

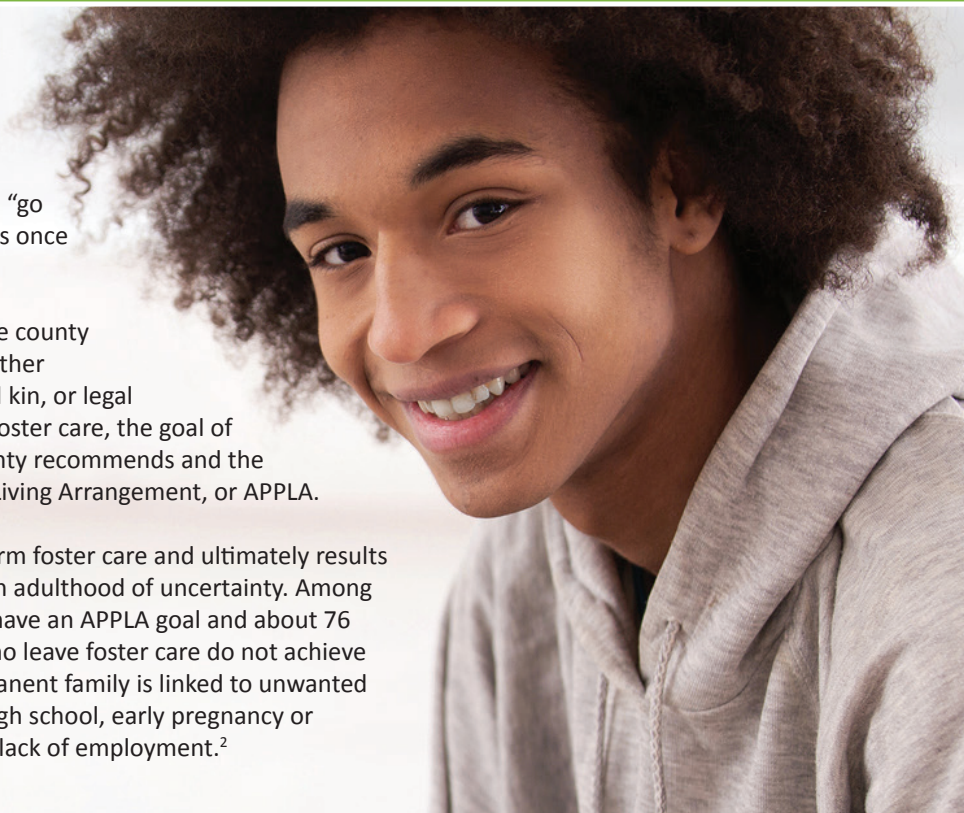
Eliminating APPLA for All Children



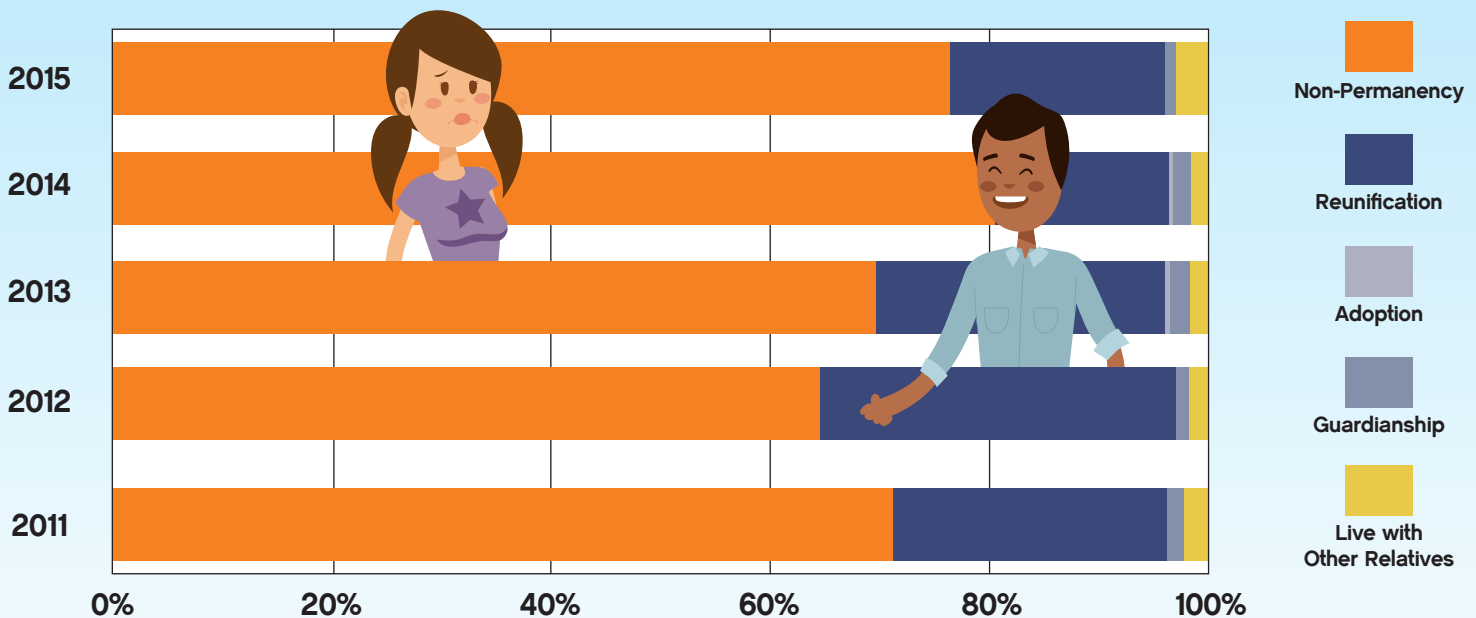
Every Pennsylvania child and youth in foster care has a court-ordered goal or outcome the child welfare agency is responsible for working toward. When families are in crisis and children must enter foster care, the most common court-ordered goal is to “go home” or to reunify children with parents or caregivers once the family setting is safe and stable.

