




pennsylvania
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES BULLETIN

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SUBJECT Concurrent Planning Policy and Implementation		BY  Cathy A. Utz Deputy Secretary, Office of Children, Youth & Families

SCOPE:

- County Children and Youth Social Service Agencies
- County Chief Juvenile Probation Officers
- Private Children and Youth Social Service Agencies
- Juvenile Court Judges Commission
- Juvenile Court Judges
- Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts
- Juvenile Law Center
- Orphans Court Judges
- Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network
- Youth Advisory Board
- Guardians Ad Litem
- County Children and Youth Solicitors
- Child Welfare Training Program
- Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this bulletin is to transmit policy and guidance to public and private child welfare agencies about the implementation of concurrent planning for children in out of home care in Pennsylvania (PA).

<p>REFER COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS REGARDING THIS BULLETIN TO:</p> <p>Origin of Bulletin: Lorrie Deck (717) 772-7046 lodeck@pa.gov</p>

BACKGROUND:

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) was passed by Congress to address permanency outcomes and safety for children and families in the child welfare system. ASFA focuses on preserving families while assuring child safety, permanency, and well-being. ASFA requires that county children and youth agencies (CCYAs) make reasonable efforts to finalize permanency plans as soon as a child enters substitute care and that they be diligent in identifying a permanent family for the child. To that end, concurrent planning is acknowledged in ASFA as a best practice for achieving permanency and stability for a child. PA's Juvenile Act, in complying with ASFA, identifies the hierarchy of permanency goals for children and youth in the custody of a county agency as return to parent, adoption, permanent legal custodianship, permanent placement with a fit and willing relative, or another planned living arrangement intended to be permanent.

Although ASFA encourages the use of concurrent planning when a child enters placement, many agencies still use a sequential approach to permanency planning for children. The first plan is generally for the child to return home and planning for this may take 12 to 15 months. Once it becomes apparent that the child will not be returning home, another permanency goal is identified. Sequential planning results in children remaining in placement longer than when concurrent planning is initiated at the time of placement. ASFA requires that for children who have been in foster care for 15 of the most recent 22 months, the state must file a petition to terminate parental rights unless certain exceptions apply. The state must concurrently identify, recruit, process, and approve a qualified family to adopt the child when it files or joins a petition to terminate parental rights when the child has been in care 15 of the last 22 months or a court of competent jurisdiction has made determinations consistent with Section 475(5) of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 675(5) (E)).

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 does not expressly address concurrent planning. It does, however, provide new resources for relatives who wish to become children's legal guardians, creating a meaningful permanency option in the context of concurrent planning practice. Additionally, this Act requires that adult relatives of children entering or at risk of entering foster care be contacted simultaneously with other permanency planning efforts.

As part of the assessment of the performance of state child welfare systems, the federal Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) addresses the extent to which states are using concurrent planning. The results of the 2002 CFSR in PA indicated that while not in use statewide, many CCYAs reported the use of concurrent planning. However the evidence from the record reviews and the interviews with families, workers, and key stakeholders was that workers seemed to view the practice as a 'back up' plan and not necessarily as a plan to be implemented at the same time the plan is implemented to achieve the child's primary permanency goal. As part of the 2010 Program Improvement Plan (PIP) resulting from the 2008 CFSR which largely reiterated the 2003 findings relative to concurrent planning, PA was charged with the task of developing a statewide policy to support case practice for concurrent planning.

In May 2009, the Mission and Guiding Principles for PA's Child Dependency System were adopted as a system-wide statement for practice with abused and neglected children and their families. The document is supported by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, the Office of Children, Youth and Families (OCYF), the Juvenile Court Judge's Commission, and the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania. The document emphasizes the need for concurrent planning which leads to safe, timely, permanence for children. More information on the Mission and Guiding Principles for PA's Child Dependency System can be found online at: <http://www.ocfcpacourts.us/about-ocfc/guiding-principles>

In December, 2013, OCYF issued bulletin 3130-12-13, Concurrent Planning and Policy Implementation. Since that time, there have been several changes to federal and state legislation that have had an impact on Concurrent Planning and Policy Implementation. This bulletin incorporates those legislative changes and rescinds and replaces the above referenced bulletin.

Act 75 of 2015, the Activities and Experiences for Children in Out-of-Home Placement Act, effective November, 17, 2015, was designed to help children and youth who are in Pennsylvania's foster care system live more normal lives and assures PA's compliance with the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (Public Law 113-183). The law ensures that children in foster care are afforded opportunities to engage in age and developmentally appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, or social activities and experiences. It empowers the resource parent(s) for the child or a designated staff person in the child's foster home or congregate care setting to make decisions regarding the child's participation in such activities without prior approval from the CCYA, private children and youth agency, or the court, provided the decision is based on a reasonable and prudent parental standard and the decision does not conflict with the child's service plans or active court orders. The law requires that caregivers receive training in how to use and apply the reasonable and prudent parent standard to decisions and ensures appropriate liability for caregivers, CCYAs, and private children and youth agencies, when a child participates in an activity and the trained caregiver acts in accordance with the reasonable and prudent parent standard. The law also ensures that caregivers receive notice of their responsibilities and rights, and children receive notice of their opportunities under Act 75. This bulletin has been updated to include those changes in the Key Terms and Practice Considerations and in Core Components 1, 6, and 7.

Act 94 of 2015, effective January 1, 2016, ensures Pennsylvania's compliance with the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (Public Law 113-183) by amending Section 6351 of the Juvenile Act to require that during permanency hearings the court consult with the child regarding the child's permanency plan and the child's desired permanency goal, determine the services needed to assist a child who is 14 years of age or older to make the transition to successful adulthood, and determine whether the child is being provided with regular, on-going opportunities to participate in age-appropriate and developmentally-appropriate activities and experiences. Act 94 also requires the CCYAs to document the steps that are taken to ensure that caregivers are following the reasonable and prudent parent standard and that the child has regular,

ongoing opportunities to engage in age and/or developmentally appropriate activities and experiences.

In addition to the above changes, Act 94 prohibits the courts and CCYAs from establishing or maintaining a permanency plan/goal of APPLA for children under the age of 16 and requires that at every permanency hearing held for a youth with a goal of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA), that the CCYA identify or document efforts to identify at least one significant connection with a supportive adult willing to be involved in the youth's life as they transition to adulthood. CCYAs must also document their intensive efforts and a compelling reason why it is not in the youth's best interests to be returned home, placed for adoption, placed with a Permanent Legal Custodian (PLC), or placed with a fit and willing relative.

Additionally, the courts must ask youth with a goal of APPLA about their desired permanency outcome/goal and to make a judicial determination explaining why APPLA is the best plan, including the compelling reasons why return home, adoption, PLC, or placement with a fit and willing relative are not in the youth's best interests. This bulletin has been updated to include those changes in the Key Terms and Practice Considerations and in the Full Disclosure core component section.

KEY TERMS AND PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS:

Child: An individual who is under the age of 18 years or was adjudicated dependent before reaching the age of 18 years and who, while engaged in a course of instruction or treatment, requests the court to retain jurisdiction until the course has been completed.

Child's Permanency Plan (CPP): Upon placement of a child, the CCYA is required to collaborate with all stakeholders to develop and prepare a CPP (amendment to the Family Service Plan) for each child. The CPP should never be developed in isolation. The CCYA must involve the parents, child, youth, relatives, kin, and other stakeholders in the development of the CPP.

