



Iowa Children's Justice

Iowa Children's Justice Update

To inform the courts and other interested members of our state community, Iowa Children's Justice will send out periodic information about issues and activities related to Juvenile Court.

August 2009

APPLA – Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement

When to Choose APPLA

Prior to accepting a goal of APPLA, reunification, guardianship, permanent placement with a relative and adoption must be thoughtfully considered. Compelling reasons for using APPLA as a permanency goal must be supported with strong, case-specific facts and evidence that includes justification for decisions made and reasons why all other more permanent options for the child are not reasonable, appropriate or possible.

APPLA is generally viewed as an appropriate permanency goal for a very few youth – who are age 16 and over who have a signed APPLA agreement with a caretaker. It is **rarely**, if ever, an appropriate goal for children age 12 or younger. The Adoption & Safe Families Act (ASFA) statute explicitly prohibits long-term foster care as a permanency option because of its inherent instability.

APPLA is seldom the best permanency option that can be offered to a youth. When it is used it is often a 'default goal' at the time of the permanency hearing. There are a variety of reasons including: 1) reunification is no longer appropriate but another realistic permanency goal has not yet been identified; 2) adoption or guardianship has not been fully explored with the permanent family and/or the youth; 3) an adoptive option has not been identified; or 4) either the child or the caretaker family need the financial assistance provided by foster care.

In the fall of 2008, DHS conducted a study of children in care with a goal of APPLA. This study - which included a random selection of case file reviews and caseworker interviews - was intended to assess the appropriateness of the APPLA goal, the conditions under which it was most frequently utilized, and to help identify trends and possible training issues. This study also helped DHS to identify additional actions that could be taken toward more permanent goals for many children. DHS has initiated on-going practice discussions, practice bulletins, and training to increase awareness of the need to pursue all other options prior to using APPLA.

APPLA as a Permanency Option

Permanency for children is critical to positive outcomes and success in life. Research indicates that a child must have a relationship with at least one adult who is nurturing, protective and fosters trust and security over time to become a physiologically healthy adult. Stability of relationships is important because day to day consistency of care giving directly impacts a child's ability to trust, love and cope.

While APPLA provides a child with a living arrangement that is planned and permanent, unlike adoption or guardianship, APPLA does not guarantee lasting relationships or connections for a child. A reliable living arrangement is important, but stable caring relationships that last a lifetime are critical to healthy development.

Research has demonstrated that youth with an APPLA goal are more likely to be on their own upon reaching adulthood because permanent, lifelong relationships have not been established. These youth are also at high risk for incarceration, homelessness, physical or sexual victimization and mental health challenges.

What Contribution can Judges Make?

Judges can assure that more permanent options such as adoption, guardianship or permanent placement with a relative have been well researched, thoughtfully considered and clearly documented. Before accepting APPLA as the appropriate permanency goal, Judges might ask:

- What is the plan for this child and why is it in his/her best interest?
- What are the barriers to guardianship, adoption or permanent placement with relatives?
- Has there been a diligent, thorough, ongoing search for both maternal and paternal relatives of the child?
- Would a foster parent or other substitute caregiver be willing to enter into a written agreement documenting a long-term commitment to the child?

In the rare cases when APPLA is determined to be an appropriate permanency goal, post permanency review hearings should regularly re-visit the reasons for establishing the goal of APPLA and modify this goal when appropriate. Through judicial oversight, the court can help to assure that:

- The youth is supported by a functioning Transition Team or transitional living program that will assure a successful transition to adulthood
- Efforts have been made to identify and engage adults who can and will provide permanent connections that will last a lifetime for the youth
- Arrangements have been made to support ongoing connections and contacts with siblings who may be separated from the youth or adopted by other family members
- For ICWA eligible youth, the tribe has been properly noticed and involved in planning with the youth

For More Information about APPLA

For more information about APPLA, contact DHS Adoption Program Manager, Tracey Parker at tparker@dhs.state.ia.us

For More Information on Iowa Children's Justice

This e-letter may be forwarded to others you think might be interested. If you would like to add someone to our mailing list, please send their email address to jane.kieler@iowacourts.gov