Unfortunately, when reunification is not achievable the county child welfare agency works with the courts to find another family through adoption, placement with relatives and kin, or legal guardianship. But for far too many children placed in foster care, the goal of finding a permanent family is abandoned and the county recommends and the court orders the goal of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement, or APPLA.

Unfortunately, APPLA too often translates into long-term foster care and ultimately results in older youth aging out of the foster care system to an adulthood of uncertainty. Among Pennsylvania foster youth ages 16 to 20, about 1 in 5 have an APPLA goal and about 76 percent of children and youth with a goal of APPLA who leave foster care do not achieve permanency.¹ Aging out of foster care without a permanent family is linked to unwanted outcomes as a young adult, such as dropping out of high school, early pregnancy or parenthood, criminal involvement, homelessness and lack of employment.²



Children with APPLA by Discharge Reason



Source: AFCARS Report

PENNSYLVANIA *Can* AND *should* DO BETTER FOR THESE FOSTER YOUTH.

Moving in the Right Direction

Pennsylvania and many of its county child welfare agencies have made notable efforts in recent years to strengthen permanency efforts for foster children and youth, including:

Fully implementing the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act

Provisions in this 2008 federal law removed financial disincentives that have previously discouraged caring adults from providing permanent homes to foster youth. Now, Pennsylvania foster youth can stay in care until age 21 if they meet certain educational and/or treatment criteria, families willing to adopt or provide guardianship are eligible for financial assistance until age 21 and youth may re-enter foster care between the ages of 18 and 21.

Promoting the use of family finding and family conferencing

Enactment of [Act 55 of 2013](#) made a significant new effort to promote family finding in the state's foster care system. Family finding involves a process of searching for, identifying and engaging relatives and kin (or close family friends) of children in foster care. Family conferencing builds off of family finding by engaging these other family members and kin in developing a plan to support the children and family.

