

**Pennsylvania Roundtables for Children's Initiative  
Statewide Roundtable Meeting Minutes  
Hershey, Pennsylvania  
June 23, 2008**

**Representatives of the Leadership Roundtables in attendance:**

Leadership Roundtable 1

Laurie O'Connor, Montgomery County  
Cynthia Stoltz, Allegheny County

Leadership Roundtable 2

Rachael Lord, Westmoreland County  
Honorable Leslie Gorbey, Lancaster County

Leadership Roundtable 3

Honorable Brian Johnson, Lehigh County  
Honorable Todd Hoover, Dauphin County  
Peter Vriens, Dauphin County

Leadership Roundtable 4

Honorable Chester Harhut, Lackawanna County  
Honorable Mark Mascara, Washington County  
Honorable Kelly Streib, Butler County  
William Browning, Lackawanna County

Leadership Roundtable 5

John Perrot, Fayette County

Leadership Roundtable 6

Honorable Charles Saylor, Northumberland County  
Richard Saylor, Lycoming County

Leadership Roundtable 7

Honorable Carol Hanna, Indiana County  
Honorable Oliver Lobaugh, Venango County  
David Schwille, Venango County  
Kerith Strano Taylor, Jefferson County

Leadership Roundtable 8

Honorable Scott Naus  
Diana Robinson, Tioga County  
Sandra Olson, Tioga County  
Lisa Wilcox, Sullivan County

**Permanent State Roundtable Members:**

Honorable Kim Berkeley Clark, Allegheny County  
Honorable Kevin Dougherty, Philadelphia County  
Marc Cherna, Allegheny County CYF  
Ann Marie Ambrose, Philadelphia County

**Additional Presenters:**

Honorable Maureen Lally-Green, Superior Court of Pennsylvania  
Honorable Thomas Kistler, Centre County  
Dean Phillips, Esq. Appellate Courts Rules Committee

**Invited Guests:**

Melita Jordan, Director of Family Health, for Dr. Calvin Johnson, Secretary of Health  
Frank Cervone, Executive Director, Support Center for Child Advocates  
Jim Anderson, Executive Director, Juvenile Court Judges Commission  
Dale McClain, President, Pennsylvania Bar Association  
Mimi Laver, J.D., American Bar Association  
Richard Gold, Deputy Secretary, Office of Children, Youth and Families  
Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare  
Honorable George Hartwick, III Dauphin County Board of Commissioners

**Members of the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts:**

Honorable Max Baer, Justice, Supreme Court of Pennsylvania  
Michele Makray, Pennsylvania Supreme Court  
Zygmunt A. Pines, Esq. Court Administrator of Pennsylvania  
Joseph Mittleman, Director of Judicial Programs  
Sandy Moore, Administrator, Office of Children and Families in the Courts  
Ralph Hunsicker, Judicial Automation Division  
Barbara Holmes, Judicial Automation Division  
Angelo Santore, Judicial Analyst, Office of Children and Families in the Courts  
Elke Moyer, Administrative Assistant, Office of Children and Families in the Courts

## **Welcome, Introductions and Opening Remarks (Sandy Moore and Justice Baer)**

The meeting began with Sandy Moore, Administrator for the Office of Children & Families in the Courts, welcoming all participants. Ms. Moore thanked everyone for their active participation in Leadership Roundtables during the past year and noted the historic nature of this second Statewide Roundtable meeting.

Statewide Roundtable participants next introduced themselves noting their position, their county and their Leadership Roundtable.

Next Justice Baer made brief opening remarks. Justice Baer thanked everyone for attending today's meeting and provided regrets for Senator Greenleaf, who was unable to attend due to intense budget negotiations underway. Justice Baer spoke to the excitement that has grown regarding this initiative since last year's meeting and noted that the OCFC and he have received many inquiries from individuals/groups wanting to join our efforts. Most notably the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP) voiced a strong interest to be actively involved. As such, three county commissioners were invited to join the group. Justice Baer specifically thanked Commissioner George Hartwick, III, for representing the CCAP at today's Statewide Roundtable meeting.

Justice Baer further acknowledged the vast array of items currently underway, which were demonstrated in such a full agenda for the day. He emphasized the critical importance of our Statewide Roundtable and the decision-making status of the group, reminding all of the priorities established at last year's meeting including specific practices (Family Finding, Family Group Decision Making & Family Development Credentialing), enhanced judicial oversight/leadership, development of a Dependency Bench Book, an expedited appeals process, a plenary session/conference for dependency, and a philosophical framework for OCFC and a Dependency Court data system.