The CPP also provides a wide variety of information for the courts and should be provided to all parties. The CPP includes specific information regarding the child, such as circumstances which made placement necessary, the child's permanency goal and concurrent planning goal, the placement type and location, medical and educational information, appropriateness of the placement, justification for the placement's level of restrictiveness, and anticipated duration of the placement, and ensures the child has the opportunity to participate in age appropriate or developmentally appropriate activities and experiences to the greatest extent possible to promote healthy child and adolescent development.

Concurrent Planning: A process of working towards one legal permanency goal (typically reunification) while at the same time establishing and implementing an alternative permanency goal and plan that are worked on concurrently to move children/youth more quickly to a safe and stable permanent family (Permanency Roundtable Project, 2010). This is a process which involves concurrent rather than

sequential permanency planning efforts. It involves a mix of meaningful family engagement, targeted case practice, and legal strategies aimed at achieving timely permanency, while at the same time establishing and actively working a concurrent permanency plan in case the primary goal cannot be accomplished in a timely manner. It is not a fast track to adoption, but to permanency (<http://www.nrcpfc.org/cpt/overview.htm>).

Diligent Search: A process conducted to locate parents, relatives, kin, or other potential permanency resources or connections for a child who is receiving services from or who is in the custody of a CCYA. A detailed Diligent Search Packet outlining the step by step process is available online at www.diakon-swan.org.

Family: A group of individuals who are bound by ties of blood, law, and/or affinity.

Family Engagement: A family-centered and strengths-based approach to partnering with families in making decisions, setting goals, and achieving desired outcomes. It is founded on the principle of communicating openly and honestly with families in a way that supports disclosure of culture, family dynamics, and personal experiences to meet the individual needs of every family and every child. (For an in-depth guide to the practice of family engagement, see *Family Engagement: A Web-Based Practice Toolkit* developed by the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections: www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/fewpt/index.htm)

Family Finding: A process developed by Kevin Campbell to locate and engage relatives of children in out-of-home care with a goal of providing those children with a permanent placement and/or lifelong connections. True family finding includes on-going diligent searches for relatives and kin and then engaging and including those family and kin in the permanency process.

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)/Family Group Conferencing (FGC): A method of bringing family members together in a family-focused, culturally-sensitive approach to develop a safety/reunification/alternate permanency plan for children who are in foster care, who are at risk for entering foster care, or who are already in care and in danger of aging out without a permanent resource. FGDM/FGC involves meeting with immediate and extended family members, and any parties important in the children's or families' lives. Unlike the traditional child welfare case conferencing, the family is "in-charge" of the meeting and responsible for creating the recommended plan and identifying the attendees. The caseworker's participation primarily involves the sharing of information/resources and acceptance of the family's plan (if safety concerns are adequately addressed). Unique to this practice is private family time that excludes any non-family members.

Family Service Plan (FSP): The plan that is developed in collaboration with the family and the CCYA. The FSP should never be developed in isolation. The CCYA must involve the parents, child, youth, relatives, kin, and other stakeholders in the development of the FSP. The FSP must include identifying information related to the family members, the circumstances which necessitated CCYA involvement, service objectives, services to be provided to achieve the objectives, actions to be taken by the

parents, children, stakeholders, the CCYA or other agencies, and the dates when these actions will be completed (55 Pa. Code §3130.61).

Full Disclosure: The process of providing clear, objective information to parents regarding the rights, responsibilities, and expectations of all members of the permanency team. It must include information on the impact of out-of-home placement on children and the urgency of placing children in permanent living arrangements as quickly as possible. Full disclosure includes telling parents about shortened timeframes, that concurrent planning means there will be two permanency goals, and plans developed to complete both goals as well as the expectations of the CCYA and court.

Kinship Care: The full-time nurturing and protection of a child who is separated from his/her parents and placed in the home of a caregiver who has an existing relationship with the child and/or the child's family. The existing relationship involves one of the following characteristics:

- Relative of the child through blood or marriage;
- God parent of the child as recognized by an organized church;
- Member of the child's tribe or clan; or
- Significant positive relationship with the child or the child's family.

Parent: A biological parent, adoptive parent, or legal guardian.

Permanency: The establishment of an identified adult or family who has made a commitment to care for and to support a child up to and beyond the age of majority. Permanency options as defined by ASFA in hierarchical order are as follows: (1) return to the parent, (2) place for adoption, (3) placement with a permanent legal custodian, (4) placement with a fit and willing relative or (5) APPLA. *(APPLA may be used only for youth age 16 or older for whom it has been determined by the court that there are compelling reasons that it would not be in the child's best interest to return home, be placed for adoption, placed with a legal custodian or placed with a fit and willing relative. Additionally, the CCYA must identify at least one significant connection with a supportive adult willing to be involved in the child's life as they transition to adulthood. APPLA may not be used as a primary or concurrent goal on any youth under the age of 16. Should the court order a primary or concurrent goal of APPLA for any youth under the age of 16, no federal or state funds may be used for placement costs.)*

Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard: Careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interests of a child while encouraging the emotional and developmental growth of the child, that a caregiver must use when determining whether to allow a child in an out-of-home placement to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities.

Relative: Any relation by blood, marriage, or adoption within the fifth degree of kinship to the child. This includes great-great-grandparents and first cousins once removed (children of first cousins).

Resource Family: A family which provides temporary foster or kinship care for a child who is in need out-of-home placement and may eventually provide permanency for those children, including an adoptive family.

Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN): A network of public and private agencies and organizations that have a common goal of improving the opportunity for timely permanency for Pennsylvania children. SWAN provides direct services to foster children and the families who serve them including Child Profile, Family Profile, Child Specific Recruitment, Child Preparation for Permanency, Placement, Finalization, and Post-permanency Services. In addition to direct services numerous support services are also provided, such as the SWAN Legal Services Initiative.

Teaming: The identification and formation of a working group that shares a common “big picture” understanding and long-term view of the child/youth and family. Members of the team have sufficient knowledge, skills, and cultural awareness to work effectively with the child and family.

DISCUSSION:

Successful permanency planning for all children in out-of-home care requires the development of a concurrent/alternative permanency plan. Concurrent planning is the ongoing process of actively working on two permanency plans at the same time. It is most effective when the necessary systems are in place to support the caseworker, the family, the resource family, and the child through the concurrent planning process. Concurrent planning does not double the work. Thorough permanency planning efforts will result in faster permanency, either through reunification or another permanent plan. In either case the efforts and process are the same.

Concurrent planning expedites reunification because of the structured, focused and respectful involvement of parents and family early in the planning process while at the same time advances efforts to achieve an alternative permanency plan, if reunification is not feasible.

Four Main Goals of Concurrent Planning:

- To promote the safety, permanency and well-being of children and youth in out-of-home care;
- To achieve timely permanency for children and youth through early permanency decisions;
- To reduce the number of moves in the foster care system for children; and
- To engage families and relatives early and foster significant relationships between children in out-of-home care and their family/kin.

