



# Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **NUMBER OF CHILDREN LIVING IN FOSTER CARE DECLINING IN STATE**

*Majority of Counties Reduced Foster Care Placements in 2009-10*  
PPC Releases Report on Performance of Child Welfare System in PA

HARRISBURG (Sept. 21, 2010) – Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children (PPC) today released **The State of Child Welfare**, a report on the performance of Pennsylvania's child welfare system designed to provide data highlighting how counties are doing in meeting the needs of children and families in the child welfare system. Comprehensive data for all 67 counties takes a critical look at measures for every county including number of first-time entries and re-entries into foster care; type of placement including group homes and institutions; adoption rates and length of stay in foster care.

The news is encouraging so far. Pennsylvania is making significant progress in safely reducing the number of children living in foster care. Almost 90 percent of counties reduced their foster care placements over the past year resulting in a nearly 12 percent drop in children living in foster care and a decline of more than 16 percent of children entering the system. There was negligible change in substantiated reports of repeat child abuse and re-entry into foster care declined as well providing important assurances that the reduction in foster care placement is safe and stable for Pennsylvania's children.

"In our inaugural report last year we posed some fundamental questions about how well Pennsylvania state and county governments are doing keeping children safe in their own homes so fewer children enter foster care, how they're doing in decreasing the likelihood of repeat abuse or re-entry into foster care, and the steps being taken to achieve permanency for kids through reunification with birth families, adoption or guardianship," said Joan L. Benso, president and CEO, PA Partnerships for Children. "Now we have the data to answer these questions and assess our progress."

Pennsylvania is a state that historically has relied heavily on placing children in congregate care (group homes and institutions) rather than foster family homes, but this trend is changing as there was a decrease of nearly eight percent in placement of children in congregate care settings over the past year. Research indicates that children who live in group settings while in foster care have less contact with their birth families, more behavioral problems, and are less likely to end their journey living in a permanent family than children who are placed in home-like foster family settings.



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Also encouraging, there was an 11 percent increase in children reunifying with their birth families in a timely manner over the past year. And, for children who didn't benefit from reunification, many left the system because they were adopted or went to live with a legal guardian.

While this report highlights some promising gains, the news isn't all good. State and county systems need to strengthen efforts to reduce the disproportionate number of children of color in foster care placement as an African American child is still six times more likely than a white child to be in foster care. And more aggressive steps need to be taken to ensure that youth don't end their child welfare experience through emancipation ("aging out" of the system) instead of with a permanent family.

"Pennsylvania's child welfare system serves some of the most vulnerable children and families in our communities. It is critically important that we continue to monitor the performance of this essential safety net," Benso said. "But commendable steps have been taken to fulfill our goals of safely reducing the number of children in foster care and creating safe, stable, permanent family connections for all children."

More information may be obtained by contacting Kathy Geller Myers, Communications Director, at 717-236-5680 or [kgmyers@papartnerships.org](mailto:kgmyers@papartnerships.org). The report can be accessed at [www.porchlightproject.org](http://www.porchlightproject.org)

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