Without repeating history, Ms. Moore next highlighted the specific activity that has occurred with regard to the statewide automated Dependency Court Data System. Ms. Moore briefly reviewed the need for a statewide data system, the decision made at last year's Roundtable meeting regarding such and, the current status of the system's roll-out. She further thanked the three pilot counties, specifically acknowledging Judge Mascara from Washington County for leading the system implementation. Ms. Moore next asked the AOPC's Judicial Automation staff to provide a more detailed account of system development & implementation.

## **CPCMS – Dependency Data System (Ralph Hunsicker, AOPC)**

Mr. Ralph Hunsicker, Senior Projects Manager, AOPC Judicial Automation Department, provided an update as to the progress thus far in rolling out the Dependency Data System. Mr. Hunsicker provided a brief overview, discussed

system functionality, and updated members concerning the progress of site visits, training and county implementation. To date, 41 county site visits were completed with another 16 scheduled. There are currently nine counties actively utilizing the system with an additional 32 counties schedule to go live. Mr. Hunsicker advised that overall implementation has gone smoothly. Many suggested changes have been made to the system, based on county input. At this point, all change requests are being reviewed by the Juvenile Rules Committee and the Office of Children, Youth & Families (those that have potential fiscal implications) prior to changes being made.

In addition to the many successes of system roll-out, concerns were shared. One Roundtable member voiced concern regarding court orders being completed within the 48 hour timeframe. It was clarified that the 48 hour timeframe is in place as a result of the Rules of Juvenile Court Procedures – Dependency Matters, not a result of the Dependency Data System. After some discussion, most anticipated the data system would help courts meet the 48 hour timeframe.

Next, Sandy Moore shared that the forms seem to have been of significant concern for some counties. She assured the group that as AOPC's Automation staff complete county site visits, all concerns/questions will be addressed. Ms. Moore explained that the Judicial Automation staff is working diligently with each county to help meet its needs. At this point, Judge Mascara stressed the cooperative nature of the Automation staff's work with Washington County and his appreciation of such.

Finally, there was discussion regarding resources available to assist with implementation of the system. These include OCFC funds to meet computer equipment needs and to assist in data entry. Sandy encouraged counties to request any assistance needed to elevate the usefulness and accuracy of the system.

### **OCYF/Court Partnership (Richard Gold, Deputy Secretary for Children, Youth and Families)**

In addition to data, partnerships between stakeholders are necessary to achieve success for PA's children. To this end, Dept. Secretary Richard Gold shared his belief that a strong partnership between OCYF, OCFC and county Dependency courts is critical to the well-being, safety and permanence of children. Dept. Secretary Gold highlighted how this relationship was developed and is being sustained through regular meetings & discussion as well as joint planning & implementation of identified priorities.

Dept. Secretary Gold emphasized OCYF's expectation that all counties and placement providers will be required to provide child-specific outcomes, which will be shared with the public. Additionally, the Deputy Secretary advised that he will be conducting pre-needs based budget meeting with ten counties. This will

provide direct communication between OCYF and these counties to ask & have answered county specific questions. Finally, he will be conducting a post needs based budget meeting with 20 counties.

Dept Secretary Gold next discussed steps he is taking to rescind and rewrite a current bulletin that does not allow parent representation to be funded through the NBB. The revision to this bulletin will allow for child, parent and county representation to be funded through the NBB. He hopes this will be of assistance to counties, courts and families.

Dept. Secretary Gold next shared information regarding the pending federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). The three counties selected for the federal review include: Philadelphia, Allegheny and Northumberland. He explained while Pennsylvania will be the 24<sup>th</sup> State to be reviewed in this second round of the CFSR and, to date, no state has fully passed the review; although PA will try its best for success.

Finally, Dept. Secretary Gold shared his experience/perception of the two Leadership Roundtable Meetings he attended. He spoke to the enthusiasm of both groups and the relationships being enhanced. He strongly urged the Statewide Roundtable to support mandatory attendance of both the Dependency Judge and their Children & Youth Administrator, emphasizing that lasting, positive change for children will occur most effectively when the court /child welfare system partnership is strengthened and communication enhanced.