Benefits of Concurrent Planning:

- Increased honesty and clarity between the CCYA, the resource parents, the child's parents, the child, family, and kin regarding the plan for the child's permanency (full disclosure);
- Early permanence through reunification or another permanency option that was identified and pursued;
- Provision of meaningful visits between the parents and the child;
- Involvement of family in identifying kinship options;
- Reduction in the number of placement settings the child experiences;
- Reduction of time the child spends in foster care;
- Development of a trusting relationship between caseworkers, parents, family, kin, and the courts because planning for the child becomes more strength-based and less punitive and adversarial resulting in enhanced parent motivation;
- Increased connections for the child through voluntary visitation agreements in adoption or guardianship/kinship arrangements; and
- Development of a network of resource parents and relatives who are willing to work with the biological families while serving as a permanency resource for children.

Barriers to Effective Concurrent Planning

- Challenges of resolving the issues that brought the children into care within the statutory timeframes;
- The need for a culture shift in child welfare to embrace the concept of concurrent planning;
- High caseloads and staff turnover;
- Some community agencies, courts, attorneys, resource parents, and other stakeholders in the child welfare system do not have an understanding of concurrent planning;
- Lack of meaningful parent-child visitation;
- Collaboration challenges between all partners in case planning;
- The shortage of services for children and their families; and
- The availability and cost of cross systems training needed to improve the understanding of the complexities and limitations of each system.

In addition to the benefits and barriers to effective concurrent planning, several pitfalls have been identified with concurrent planning that must be anticipated and avoided. Those pitfalls include:

1. *Equating concurrent planning with a fast track to adoption* and, as a result, minimizing reunification efforts. When this happens, caseworkers may pay less attention to parents' service needs and may not prioritize frequent parent-child visits.

2. *Investing in a particular outcome.* Caseworkers may come to the process with a commitment to making one outcome or another happen rather than allowing the case outcome to evolve based on the family's actions and decisions.
3. *Designing case plan that are not individualized and family-centered.* Caseworkers may develop plans that are similar from family to family, utilizing the same service objectives regardless of the family's individual needs. This may occur when the planning process does not fully engage parents or help parents to assume roles and responsibilities that are important to their maintaining connections with their children or making the changes that they need to make so that their children can be safely returned to them.
4. *Offering resource parents and relatives an estimate of "legal risk."* Some caseworkers may communicate to resource parents and relatives the odds of a successful reunification and their becoming the child's permanent family. It is important to consistently communicate to resource parents and relatives that their role is to support reunification efforts while continuing to stand ready to be "Plan B" for the child.
5. *Interpreting 12 months as the absolute limit on reunification irrespective of the parents' progress.* It can be challenging, but it is very important to maintain the balance between the judicious use of time limits to ensure that a child does not remain in foster care unnecessarily and a rote enforcement of time limits in a way that ignores the full picture of the parents' motivation, efforts, incremental progress, and a foreseeable reunification. (Linda Katz at: Katz, L. (1999). Concurrent planning: Benefits and pitfalls. *Child Welfare*, 78(1), 71-87).

POLICY:

OCYF is committed to improving outcomes in child welfare practice in PA by implementing concurrent planning through policy and procedure. OCYF acknowledges that the consistent implementation of concurrent planning will require a practice shift for public and private child welfare agencies, the courts, resource families, and other stakeholders. Agencies will need sufficient time to plan and prepare the groundwork that will be needed to support and sustain this required practice. Counties already implementing one or more elements of concurrent planning may need to adjust their written agency policy to ensure compliance with the requirements of this bulletin; additionally, they may need to revise case plan forms they are currently used to be in compliance with this concurrent planning policy. Concurrent planning is supported by some of the more recently implemented statutory and policy requirements.

The passage of the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (Fostering Connections), which includes emphasis on relative notification and connection, dovetails with PA's CFSR findings related to the need for concurrent planning policies and procedures. By developing kin as resources for permanent child placements, in the event reunification is not possible, agencies are intrinsically enhancing viable concurrent planning options and reducing the time children spend in foster care.

Two OCYF bulletins: Kinship Care Policy, #00-03-03, and Child Placement with Emergency Caregivers, #3140-04-05/3490-04-01, are used in conjunction to promote the safe placement of children with persons who have an established relationship with the child and family. In addition, OCYF Bulletin #3130-10-02/3140-10-03 entitled "Permanent Legal Custodian Policy" establishes the procedures for counties to create permanent legal relationships, both subsidized and non-subsidized, between children and individuals with whom they are bonded.

In all cases where children are removed from the home, the CCYA must engage in concurrent planning. Concurrent planning is the practice whereby the CCYA simultaneously establishes and executes two permanency goals and two plans designed to achieve each goal. For example, the primary plan for children in out-of-home care is generally reunification. In concurrent planning, the CCYA must make reasonable efforts for reunification of the family while also pursuing the goals and objectives of a second or alternate plan that is another permanency option. If for any reason the primary goal cannot be achieved, the execution of the concurrent plan will ensure progress has already been made toward the concurrent permanency goal. Concurrent planning can significantly shorten the length of time a child remains in care since virtually no time is lost from the end of the primary plan to the initiation of the concurrent plan.

Target population:

All children entering foster care with a goal of reunification will have a concurrent plan for permanency established within 90 days of their placement.

Technical Assistance:

Technical Assistance (TA) is available at no charge through the PA TA Collaborative. The TA Collaborative is a cohesive group of TA providers who work in collaboration with CCYAs to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. CCYAs may request assistance with their organizational self-assessment and with incorporating the core components of concurrent planning by contacting any of the TA Collaborative partners including their OCYF regional office, SWAN, the Administrative Office of PA Courts (AOPC), the American Bar Association (ABA) Barriers to Permanency Project, and the PA Child Welfare Resource Center (CWRC). Additional free resources on concurrent planning are located on Page 28 of this bulletin.

Core Components of Concurrent Planning

There are eight core components of concurrent planning which are the basis of good permanency planning:

1. Full disclosure to all participants in the case planning process;
2. Family search and engagement;
3. FGDM/FGC/Teaming;
4. Child/family visitation;

5. Establishment of clear timelines for permanency decisions;
6. Transparent written agreements and documentation;
7. Committed collaboration between child welfare agencies, the courts, resource families, service providers, and other stakeholders; and
8. Specific recruitment, training, and retention of resource families.

Each of these core components will be examined within this policy and each must be implemented by every CCYA as a part of the PA concurrent planning process.

1. Full disclosure to all participants in the case planning process

Full disclosure is a respectful and candid discussion that begins when the child is placed in out-of-home care and continues throughout the life of the case. The discussion is offered to the parents and child as well as other team members and stakeholders such as extended family, resource families, relative caregivers, attorneys, guardians ad litem, and service providers. The discussion should be consistent with the principles of strengths-based and solution-focused casework practice.

Issues to be discussed with the parents as part of a full disclosure process include:

- The circumstances that led to CCYA's involvement and that led to placing the child in out-of-home care;
- That foster care is temporary and is not designed to be permanent;
- That foster care has emotional and developmental impacts on children and it is imperative that the child be returned to the family as soon as possible or that another legally permanent family be found for them as soon as possible;
- The reasonable and prudent parent standard and that the resource family or facility will make daily parental decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interests of the child and will make decisions regarding whether to allow the child to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities;
- The legal rights and responsibilities of the parents;
- That it is important for them to share information about the child's needs so that those needs can be met;
- That it is important for them to identify relatives or other significant adults who may be considered as a permanency resource and participate in the case planning process so that if it becomes necessary to place the child in out of home care that the child may be placed in the best possible environment with people they know;
- The legal rights and responsibilities of their child including the child's rights under PA Act 119 of 2010, the Children in Foster Care Act;
- The permanency planning timeframes;
- The identification of the primary and concurrent goal and the plans to achieve both goals;
- The support services available to help family;
- The changes needed and the expectations of the agency and court; and

- That if they do not meet the agreed upon goals, the alternative plan may become the primary permanency plan and the focus of permanency efforts for the child.

