

New England Youth Permanency Convening

December 1, 21010

Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA)

Policy Round Table

Some thirty five child welfare professionals gathered to discuss the policies related to APPLA, acknowledging that far too many of their state's children and youth who are in care are assigned this federal "goal." Even when this designation is assigned with ongoing concurrent planning many participants nodded with grim agreement as one colleague observed "APPLA is not a goal; it is a fall back when we are stumped and then the kid gets stuck."

There was a robust discussion of the challenges that ensue when APPLA is the goal, evening temporarily for a child/youth. Noting that case practice is irregular in response to the assignment of APPLA, many observed that without intentional, persistent and creative case work that involves the youth, birth family and other stakeholders, youth with APPLA goals will inevitably "age out" of care without a permanent family or lifelong relationships for connection and support. As the conversation progressed, there was reluctant recognition by some, that in rare circumstances (an example was offered); an APPLA goal may afford a creative opportunity for a child or youth in highly unique circumstances to maintain permanent relationships that are "family-like" when other options bear even less desirable outcomes.

Successful strategies for mitigating the negative or unintended consequences of APPLA for most children and youth were shared among the group. Participants agreed that sharing ways of avoiding the use of APPLA in the first instance or moving "beyond APPLA" if designated as a goal, helped to stimulate their own thinking of how to improve their own state's practice and related policies. As one participant noted with determination, "Our goal should be to *not* have APPLA for *any* child or youth!!

Concerns were raised regarding the potential "disincentives" that are created when "benefits to remaining in care" such as access to Medicaid and post-secondary tuition assistance/waivers are not afforded to youth who leave care to a permanent, legal family. Brainstorming pointed to the need for policies which allowed access to such "in care benefits" for youth who have been in placement for extended periods and who are then placed with a permanent family, even if this isn't through adoption (most states afford access to post-permanency benefits like tuition assistance and Medicaid.)

There was broad consensus that effective policies and related practices are characterized by:

- *Legal* permanency is the preferred option for *all* children and youth
- An organizational culture that considers the accomplishment of legal permanency as an "urgent matter" for all children and youth.
- Establishment of a minimum age that APPLA can be considered (e.g. not under 16 years old)
- Requirement of high level, senior administrative approval of APPLA as a goal for each individual youth

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- Some form of team approach that includes the youth and appropriate family members including birth family members (even if a TPR has been accomplished) and kin
- Required concurrent planning
- Robust family finding that includes fathers/paternal relatives
- Ongoing and frequent team review of progress
- Youth participation in court hearings which are scheduled at least every 3 months until *legal* permanency is accomplished.

Strategies that support accomplishing both legal and relational permanency included:

- Establishment of clear, prescriptive actions that must be taken to avoid use of APPLA
- Support for re-visiting possible permanency options that were dismissed in the past (“People and their circumstances change!”)
- Family group conferencing for *all* youth both prior to APPLA designation and if given, after as well
- Aggressive family finding activities for all APPLA youth (e.g. “Extreme Recruiting.”)
- Thoughtful assessment of the commitment of those identified as possible lifelong connections (e.g. “BEST” tool)
- Establishment of ongoing, frequent and comprehensive court reviews of case planning with APPLA youth
- Training for social workers AND supervisors that help them learn how to “unpack the No.”
- Establishing robust tracking through the CQI system
- Make the establishment of legal or lifelong, dependable relationships *everyone’s* responsibility, not just those with the title of adolescent services or permanency workers. Prevent “siloed” thinking.
- Making permanency the goal for youth in the juvenile justice system as well as child protective services
- Engage attorneys, GALS and CASA workers in the drive for permanency as many will advocate for APPLA.
- Establish strong and accessible “post permanency” and “transitional” supports for the youth and family.
- Establish an organizational culture which encourages creative problem solving, broad participation of family and kin in finding solutions, “thinking outside the box” and celebrates permanency successes.

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