### **Expedited Appeals Process (Honorable Maureen Lally-Green, Superior Court of Pennsylvania)**

The Roundtable next heard from Superior Court Judge Maureen Lally-Green, chair of the dependency sub-committee working on the issue of an expedited dependency appeals. Judge Lally-Green reported on the sub-committee's progress in developing draft rules to expedite the appeals process. Some of the draft Rule changes include:

- ◆ Requiring the filing of statements of matters complained of on appeal automatically.
- ◆ Urging trial court's to explain their decisions on the record, in lieu of writing separate opinions
- ◆ Reducing the time needed to list cases
- ◆ Reducing the time for briefings

Judge Lally-Green was very interested in suggestions and comments from the Statewide Roundtable. The sub-committee anticipated sharing a draft of the Rule changes at the upcoming Pennsylvania State Trial Court Judges Conference, while in due course publishing the proposals, making final changes and recommending them to the Supreme Court for implementation.

Justice Baer shared concerns regarding the difficulty in producing timely transcripts. He discussed the potential for “real time” transcribing and advised the OCFC may be able to assist counties in implementing this process, if needed.

Judge Grobey posed a question to the group related to processes being used for parent representation. Deputy Secretary Gold reminded the group that parent attorney costs can be included in the Needs Based Plan & Budget. Mimi Laver shared that there will be an upcoming conference for parent advocates.

\*Members of the Roundtable suggested this be a topic item for the Fall Leadership Roundtables.

### **Pennsylvania Permanency Practice Initiative (PPPI)**

A panel of Roundtable members next discussed the Pennsylvania Permanency Practice Initiative. Sandy began the discussion, with an overview of the decisions and priorities set by the Statewide Roundtable during the June 2007 meeting, which included Family Group Decision Making, Family Finding and Family Development Credentialing, as well as enhanced judicial oversight/leadership, expanded judicial education, and expedited appeals. To this end, much has occurred.

Peter Vriens, Director of the Dauphin County Human Services & Co-Chair of the Pennsylvania Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) Statewide Leadership Team, highlighted the practice and the activity which occurred following the June 2007 Statewide Roundtable meeting. He discussed the Leadership Team, the Statewide Implementation Team and upcoming meetings. He highlighted the joint conference in November 2007, which brought together judicial/agency teams from approximately 45 counties and explained why FGDM is the foundational practice for the PPPI.

Angelo Santore, OCFC Judicial Program Analyst, then shared information regarding the practice of Family Finding. The practice was developed by Kevin Campbell of the state of Washington. The practice is designed to find extended family members to assist children in care. It incorporates a search engine, some detective work and good social work practice in finding family members. While it has been very successful in other states, no county in Pennsylvania is currently utilizing this practice.

Questions were raised regarding whether it would be feasible to allow county departments beyond C&Y to use Family Finding similar to how FGDM is being used in different scenarios. After some discussion, it was clarified that while counties certainly could use FF in other areas, the PPPI is focused on finding family members to provide permanency for abused & neglected children.

At this point, Roundtable members shared comments regarding the significant potential the PPPI has in safely reducing placements and the need to reward rather than penalize counties for doing so. Commissioner Hartwick expressed strong belief that it was important for County Commissioners to understand the fiscal implications/possibilities. Deputy Secretary Gold assured the group that Act 148 and the associated general fund match savings could be re-invested, provided the county was demonstrating positive outcomes related to children and families. He referred to this process as the Incentive Fund.

Finally Judge Mascara, Washington County, discussed the importance of enhanced judicial oversight in court active cases. He shared his very positive experience with three month review, and recommended them to all.

At this point, a brief break was taken for lunch and networking among members.

Upon reconvening the group, a new element of our Children's Roundtable Initiative was introduced...that of Leadership Roundtable Co-chairs. Roundtable Co-chairs were asked to provide a brief description of their particular group and highlights from their Spring Leadership meeting.

### **Leadership Roundtable Reports**

#### **Roundtable 1 (Judge Dougherty, Philadelphia County and Cynthia Stoltz, Allegheny County)**

This Leadership Roundtable discussed the CPCMS dependency module and implementation issues for large counties; the need for a clear OCFC philosophy similar to the BARJ principles; components of the Pennsylvania Permanency Practice Initiative and specific county initiatives. Of great benefit to group members was the communication, relationships and sharing that is occurring between judicial districts/counties.

#### **Roundtable 2 (Judge Gorbey, Lancaster County)**

Topics discussed during the Leadership Roundtable Meeting included: CPCMS, ICPC and the need for/use of interpreters. Judge Gorbey described the networking between jurisdictions which has enabled counties to learn from each other, discussing common issues and concerns. One example given was related to an immigration issue. Ironically, the day immediately following the Leadership Roundtable an immigration issue arose in one of the participating counties for the first time, and as a result of the Leadership discussions, the judge was able to connect with experienced colleagues and help a child who had been abused and now was facing deportation.