Issues to be discussed with the child during full disclosure include:

- The circumstances that led to CCYS's involvement and that led to placing him/her in out-of-home care;
- That foster care is temporary and is not designed to be permanent;
- That it is imperative that the child be returned to the family as soon as possible or that another legally permanent family be found for them as soon as possible;
- That it is important for them to share information about their needs so that those needs can be met;
- That it is important for them to identify relatives or other significant adults who may be considered as a permanency resource and participate in the case planning process so that if it becomes necessary to place them in out-of-home care that they are placed in the best possible environment with people they know;
- Their legal rights and responsibilities including their rights under PA Act 119 of 2010, the Children in Foster Care Act;
- The right to participate in age or developmentally appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities;
- The permanency planning timeframes;
- The identification of the primary and concurrent goal and the plans to achieve both goals;
- The support services available to help their family;
- The changes needed and the expectations of the agency and court; and
- That if their parents do not meet the agreed upon goals, the alternative plan for them may become the primary permanency plan and the focus of permanency efforts.

While it is recognized that not all children are developmentally mature enough to understand all of the above, it is expected that caseworkers engage in a frank discussion with the child regarding the child's permanency plan in a manner appropriate to the child's age and maturity. It is also expected that caseworkers take into account the behavioral, mental, and physical health of the child and consider the best interests of the child when engaging in these discussions.

Issues to be discussed with resource families include:

- The circumstances that led to the removal of the child from their home;
- The needs of the child;
- That foster care is temporary and is not designed to be permanent;
- The permanency planning timeframes;
- The identification of the primary and concurrent goal and the plans to achieve both goals;

- The legal requirement to search for relatives who would be able to care for the child (if a non-relative placement);
- Licensing requirements, training, and responsibilities of the resource family (for kin, relative, PLC homes);
- Their legal rights and responsibilities including their rights under the PA Resource Family Care Act (Act 73 of 2005);
- Their legal right to make reasonable and prudent parent decisions that maintain the health, safety, and best interests of the child and to make decisions regarding whether to allow the child to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities;
- What needs they may have to adequately provide for the child and what support services are available to help them; and
- The child's primary permanency goal, i.e., reunification, the importance of their support of that goal, and that they are encouraged to consider becoming a permanency resource should reunification efforts fail.

Documentation of Full Disclosure must be contained in the child and family record. Additionally, it is recommended that all parents and youth receive the above information in writing (see Attachment A, Parent Handbook on Concurrent Planning and Attachment B, Westmoreland County ABA Permanency Barriers Project Parent Handbook). Each CCYA may use these documents to create their own Parent Handbook for use in Concurrent Planning. Additionally, CCYAs may create their own youth handbook or use *the Know Your Rights Manual* offered through the Juvenile Law Center and Kids Voice (see Attachment C, Know Your Rights Brochure).

2. Family search and engagement

The early determination of paternity and early identification of family members and kin is critical to identifying possible resource families among the child's relatives. Research shows that placement with kin reinforces safety, stability, and well-being, reduces trauma, reinforces the child's sense of identity, helps keep siblings together, honors family and cultural ties, expands permanency options, and can reduce racial disproportionality. This early identification of potential placement resources and placement with relatives can greatly assist in developing a feasible concurrent plan of some form of permanency with a relative.

Identifying and locating relatives and kin is an on-going process that begins during the initial screening or intake process and continues through the life of the case. It is recommended that CCYA obtain as much information as possible on all family members and kin during the initial screening or intake process so that in the event it becomes necessary to place a child in out-of-home care the non-custodial parent and other family members may be included in the FSP and/or CPP and may serve as placement resources for the child.

Even when fathers are not actively involved in their children's lives, they and their family members can be important sources of support for children and youth. If it is not already known, it is imperative that CCYAs immediately take the necessary steps to

establish paternity when a child enters placement. Once paternity has been determined, the CCYA will search for and engage the paternal relatives in the permanency process.

As family members and kin are identified, they need to be engaged immediately while the caseworker or the SWAN Legal Services Initiative (LSI) paralegal continues to search for additional family members or kin. Those identified family members/kin are a valuable resource to locating more family members who may also be interested in participating in the concurrent plan, maintaining a life-long connection for the child, and/or being considered as a permanency resource for the child. Family search is an on-going process that extends beyond the requirement of notifying all known relatives of a child's placement within 30 days. The diligent search for relatives, kin, and permanent connections, and the engagement of those located, should be on-going throughout the life of the case.

Legal Requirements for Kinship Involvement

Act 25 of 2003, which amended the Public Welfare Code (P.L.31, No.21), requires the CCYA to give first consideration to relatives when placing children in out-of-home care. Relatives, as defined in the Public Welfare Code, include those who are within the third degree of consanguinity or affinity to the parent or stepparent of a child, which includes grandparents, great-grandparents, great-great-great grandparents, great aunts and uncles, aunts and uncles, first cousins, adult siblings, and half-siblings.

Fostering Connections requires that the CCYA notify all adult relatives within 30 days of placing a child to inform them that the child has entered care and to determine if they are willing to become a resource for the child. In response to Fostering Connections, OCYF issued a Special Transmittal on February 24, 2009, requiring compliance with Fostering Connections, including notification of all adult relatives within 30 days of placing a child to inform them of their opportunities to offer assistance or become a resource for the child. In July 2010, OCYF re-issued the PLC Policy wherein "relative" was defined as all adult relatives within the fifth degree of blood, marriage, (affinity) or adoption.

In addition to relatives, CCYAs may wish to consider kin as a placement resource. Pennsylvania's current definition of kin includes relatives as defined above or individuals who meet at least one of the following:

- Godparent as recognized by an organized church;
- Member of the child's Indian tribe, nation or clan; or
- Individual with a significant, positive relationship with the child or family.

Although CCYAs must notify all relatives to the fifth degree when a child is placed in out-of-home care, there is no requirement for them to notify kin. However in many instances kin, as defined above, are a valuable resource for the family and child and can be considered as a permanency resource for the child if placement is necessary. When a child enters out-of-home care, families and youth should be encouraged to identify all of their kin resources as they may be of assistance in

development of the CPP and may even be considered as a placement resource. If the family or youth identify potential kin resources, the agency may send them notification of the child's placement even though such a notification is not required.

There are several resources available to the CCYA to support locating and involving relatives and kin including:

- **Family Finding:** PA has developed a curriculum based on Kevin Campbell's Family Finding. A six day training offers an overview of the Family Finding model including Discovery, Engagement, Planning, Decision Making, Evaluation, and Follow up on Support. This training is available through the PA CWRC and all CCYAs should ensure that their staff is trained on the Family Finding model.
- **Accurint:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) has contracted with Reed Elsevier's Lexis-Nexis® to provide all CCYAs access to this online person locator and research tool. Among other things, an Accurint search can assist with locating parents, relatives, and permanent connections for children in out-of-home placement. Accurint is one of several valuable tools that can assist workers in the Diligent Search process.
- **Diligent Search Packet:** The SWAN LSI created the Diligent Search Packet to aid the CCYA in the search process. This packet is available online at no cost at <http://www.diakon-swan.org>. In addition to information about Accurint, the SWAN LSI Diligent Search Packet contains other information and instructions on how to perform searches to locate family members and kin. Diligent search is the foundation to locating family members and kin and should be an on-going continuous process throughout the life of the case.
- **SWAN LSI:** OCYF has provided SWAN LSI paralegal support to many CCYAs. SWAN LSI paralegals are an excellent support that can use Accurint and perform diligent searches to locate family and kin thereby freeing the CCYA caseworker's time to engage in other practice related to the case. It is not the responsibility of the paralegals to engage the family members and kin located, but rather to provide the information obtained through the diligent search process, such as the names and contact information of the family and kin located to the CCYA caseworker so that they may begin to engage those individuals who have been identified in the permanency process.

