

Family Findings Pilot via SWAN Dollars

This would be a pilot project utilized through the SWAN NBB budget. These costs would not be incurred by the county NBB but rather through SWAN dollars.

Per the SWAN Bulletin the child population served through SWAN services is described as below:

- Are in the legal custody of county agencies and/or have a court ordered goal of adoption; or
- Are in need of post permanency services.

Purpose

To assure compliance with the Fostering Connections and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 by searching for relatives within the first 30 days of out of home placement. Also, currently goals outlined by Pennsylvania in partnership with the National Governors Association (NGA) is to reduce the number of children in out of home placement by 10% by 2010. This initiative is directly in line with current practice standards and will outlast the 2010 benchmark. Out of home placement numbers in County are decreasing, but still well above where the County would like to be. With such programming, we would expect to reduce the number of children in non-relative out of home care by another 10% by the end of FY 2011.

To pilot a Family Finding program in partnership with through County C&Y, SWAN Referrals would be utilized to begin intensive family findings efforts at County CYS via Diakon Adoption and Foster Care. Diakon Adoption and Foster Care would provide Family Finding efforts, family engagement, child profile, preparation and family preparation and profile services on a case by case basis for two populations of children served by CYS. Approximately 24 children and youth between January 2010 and December 2010 could be referred through the use of SWAN profiles at various stages of their involvement with the child welfare system. The Family Finding caseload would consist of “Front Door” children referred at the point of entering CYS custody and “Older Youth” children who have APPLA or adoption goals with or without TPR.

“Front Door” children referred for services would be provided Family Findings in an intensive way to meet set guidelines for identification and engagement of relatives within the first 30 days of their time in county custody to the fifth degree. Permanent Resources within family connections would be sought immediately upon family engagement in the process.

“Older Youth” children would be provided the same services but due to extensive periods of time spent in care and lost support systems for significant period of times, a benchmark of location and engagement of relatives would be set at no more than 60 days from time of referral to the program. Permanent Resources within family connections would be sought immediately upon family engagement in the process. If familial

reconnections do not produce relatives willing to provide formalized permanency but rather present as durable and continuous connections for the waiting youth, this would still be considered a success within the program for this population.

Timeframes for location and engagement of relatives for each child referred for family findings would be tracked to provide outcomes for the pilot project. A database will be created to provide identification of all relatives contacted and outcome, relatives attending engagement meetings, relatives presenting as permanent resources for the youth participating in the program with specific emphasis on the timeframes involved in identifying relatives and engaging them in the decision making process as well as the time elapsed from point of referral engagement of relatives, first engagement meetings and to placement of the child with fit and willing relative.

Process

For “Front Door” children with reunification goals and at point of intake, the CSR Unit of Service would be referred through SWAN to Diakon Adoption and Foster Care. U.S. Search and Accurint search services would be performed in conjunction with County and relatives investigated to the fifth degree within the 30 day benchmark set forth by the *Fostering Connections Act*. Interviews with family members, birth parents and those important in the child’s life would be held. Status of relatives would be reported to the county agency. Family engagement meetings would be scheduled and facilitated by the Family Finder and should include birth parents (if possible), family members, county C&Y workers, therapists, foster parents currently caring for the child, and significant persons in the child’s life. These meetings would be scheduled and held within the first 30 days if at all possible to provide timely permanence for children with return home goals.

Planning and decision making meetings facilitated by trained Family Group Decision Making professionals in county FGDM departments or through Diakon Adoption and Foster Care staff. These meetings would take place and, if in the best interest of the child, kin (other than birth parents) identified as permanent resources for the child would be assessed as appropriate through CYS. Child Profile and Child Preparation units of service through SWAN and referred to Diakon Adoption and Foster Care would be used to help ease transition to kin placement as well as reintroducing family members to the child. If necessary, on a case by case basis, CYS would refer the Family Profile Unit of Service through SWAN to Diakon Adoption and Foster Care. Post Permanency services through SWAN are available to all formalized kinship families and are available through Diakon Adoption and Foster Care.

Follow up to kinship reconnections and placement with relatives would be held twice or as needed within the time frame allowed for completion of the Child Specific Recruitment unit of service per SWAN benchmarks. Back up caregivers would be

identified during the planning and decision making process to assure that if the initial kinship placement is unsuccessful, another option for care is ready and willing to provide permanence or respite to assure that the child does not re-enter the foster care system.