### Roundtable 3 (Judge Johnson, Lehigh County and Peter Vriens, Dauphin County)

Roundtable 3 Co-chairs focused on the excitement of their roundtable and the growth that is occurring across jurisdictions. The co-chairs reported being motivated and seeing the seeds taking root and ideas becoming concrete actions. The Roundtable addressed and discussed best practice issues. The co-chairs further highlighted how helpful the local Children's Roundtables have been to the Leadership discussions.

### Roundtable 4 (Judge Mascara, Washington County and Bill Browning, Lackawanna County)

This Roundtable discussed the enhanced and more frequent court review component of the PPPI. Co-chairs reported that Washington, Beaver and Lackawanna Counties have implemented more frequent court oversight reviews, all with no additional resources. In fact, Lackawanna has implemented a Reunification Court with weekly update/progress reviews by the judge. Additional counties within this Roundtable, including Butler County, are considering the enhanced review timeframe.

### Roundtable 5 (John Perrot, Fayette County)

Topics discussed during Leadership Roundtable 5 included issues related to truancy and the educational needs of abused/neglected youth. Additionally, many counties in this Leadership Roundtable are in the beginning stages of implementing Family Group Conferencing. Mr. Perrot echoed the sentiments of other Leadership Roundtables, sharing that Roundtable 5 members are very excited about the positive things happening in the counties. Additionally, he shared that the Seeds of Hope Program and an additional partnership with Penn State regarding safe parenting centers has been incredibly successful in Fayette County.

### Roundtable 6 (Judge Saylor, Northampton County and Rick Saylor, Lycoming County C&Y Director)

Topics discussed during Leadership Roundtable 6 mirrored many of the earlier roundtable discussions. However of special note to this Leadership Roundtable was the area of partnerships with the education community. Roundtable 6 focused much energy and discussion on truancy, school to school transfers and the need to network with schools. Indeed, out of this Roundtable came the possibility of pursuing legislation which would allow youth placed in foster care to maintain home school enrollment if deemed by a court to be in the youth's best interest. While many details regarding this idea need to be fine tuned, it is being explored by JCJC as a potential legislative agenda.

\*At this point, there appeared to be consensus amongst Statewide Roundtable members that the educational needs and consistency in education for foster youth was an issue/need for all Roundtables and warrants further exploration.

#### Roundtable 7 (Judge Hanna, Indiana County)

Judge Hanna provided the update for Roundtable 7 explaining that the Roundtable was very energetic, enthusiastic and well-represented. Major areas of discussion during the Spring Leadership meeting included the impact of ICPC, the PPPI, the implementation of 3 month court reviews, FGDM and CASA. Additionally the Roundtable had several counties involved in the ABA Barriers to Permanency Project.

#### Roundtable 8 (Judge Naus, Columbia/Montour Counties and Lisa Wilcox, Sullivan County)

Roundtable Co-chairs reported significant enthusiasm from their Spring Leadership meeting, realizing much can be done to move children more quickly into a permanent home. This group emphasized the need for C&Y/Courts to work collectively to advance permanency for children. Indeed, as current president of PCYA, Lisa is encouraging other administrators to be actively involved with their local Children's Roundtable. Co-chairs also shared their observation that the diversity of membership within their Leadership Roundtable was a significant strength, adding different perspectives to the discussions.

### **Roundtables Structure**

Upon completion of the Roundtable Updates, the group next engaged in a lively and thoughtful discussion regarding the Children's Roundtable Initiative structure. All agreed the structure, allowing for local concerns/solutions to be discussed at a local and among like-size counties from throughout the state, and then elevated to the Statewide Roundtable as necessary, appears to be working well for the Commonwealth.

The group then discussed what, if any, direction/guidance it wanted to provide to the various tiers of the Roundtable structure. By consensus, the state roundtable agreed that it did want to provide little specific direction to local Children's Roundtable. However, the group did decide that all local Children's Roundtables should be convened by the Dependency Judge and include the children and youth administrator, as well as all other persons needed to impact outcomes for abused & neglected children.

The group, also by consensus, agreed that more direction was needed for the Leadership Roundtable level of the structure. After some discussion, it was decided that three members from each children's roundtable should participate in the Leadership Roundtables. These members should include the dependency

judge, the children & youth administrator and a third person from the local Children's Roundtable, who could be varied from meeting to meeting.