3. FGDM/FGC/Teaming

FGDM/FGC

Once family members and kin have been identified and contacted, the CCYA may wish to proceed with a family group conference to help finalize the permanency plan for the child.

FGC can be a useful tool in concurrent planning practice. It is an inclusive and informal process of making and implementing a plan that safeguards children, young

persons, and adults. At the center of the planning is the “family group”, encompassing the immediate family as well as their relatives, friends, and other informal ties. Supporting the process are the involved community organizations and public agencies. The model’s origins, legalization, process, dissemination, and outcomes all reflect a culturally based approach to resolving interpersonal violence and other relationship concerns.

Many counties have implemented FGDM as a key family engagement strategy to bring families together to meet with the CCYA, extended family members, service providers, and other significant individuals in their lives who can support them in making the best decisions for children in out-of-home care.

For children in out-of-home care, FGDM/FGC can be used to help identify the best out-of-home placement and the best permanent home. It is one method by which the CCYA’s requirement to give first consideration to relatives when placing children in out-of-home care may be achieved.

As used in concurrent planning, FGDM /FGC is a process led by a facilitator who is independent of the case. The coordinator brings together the family members, kin, CCYA personnel, and other identified members of the permanency team to create a plan to find the best placement for the child.

FGDM/FGC positions the family group to lead decision-making and the CCYA agrees to support the family group plans that adequately address the agency’s concerns. Once a plan is developed and approved, the CCYA organizes the family members and service providers to access resources for implementing the plan and incorporates the plan into the FSP and CPP.

FGDM/FGC is not a conflict-resolution approach, therapeutic intervention, or forum for ratifying professionally crafted decisions. Instead, FGDM/FGC actively seeks the collaboration and leadership of family groups in crafting and implementing plans that support the safety, permanency, and well-being of their children.

Once the FGDM/FGC meeting has occurred and resources have been identified as possible placement or permanency resources for the child, the CCYA should follow the procedures outlined in the Child Placement with Emergency Caregivers Bulletin #3140-04-05/3490-04-01 and ensure that appropriate services are provided such as family profiles, child profiles, child preparation, and other permanency related services. CCYAs may provide the services directly or make referrals to the SWAN prime contract.

Teaming

Although only some counties use FGDM/FGC for certain target populations, the CCYA is expected to engage the family in permanency planning and in the development of the FSP/ CPP. In those cases where FGDM/FGC is not appropriate or possible at the time of placement, the CCYA should continue to make efforts to engage the parents, child, relatives, and kin so that a future FGDM/FGC may be held as the FGDM/FGC process is more inclusive of all family members than is a Team Meeting.

Until a FGDM/FGC can be held, Family Team Meetings involving the child, parents, extended family, kin, CCYA staff, resource parents, and other stakeholders should be held to develop the most appropriate concurrent plan.

A Family Team Meeting is a gathering of family members, friends, community specialists, and other interested people who join together to strengthen a family and provide a protection and care plan for the family's children. The Family Team Meeting is often the forum that is used to help the family craft, implement, or change the permanency plan. The team provides an alliance of support for the family and facilitates the family's participation in decision-making regarding safety, permanence, and well-being for their children.

Teams should include all available family members, the CCYA case worker and supervisor, any contracted service providers, health care providers, educational partners, child/youth and parent advocates, or anyone else who is integral to the case. When applicable, team members should also include behavioral health professionals, spiritual leaders, substitute caregivers, private providers, residential facilities, juvenile probation, and others as identified. Collaboration among team members from different agencies is essential. Team composition should be competent and have the right balance of personal interest in the family, knowledge of the family, technical skills, cultural awareness, authority to act, flexibility to respond to specific needs, and time necessary to fulfill the commitment to the family. Collectively, the team should have the authority to act and ability to assemble supports and resources on behalf of the child and the family.

The team should be brought together at a time and place accessible to the family to facilitate the development of a plan, record specific responsibilities of team members, ensure that steps are accomplished, and monitor progress towards change. Team members are critical to identifying strengths, identifying options for accomplishment of goals, contributing their skills and resources as family supports, holding others accountable for their commitments, identifying critical decisions, and providing feedback about progress (http://www.childwelfaregroup.org/documents/FTC_History.pdf).

Once the Family Team Meeting has occurred and resources have been identified as possible placement or permanency resources for the child, the CCYA should follow the procedures outlined in the Child Placement with Emergency Caregivers Bulletin #3140-04-05/3490-04-01 and ensure that appropriate services are provided such as family profiles, child profiles, child preparation, and other permanency related services. CCYAs may provide the services directly or make referrals to the SWAN prime contract.

4. Child/family visitation

Children in out-of-home care must maintain meaningful contact with their parents and siblings. Research has shown that maintaining parent-child and other family attachments reduces the child's sense of abandonment, shortens the overall length of stay in care, and increases the likelihood of reunification. Frequent child/parent

visitation is the key to maintaining connections between children in out-of-home care and their parents.

The quality and frequency of visitation is a key factor in contributing to the timely permanency of children in out-of-home care. Foster children who are visited frequently by their parents are more likely to have high well-being ratings and are more likely to adjust well to their foster care placement than are children who have infrequent or no visits. Frequent visitation has consistently been found to contribute to the successful reunification of children placed in out of home care (<http://www.nrcpfc.org/cpt/component-five.htm>).

Act 115 of 2010, Placement and Visitation with Siblings, requires the court at disposition and permanency review hearings to make additional judicial determinations if the child has siblings. Those determinations include whether reasonable efforts were made to place the child and siblings together and to ensure visitation between the child and sibling no less than twice a month.

The CCYA must ensure frequent and constructive use of parent-child visitation as a fundamental framework for reunification efforts. Visits must be carefully planned based on the child's developmental needs and used for both skill development and assessment of parental progress toward reuniting with their child. The frequency of visits in concurrent planning is based on the unique needs of the family and child rather than on arbitrary policy guidelines and all visits should be held in a family friendly setting. Visitation should be as frequent as possible, with a minimum of one visit every two weeks, with at least weekly visitation whenever possible for all families with a goal of reunification. The FSP and CPP should detail the current visitation plan as well as clear plans to provide more frequent and meaningful parent-child contact as the case progresses towards reunification.

Successful concurrent planning and visitation requires collaboration between the CCYA, the resource family, the child's family, and service providers. Resource families need to understand their role in concurrent planning and visitation, including that at times, they may be asked to supervise visits and/or have visits in their home between the child and his/her family.