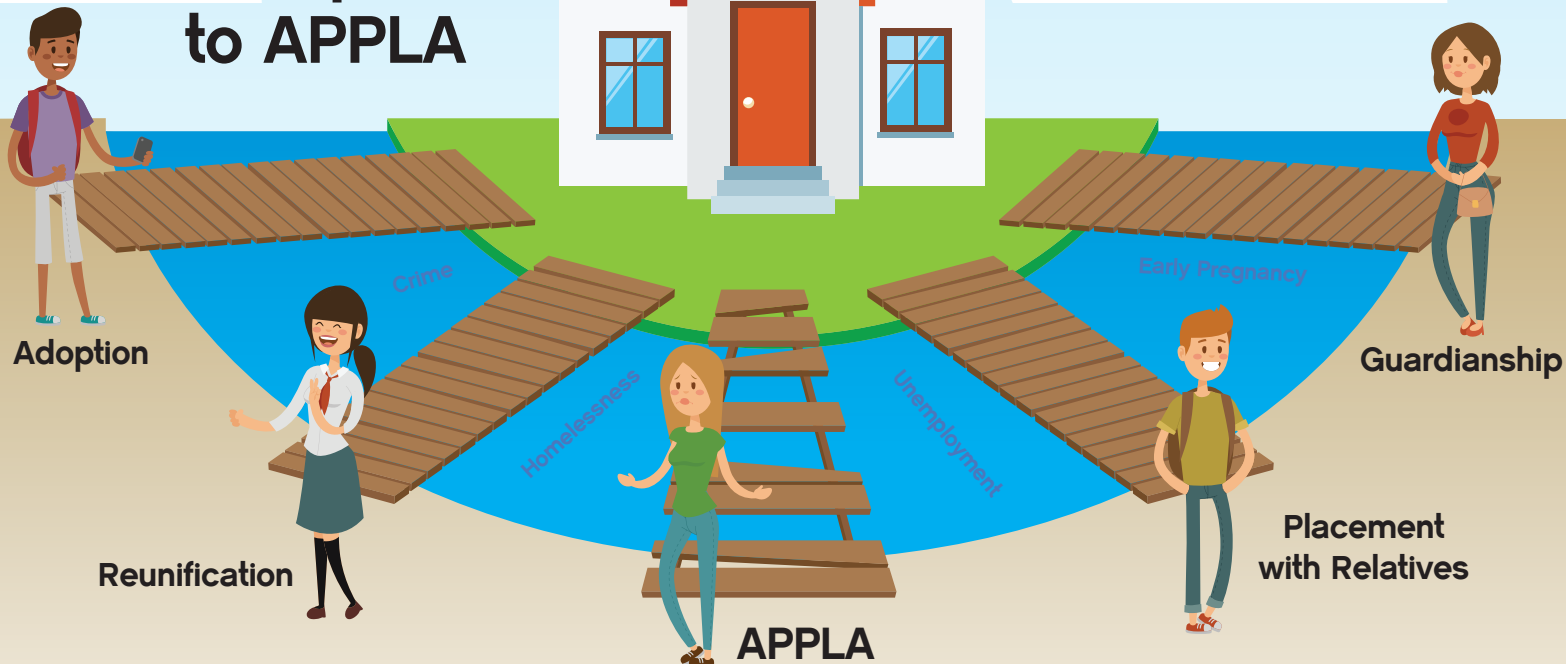
Using concurrent planning

This involves working towards one legal permanency goal (typically reunification) while at the same time establishing and implementing an alternative permanency goal and plan to move children/youth more quickly to a safe, stable, permanent family.³ All county child welfare agencies are now required to implement concurrent planning for children entering out-of-home care.⁴

Building on new federal laws

A 2015 Pennsylvania law goes beyond the requirements of the federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act by limiting APPLA's use to youth age 16 and older and encouraging efforts to identify supportive adults willing to be involved in a foster child's life. Through the enactment of [Act 94 of 2015](#), Pennsylvania became only the second state in the country to mandate that efforts to identify supportive adult connections be established for all youth with the goal of APPLA. In 2015, over 19 percent of youth age 16 and older had the goal of APPLA.⁵ We are encouraged that the implementation of Act 94 will lead to further reductions to the number of older youth with the court-order goal of APPLA and a supportive adult in their life.

Better options to APPLA



In partnership with the General Assembly and several administrations, Pennsylvania has gone beyond federal requirements and has passed laws and executed policies that help more children and youth achieve greater permanency. Our efforts are working to reduce Pennsylvania's use of APPLA. Last year, 4.8 percent of children and youth in foster care had the goal of APPLA,⁶ down from 9 percent in 2011, but there are still far too many youths that are unlikely to end up with a permanent family. Pennsylvania can do more.

Next Steps

There are targeted practices and policies the commonwealth can implement to deter, and ultimately eliminate, the use of APPLA.

1

Make the statutory changes necessary to eliminate the use of APPLA by the counties and courts as a permanency goal.

Pennsylvania could be a leader in helping children in foster care by being the first state to eliminate APPLA. Eliminating APPLA will require changes to Pennsylvania law. We applaud the General Assembly's commitment to exploring the possible elimination of the use of APPLA for the commonwealth's older youth and encourage continued focus on this issue after the Department of Human Services submits its report to the General Assembly required under [Act 94 of 2015](#).

2

Institute additional policies and practices that discontinue the use of APPLA and encourage greater permanency for children and youth.

Pennsylvania should consider strategies used successfully by other states to reduce APPLA. Multiple states report that implementing policies that utilize forms of strong oversight and monitoring have resulted in a significant reduction in the use of APPLA within their state. Such policies include mandating comprehensive and frequent case reviews for all children in out-of-home care, increased training and technical assistance when conducting APPLA case reviews and requiring a high-level administrative sign-off of all child welfare agency recommendations when assigning the goal of APPLA.

Pennsylvania also could expand the use of "permanency roundtables" - structured, professional case consultations designed to expedite permanency for children and youth in foster care - as an effective strategy to reduce APPLA. The Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN), in partnership with Casey Family Programs, already has implemented permanency roundtables in Allegheny, Bucks, Cumberland, Franklin, Lawrence, Mifflin and Washington counties. Additional counties should consider implementing permanency roundtables within their county, especially for their population of older youth.



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3

Continue to promote permanency goals that have better outcomes for children.

Promoting permanency requires child welfare agencies and the courts to function with a heightened sense of urgency to deliver the services that parents and children need. More must be done to educate and promote permanency goals that have better outcomes for children and youth, and permanency planning and services must be provided in a highly coordinated, efficient and effective manner.

Taken together, these recommendations can help Pennsylvania ensure every child in foster care eventually finds a permanent home. Pennsylvania children and youth in foster care deserve nothing less.



Source notes can be found at papartnerships.org

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