SWAN NBB Cost for “Front Door” children:

Child Specific Recruitment – at point of referral to the program - \$3000.00

Child Profile (as needed) – at point of referral to the program - \$2,000.00

Child Preparation (as needed) – at point of identification of permanent kin family and/or prior to return home - \$2,000.00

Total Cost SWAN NBB: \$7,000.00 per child

Family Profile (As needed) \$2,500

With Additional Costs: \$9,500.00 per child

Follow Up Extended Engagement Services (As needed): Child Prep referral prior to leaving county custody - \$2,000.00

Total Cost to SWAN NBB with additional services and Follow up: \$11,500.00 per child

For “Older Youth” children with APPLA or Adoption Goals with or without TPR, the CSR Unit of Service would be referred through SWAN to Diakon Adoption and Foster Care. An intensive case record review would be conducted at the county agency to identify potential resources and to assess the significant needs of children who have remained in care for extended period of times and lost touch with their support systems. U.S. Search and Accurant search services in conjunction with C&Y would be performed and relatives investigated to the fifth degree. Status of relatives would be reported to the county agency.

Youth involved in Family Findings would be engaged in the process and presented with possible resources and reconnections. Their comfort level will be assessed to assure their “buy in” to the process. Research shows that children who have resolved issues around their birth families and reestablished connections fare better in adoptive stranger care placements and after finalization. This process would facilitate reconnections and if family members are not identified as long term resources, identified kin could be a support to non-relative placements. Family Finders would meet with youth referred to the program to introduce the process via “ The Loneliest People” CBS 60 Minutes segment video and explanation of efforts on behalf of the youth as well as identified resources and the family engagement and decision making process.

Planning and decision making meetings facilitated by trained Family Group Decision Making professionals in county FGDM departments or through Diakon Adoption and Foster Care staff and should include birth parents (if possible), family members, county C&Y workers, therapists, foster parents currently caring for the child, and significant persons in the child’s life. These meetings would be held within the first 30 – 60 days of

referral for CSR services to facilitate timely permanence for children with APPLA or Adoption goals. A benchmark of location of relatives and engagement in the planning process would be set at 60 days from point of referral for older youth.

Planning and decision making meetings would take place and, if in the best interest of the child, kin (other than birth parents) identified as permanent resources for the child would be referred for family profile through SWAN units of service. Family preparation, Child Preparation and Child Profile (optional) units of service through SWAN referred to Diakon Adoption and Foster Care would be used to help ease transition to kin placement, support families in developing new relationships with youth they have not been involved with for long periods of time, as well as reintroducing family members to the child. Finalization units of service through SWAN (optional) would be used to support kinship families during the finalization process if applicable. Post Permanency services through SWAN are available to all formalized kinship families. If family members reconnected with youth in the child welfare system do not present as permanent resources but only as durable connections and support systems for the youth, engagement meetings would involve identified stranger care adoptive resources and including planning around utilizing family members as support systems for the pre-adoptive family to prevent youth from re-entering children and youth custody. Establishment of durable connections for “Older Youth” involved in the program would still measure as a success in terms of outcomes.

Follow up to kinship reconnections and placement with relatives/and or non-relative resources would be held twice or as needed within the time frame allowed for completion of the Child Specific Recruitment unit of service per SWAN benchmarks. Back up caregivers would be identified during the planning and decision making process to assure that if the initial kinship or adoptive placement is unsuccessful, another option for care is ready and willing to provide permanence or respite to assure that the child does not re-enter the foster care system.

SWAN NBB Cost for “Older Youth” children:

Child Specific Recruitment – at point of referral to the program - \$3000.00

Child Preparation (as needed) – at point of identification of permanent kin family and relatives and/or prior to relative placement - \$2,000.00

Family Profile (as needed) – at point of location of permanent possible relative resource - \$2,500.00

Total Cost SWAN NBB: \$7,500.00 per child

Child Profile (As needed and if profile is more than three years old) – at point of referral to the program - \$2,000.00

Finalization (Optional) - \$3,500.00

With Additional Optional Costs: \$13,000.00 per child

Follow Up Extended Engagement Services (As needed): Child Prep referral prior to leaving county custody - \$2,000.00

Total Cost with additional optional services and extended engagement to SWAN NBB: \$15,000

Bottom Line Savings to County Agency for County NBB:

The dollars will easily be offset with avoiding court costs and expensive paid out of home placement settings, from foster care to residential and funding is from the SWAN NBB rather than county NBB. If 6 children avoided paid out of home care during that year at a lower level rate of foster care at \$69.00 day x 365 days = \$151,110. This estimate is of course conservative, in that many placement settings average a rate much higher than \$69.00 a day. In other terms, avoiding residential placement at \$200 a day for 5 children over the course of 6 months makes up the cost of utilizing SWAN dollars in the amounts as stated above.