Visits may be supervised or unsupervised. Not all children in out-of-home care require supervised visits. CCYAs must assess whether or not supervised visits are needed and if so, provide a child and family friendly place for the visits to occur. Whenever possible, visits should occur in the family home unless there are specific reasons not to do so. The location of visits should permit privacy and interaction and be only as restrictive as required to protect the child. Visit locations may include the parents' home, the resource parents' home, parks, restaurants, family centers, recreational activities, etc.

Supervised visitation is face-to-face contact between the parent and their children in out-of-home care that is scheduled in advance and held in the most family-like setting available. Interaction between the parent and children is monitored by a CCYA agency employee, a service provider employee, a resource parent, a biological family member, a family friend, or other individual approved by the court or CCYA.

Supervised visitation provides the CCYA with the ability to continually assess the parent-child relationship, the parent's protective capacities, and their readiness for reunification.

Unsupervised visitation is face-to-face contact between the parent and their children in out-of-home care that is usually scheduled in advance. Interaction is not monitored and the visit is not overseen, attended, or managed by agencies, resource families, other family members, or friends.

In cases where visitation is supervised, prior to reunification, agencies should plan to transition from supervised to unsupervised visits. This transition may include the use of mentored visitation. Mentored visitation is planned in advance with the parent's consent and is attended by an adult who is available to intervene as needed but whose primary role is to be a discreet participant who models correct parenting while allowing the parent the opportunity to practice their parenting skills.

In addition to regularly scheduled visits, parents should be encouraged to participate in all of their child's activities including extracurricular activities, medical appointments, sporting events, educational activities, and meetings. In addition to participation in extracurricular activities, families should be encouraged to maintain connection via mail, e-mail, social networking, and video conferencing whenever possible. In no case is a parent's participation in these activities to be viewed as a regular visit; participation in these extracurricular or electronic activities is in addition to, not instead of, regularly scheduled visits.

An electronic copy of the Family Reunification Through Visitation curriculum content, handouts, overheads, and resources offered by the PA CWRC can be found online at <http://www.pacwcbt.pitt.edu/Curriculum/209FmlyRnfctnThrhVsttn.html>.

5. Establishment of clear timelines for permanency decisions

Substitute care placements are intended to be temporary; the child must have a permanency goal established in a CPP and sanctioned by the court. Permanency hearings must occur every six months with proper notification to the parents/caregivers. (PA Juvenile Act, Section 6351 (f) (9)).

Section 103 of ASFA requires agencies to file petitions to terminate parental rights when a child has been in out-of-home care 15 of the most recent 22 months. Pennsylvania implemented this requirement by adding Section 6351(f) (9) of the Juvenile Act which reads as follows:

"...if the child has been in placement for at least 15 out of the last 22 months or the court has determined that aggravated circumstances exist and that reasonable efforts to prevent or eliminate the need to remove the child from the child's parent, guardian or custodian or to preserve and reunify the family need not to be made or continue to be made, whether the CCYA has filed or sought to join a petition to terminate parental rights

and to identify, recruit, process and approve a qualified family to adopt the child unless:

- The child is being cared for by a relative best suited for the physical, mental and moral welfare of the child;
- The CCYA has documented a compelling reason for determining that filing a petition to terminate parental rights would not serve the needs and welfare of the child; or
- The child's family has not been provided with necessary services to achieve the safe return to the child's parent, guardian or custodian within the time frames set forth in the permanency plan."

If a child cannot safely return home, then the CCYA must make reasonable efforts to find the child a permanent home. Unless the child falls within one of the three exceptions listed above, Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) petitions must be filed.

This provision does not intend to delay or to defer the filing of petitions to TPR when it is appropriate. When grounds exist for a child whom the CCYA would file for TPR, then the CCYA must file the petition at that point in time and not wait until the child has been in out-of-home care to meet the 15 out of 22 month requirement.

When a child has been in out-of-home care 15 of the most recent 22 months, the CCYA must file or join a petition to TPR (PA Juvenile Act, Section 6351 (f) (9)). The 22 month time frame is calculated from the date the child enters out-of-home care. In order to petition the court for TPR, the 15 months in out-of-home care **do need not be** consecutive; if there are interruptions in placement such as when the child returns home, those time periods may not count as part of the 15 months. Fifteen months only applies to the time the child is in out-of-home care. Fifteen months of actual out-of-home care time can accrue over a 22 month period to trigger the requirements of this section. A month is defined as 30 days.

Permanency should be achieved for a child within 12 months of out-of-home placement. If permanency has not been achieved for the child by the time a child has been in placement 15 out of the most recent 22 months, the court must determine at a permanency hearing whether the CCYA filed or has sought to join a petition to TPR and to identify, recruit, process, and approve a qualified family for the child unless one of the three exceptions apply. After the initial 15th month determination, the court must make the determination regarding TPR and the agency's attempt to provide a permanent family for the child at each permanency hearing that takes place after the initial 15th month court determination.

Timelines, including federal and state mandates and a schedule of anticipated court hearings, should be shared with family members of the child's parents and other permanency team members including kin who are actively participating in FGDM/FGC/ Teaming and concurrent planning efforts related to the child's permanency. These timelines are also an important component of full disclosure and must be shared with the child, the child's family, and the resource family.

6. Transparent written agreements and documentation

The FSP and CPP specify the actions and activities of all involved parties. If FGDM/FGC is utilized, the plan developed by the family and accepted by the CCYA, including the identified concurrent plan, should be incorporated into the FSP and/or CPP.

The concurrent plan for another permanency option is required by this policy to be included in both the FSP and CPP format. The CCYA responsible for the completion of the FSP and CPP must, in conjunction with the parents or legal guardian, child and substitute caregivers, identify both goals and both plans, including the objectives and tasks to be accomplished. The plans must meet the needs of the child and the family, including the emotional, psychological, physical, and educational needs of the youth. The plans should reflect the capabilities and strengths of all parties and should clearly recognize the youth's need for safety and permanency. Additionally, the FSP/ CPP shall include goals and objectives and the child's progress toward meeting those goals and objectives for the following:

- Participation in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities; and,
- For a child who is 14 years of age or older, providing opportunities to gain experience in mastering skills needed to transition to successful adulthood and managing freedom and responsibility.

The FSP and CPP can be based upon the plan developed and agreed to through the FGDM/FGC process.

The FSP and CPP should specify both short and long term objectives and provide service linkages such as connection of parents to behavioral health services, drug and alcohol services, and other family supports. The CCYA should document all information pertaining to a case as the case progresses, including the CCYAs reasonable efforts toward reunification. Documentation should be detailed and included in the case record. Documentation should include the services provided and the family's response to the services and visitation. The documentation can be used for future FSPs and CPPs and/or for court purposes.

The CCYA must ensure that parents are fully advised of the FSP and CPP, both permanency goals and plans contained therein, their responsibilities, and of the limited time period to achieve the specified actions in the plans. The FSP and CPP should clearly document the steps that must be taken by all parties, including the CCYA, in order for the child to safely return home. The parents must be told that if they fail to accomplish the steps outlined in the FSP for them to safely return the child home, the concurrent plan will prevail.

The concurrent plan to a goal of reunification could be adoption, placement with permanent legal custodian or fit and willing relative, or another planned permanent living arrangement, if the child is age 16 or older. If reunification and adoption have been ruled out by the court, whether or not termination of parental rights has occurred, a concurrent plan could be permanent legal custodianship. Likewise, a child with a

primary plan of permanent legal custodianship could have a concurrent plan of placement with a fit and willing relative.

