulthood.

Foster care is meant to be a temporary arrangement for children. Child welfare agencies should employ an array of strategies designed to improve the odds that children will be able to return home safely or be placed permanently in a forever family. Strategies such as family finding, concurrent planning, family group decision making and family strengthening efforts will increase the odds that every child will have a forever family. Efforts are underway to utilize such strategies in Pennsylvania’s child welfare system; however the system is a long way from every family and child experiencing this level of engagement.

PPC releases the report under its new child welfare initiative dubbed “The Porch Light Project.” The mission of the Project - a guiding light for policy change for thousands of children who have been removed from their families following reports of child abuse, neglect or abandonment - is to strengthen families in order to reduce the risk of child abuse; assure that children have maximum stability when they must be removed from their homes; assure that a forever or permanent family becomes the reality for every child; and, to place equal emphasis on children who are abused regardless of their age - including youth who are approaching adulthood.

“The child welfare system in Pennsylvania must do more to provide the necessary family strengthening and supports; to create greater stability for a child placed out-of-home; to work towards permanency as a goal for all children, and to highlight the needs of older children and youth just as much as the needs of younger children” Benso added.

More information including county-by-county child welfare data and “best practices” maps is available by visiting <http://www.papartnerships.org/porchlight/> or by contacting Kathy Geller Myers, Communications Director, at 717-236-5680; kgmyers@papartnerships.org

This report was made possible in collaboration with Casey Family Programs, whose mission is to provide and improve—and ultimately prevent the need for—foster care. To learn more, visit www.casey.org. The findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (www.papartnerships.org) and do not necessarily reflect the views of Casey Family Programs.