Regardless, in all cases, the FSP and the CPP must clearly identify both the primary plan and the concurrent plan. Each plan must be clearly written with the objectives and the tasks or services for all parties to complete both plans clearly defined, as both the primary goal and the concurrent goal will be worked on simultaneously. For example, if a child is currently residing in a non-relative foster home and has a goal of reunification and resources are identified through family search and engagement and a FGDM/FGC meeting, the CCYA will ensure that the FSP and CPP clearly document the steps that must be taken by the parents, the child, the alternative permanency resource (i.e. aunt, grandmother, etc.), other team members, and the CCYA to help achieve both goals (see Attachment D).

To implement the requirements of concurrent planning into the FSP/ CPP the CCYA will:

- Review, and revise if necessary, the format of the FSP and CPP to make them compatible with concurrent planning. Both the FSP and CPP must identify each goal and the plans to accomplish both goals, including the steps needed to be taken by all parties to work simultaneously towards the completion of both;
- Submit the revised FSP and CPP format to the OCYF Regional Office for approval;
- Fully engage the parents, the child, the resource family, and other family members or kin in the development of a quality FSP/ CPP that addresses the family's individual needs and ensures a clear understanding of the simultaneous action plans required in the practice of concurrent planning to achieve permanency for the child; and
- Provide copies of the FSP and CPP to all involved parties (including the resource families and service providers) and the court at each hearing or review to ensure clear communication about the current status of the overall casework planning process and the dual directions being taken to achieve permanency for the child.

7. Committed collaboration between child, parents, relatives, child welfare agencies, the courts, resource families, service providers, and other stakeholders

The Courts and Attorneys

Courts and legal professionals are critical to successful concurrent planning. Judicial procedures that ensure effective concurrent planning enhance the likelihood of timely permanence.

The court's overarching role in concurrent planning is to determine that the appropriate primary permanency plan and the concurrent plan are appropriate and are established in a timely manner. The court also reviews the status and appropriateness

of the concurrent plan at all hearings which may occur as early as the dispositional hearing.

The CCYA should first present a thorough discussion of the primary permanency goal and the progress made toward achieving that goal to the court and all involved parties. The CCYA should then present the concurrent plan for permanency and the progress made toward achieving that goal in court for all parties.

Sufficient information should be presented by the CCYA to allow the court to monitor the progress being made toward achieving the primary permanency goal, as well as the steps being taken toward pursuing the concurrent plan and goal. Ideally, the court will ensure that the parents understand concurrent planning and reinforce its importance. All parties, including the CCYA and parents, should be held accountable for accessing and completing services in the FSP and the CPP. The court order should reflect the CCYA's concurrent plan.

The CCYA must ensure that the information presented in court is sufficient to enable the court to discuss concurrent planning with the parents and to enter both goals and plans into court orders at permanency hearings with a clear distinction between the primary permanency plan and the concurrent plan. The CCYA should ensure that caseworkers are prepared to fully address the case and the concurrent plan at all hearings. The PA Dependency Benchbook, issued by the AOPC in July 2010, includes key questions for the judge to ask during the disposition hearing including the following:

- What is the appropriate disposition of the case and long-term plan for the child?
- Where should the child be placed?
- Is this the least restrictive, most appropriate, most family-like placement option?
- Does the CCYA's proposed case plan reasonably address the problems and the needs of the child and parent?
- Has the agency made reasonable efforts to eliminate the need for placement or prevent the need for placement?
- What visitation with parents is appropriate?
- What visitation with siblings is appropriate?
- When will the case be reviewed?
- Has Family Finding been conducted to identify all possible family and caregivers?
- Has the family been offered FGDM/FGC?
- What is the concurrent plan for the child?
- Was the concurrent plan established in a timely manner and is it appropriate to the child's circumstances?

Additional questions that may be asked during permanency hearings include:

- Have all relatives been explored as permanency options and are any of them willing to adopt or be a permanent caregiver?

- Is the current caregiver willing to consider adoption and, if not, are they willing to be considered as a permanent caregiver?
- If adoption has been ruled out, why?
- What steps have been taken toward achieving the concurrent plan, specifically to identify and approve permanent caregivers?

To develop a county plan for full implementation of concurrent planning the CCYA should meet with court, legal staff, and other stakeholders to collaboratively address the following:

- Inform them of CCYA's plan to implement concurrent planning;
- Familiarize them with the revised FSP and CPP;
- Determine court, legal staff, and stakeholder training needs and collaboratively decide how to ensure such training is provided; and
- Consider preparing a mock case to illustrate differences in how concurrent planning will 'look' in court.

In some counties, the local Children's Roundtable may be a good venue through which the above may be accomplished. Each stakeholder needs to know and understand their role and responsibilities. Solicitors can help the CCYA with proper documentation, work with the court to know what information the judge would like to know about the permanency planning process, and work with the caseworkers to ensure they are ready to provide the information. Children's attorneys and guardians ad litem should be prepared to explain the process of concurrent planning to their clients, ensure the child is visiting with their parents and siblings, participate in FGDM/FGC and alert the court if the CCYA is not providing services to the child and family, and help access those services as appropriate.

Parents' attorneys can be instrumental in getting the commitment and action of their clients by practicing full disclosure with their clients and ensuring parents understand the following:

- The limited timeframe within which they have to work toward reunification;
- The need for their participation in case planning and the impact they can have in the process;
- The need for their involvement with service providers;
- The need for them to take an active role in identifying the concurrent plan for the child; and
- The need to have regular visits with their children.

A parent's attorney can also help the parent to access and comply with services and to identify relatives who will be supportive of the child and the parent. Lastly, while the parent's attorney should try to work with the CCYA, the attorney should also alert the court if the CCYA is not providing the necessary services to the parent in a timely manner.

Resource Families

Collaboration between resource parents and the children's families can have a significant impact in the overall course of placement and/or treatment. When the relationship is respectful, nonjudgmental, and supportive, all parents are able to do a better job in meeting the children's needs (Werth, 2008).

As mentioned previously, PA statute and policy require the CCYA to locate relatives and kin and give them first consideration as caregivers when a child enters care. However, for some children, placement with a relative or kin caregiver is not possible and they need to be placed in a non-relative foster home.

Creating a teaming approach with planned contact between the child's family and resource parents (both relative and non-relative) has shown that children return home sooner, have more stable placements, experience better emotional development, and are more successful in school. Children in foster care have a more positive experience if their birth parents and resource parents work together to ensure that the children feel loved and comfortable in their out-of-home placement (<http://www.nrcpfc.org/cpt/component-eight.htm>).

The CCYA should facilitate the relationship between the child's family and the resource family to enhance placement stability and expedite permanency, including coordinating and collaborating with the contracted service provider. While rare, it is recognized that there are instances where the resource family should not be closely involved with the child's family. Any situation that would prohibit the resource family from taking an active role in the concurrent plan or permanency process should be clearly documented in the record and addressed with the child's family and resource family.

To encourage interaction between resource families, particularly non-relative foster families and the children's families of origin, the CCYA should:

- Plan how to address concurrent planning in recruitment policies and practices;
- Assess the current agency resource families and private foster care providers to determine who are the best candidates to facilitate concurrent planning;
- Assess private foster care providers to determine which ones will best meet agency's needs for potential permanent homes and plan whether to change contracts or the Needs-Based Plan and Budget to accommodate any financial impact;
- Assess placement staff/units to determine how they can best be trained and enhanced to offer more time-intensive support to resource families;
- Ensure that all resource families, including non-relative foster families, are trained and approved to be both foster and adoptive families so that:
 - Children experience fewer moves while in care; and,
 - Are already in their permanent home should it become necessary to terminate parental rights; and

- Identify primary resource family recruitment and training needs for new and existing resource parents and staff who will be participants in concurrent planning implementation.

This concept of teaming is not new but now it has become a formalized part of the services offered to families. This first meeting or “icebreaker” is a facilitated, child-focused meeting held shortly after a child is placed (or replaced) in out-of-home care, lasting not more than 30 minutes. The meeting provides an opportunity for the resource family and the child’s parents to meet each other and to share information about the needs of the child. Thus, the “icebreaker” is a starting point for establishing communication and building a relationship between families (Werth, 2008).

The icebreaker meetings represent the first step in developing a working team consisting of the child’s parents and the resource parents. Once the child’s parents and resource parents have met, the teaming continues and the CCYA should ensure their resource parents and private children and youth agency resource parents, particularly those involved in concurrent planning, are trained and willing to do the following:

- Host and supervise visits in their homes between the child and the parents whenever it is feasible and there are no safety concerns for the resource family or child;
- Supplement parent/child contact by arranging and allowing telephone, e-mail communication, and text messages between visits for the child and the family (where age-appropriate);
- Engage in regular contact with the parents to keep them apprised of the child’s needs and progress;
- Serve as role models for the parents by allowing the parent to accompany them to doctor appointments, school meetings, etc.;
- Inform the parents of upcoming school and/or recreational activities in which parental participation may be appropriate; and
- Discuss the child’s right to participate in extracurricular, enrichment, cultural, and social activities and ask the parents if they have any concerns about the child participating in such activities.

Information on Bridging the Gap, which includes information on Icebreaker Meetings and how to change CCYA practice to include the on-going interaction, or teaming, between the child’s parents and resource parents is available online at <http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm?event=website.viewArticles&issueid=112§ionid=1&articleid=2757>

Additional information on Icebreaker Meetings, including an online toolkit and training video can also be found at <http://www.aecf.org/OurWork/ChildWelfarePermanence/IcebreakerMeetings.aspx>

Service Providers and Other Stakeholders

Collaboration between the CCYA and the providers they use to provide out-of-home services and other social services is another key to successful concurrent planning. CCYAs will need to meet with their service providers and other stakeholders to ensure that they understand concurrent planning and are able to implement the changes needed. For instance, private foster care agencies that have contracts with the CCYA to provide out-of-home care will need to ensure that their resource families receive training about concurrent planning and understand that it is expected that the role of the resource families will be expanded to include interaction with and mentoring of the child's family. Private agencies and residential facilities should be engaged in the concurrent planning process and participate in the teaming or case planning. For children who are dually adjudicated both dependent and delinquent or who receive shared case responsibility services, the juvenile probation office should be involved in the concurrent planning process. The CCYA needs to identify all stakeholders involved in the child and family's life and engage them in the process.

8. Specific recruitment, training, and retention of resource families

The specific recruitment of resource families for concurrent planning is a critical component to successful concurrent planning. In an effort to keep children who require out-of-home care in their home communities and schools, agencies should strive to recruit resource families from the same geographic area from which the majority of children in the CCYA's care live. Additionally, agencies should actively recruit resource families who are willing to provide care to sibling groups.

Resource families need initial as well as ongoing training and support. They will need to be educated about foster care, the grief and loss children in foster care experience and how to manage it, concurrent planning, and their role in the permanency process. Concurrent planning resource families should be trained and dually approved to both foster and adopt in order to reduce the number of moves a child experiences in foster care.

Each CCYA is expected to utilize kinship families in accordance with existing statute and policy whenever possible. The early use of kinship placements can ensure permanence for children if they are unable to return to their families of origin. When kinship placements are not an option, it is expected that CCYA will utilize other resource families that will provide the child with the best chance of being returned to their family of origin or remaining with the resource family on a permanent basis.

The CCYA must support and encourage resource and kinship families to be involved and included in working directly with the biological parents to teach skills and to communicate the children's needs whenever possible. Resource families should be active participants in the FGDM/FGC/Teaming meetings, the development of the FSP and CPP, and court hearings whenever possible.

For many resource families such close contact and mentoring of the child's family may be a scary premise. Resource families require training to understand the need for

a team approach to permanency and the need for them to be actively engaged with the child's family whenever possible. Several resources are available to CCYAs to help train their resource families including the Parents As Tender Healers (PATH) training offered by the PA State Resource Family Association (PSRFA) in partnership with Spaulding for Children. To obtain a free copy of the curriculum and training videos, CCYAs should contact PSRFA at 1-800-951-5151. Additional training resources can be found online at <http://www.nrcpfc.org/cpt/component-nine.htm>.

Kinship families often have unique needs and require additional supports. CCYAs should ensure that kinship families are provided with the community supports they need to safely provide for the child in their home and to maintain the placement for as long as necessary. In addition to community supports, CCYAs should ensure that formal kinship families are made aware of SWAN Post-Permanency Services and that they can access them by contacting the SWAN Helpline toll-free at 1-800-585-7926. SWAN Post-Permanency Services include advocacy, support groups, and respite and are provided free to formal kinship families through the SWAN prime contractor.

Concurrent Planning Resources:

- American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law:
http://www.americanbar.org/groups/child_law.html
- PA CWRC Reunification through Visitation Curriculum and Family Finding Curriculum :
<http://www.pacwcbt.pitt.edu/Curriculum/209FmlyRnfctnThrghVsttn.html>
- PA CWRC Integrating Concurrent Planning Curriculum:
http://www.pacwrc.pitt.edu/curriculum/209_CncrrntPlnng1/Cntnt/Cntnt0915.pdf
- The AOPC Office of Children and Families in the Courts PA Dependency Benchbook: <http://www.ocfcpacourts.us/judges-and-legal-professionals/benchbook-2>
- PSRF PATH training: www.psrfa.org (800) 951-5151.
- SWAN Legal Services Initiative, Diligent Search Packet, and direct services for children and families: www.diakon-swan.org
- National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections Web-Based Family Engagement Toolkit: <http://www.nrcpfc.org/fewpt/>
- Children's Bureau Express Bridging the Gap between Birth and Foster Parents:
<http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm?event=website.viewArticles&issueid=112§ionid=1&articleid=2757>
- National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections free online training on parent-child visitation: <http://training.childwelfare.gov/oltMain.cfm?z=z>

- National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections Web-Based Concurrent Planning Toolkit: <http://www.nrcpfc.org/cpt/overview.htm>
- The Child Welfare Practice and Policy Group Family Team Conferencing Handbook: http://www.cssp.org/publications/child-welfare/community-partnerships-for-the-protection-of-children/family_team_conferencing_handbook_promoting-safe-and-stable-families.pdf Juvenile Law Center <http://www.jlc.org>
- The Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Best Practice Guidelines for Family Involvement with Youth who are in Residential Facilities: [http://www.pccyfs.org/dpw_ocyfs/OMHSAS Bulletin 09-04 FamilyInvolvementRTFYouth.pdf](http://www.pccyfs.org/dpw_ocyfs/OMHSAS_Bulletin_09-04_FamilyInvolvementRTFYouth.pdf)
- Kids Voice <http://www.kidsvoice.org>