Finally, the group discussed representation on the Statewide Roundtable. Again by consensus, the group agreed that generally there should be only two representatives from roundtables one through six, with some additional members from roundtables seven and eight in recognition that these contain far more counties/judicial districts. The basis for this decision was concern that the group could grow so large as to inhibit free-flowing dialogue. Thus, exceptions would be at the discretion of Sandy Moore, as she had the best overview of the forming group. Further, it was agreed that all statewide roundtable members representing leadership roundtables must be members of and attend their respective Leadership Roundtables. If a designated leadership roundtable member could not make a state roundtable meeting, it was for the leadership roundtable chair to designate a substitute

### **OCFC Structure, Responsibilities and Philosophical Foundation**

Roundtable members next discussed specific issues pertaining to the Office of Children & Families in the Courts. While it was clear to all present that much is occurring, development of an infrastructure that would support the work was explored. Again after significant and careful examination, with many insightful suggestions, the group provided the following direction/guidance: expansion of the office should be gradual and only as needed to support the work activity, with emphasis being placed initially on strengthening the central office. Additionally, there was consensus to develop a prototype which would place one staff person regionally.

\*Additionally, there was discussion regarding what OCFC staff activities would be most helpful to the Children's Roundtable Initiative and the overall Court Improvement Project. After some discussion, the group recommended that this topic be made an agenda item for the Fall Leadership Roundtable meetings.

Next the group had a comprehensive discussion regarding a philosophical foundation for the OCFC. This conversation included issues of scope, focus and outcomes. Jim Anderson, JCJC, shared specific developmental steps taken to create the BARJ concept; however stressed that C&Y has a very different federal/state foundation than what was available to juvenile justice when BARJ was developed. The group agreed that the foundation needed to include at its core, concepts of safety, well-being, and permanence. The group also reviewed the logo concepts developed to date, and made numerous suggestions. All supported the idea of developing "guiding principles" to make any logo/acronym meaningful, rather than merely symbolic.

\*This too was recommended for the Fall Leadership Roundtable agenda as well as a smaller workgroup for further development.

At this point, Sandy Moore highlighted the various workgroups being formed to implement various Statewide Roundtable priorities. These include the Dependency Bench -Book, the Education Curriculum Development, the 2009 Dependency Conference Planning and now, the Philosophical Foundation sub-committees. Sandy next distributed volunteer sign-up sheets for those interested in two of the items (Bench Book and Conference Planning) explaining email requests for involvement would be forthcoming from her office regarding individuals needed for the other subcommittees.

At the conclusion of these helpful decision-making discussions, Justice Baer re-introduced the hope that OCFC will eventually be in a position to facilitate change/enhancements in custody matters Justice Baer explained the creation of a Pennsylvania Bar Association workgroup, led by Judge Thomas King Kistler, which was tasked with researching best practices related to custody matters and developing a report outlining these practices and providing additional reform recommendations. Justice Baer further noted that the report has yet to be reviewed by the Supreme Court and, as such, is solely the work of the committee. However, felt members of the Statewide Roundtable should be aware of such. To that end, Judge Kistler had been invited to provide a general overview of the report and answer any questions from the membership.

### **Custody Report (Judge Kistler – Centre County)**

At this point, Judge Kistler provided an excellent synopsis of the Custody Report which was finalized in May, 2007. Judge Kistler and other Roundtable members emphasized the potential controversy of the report and asked that it be taken as recommendations only. At the request of Roundtable members, Judge Kistler agreed to send an electronic copy of the report to the OCFC for dissemination to Statewide Roundtable members.

### **Upcoming Events:**

Statewide Roundtable members were advised of the following dates and encouraged to participate, if possible:

**August 29, 2008** - Lackawanna County is hosting a conference on “The Four Underpinnings of Human Behavior” by Horacio Sanchez, President and CEO of Resiliency, Inc.

**November 13 & 14, 2008** - Making Lasting Change Through Family Connections, which will highlight Kevin Campbell, founder of Family Finding and Evelyn Harris, “Godmother of Family Development Credentialing” (Nittany Lion Inn, State College)

**June 29, 2009** - Statewide Roundtable meeting (Harrisburg area)\*

**September 24, 25 & 26, 2009** - First Annual Pennsylvania Dependency Conference (Omni Hotel, Pittsburgh)

Finally, Sandy thanked all in attendance for yet another exceptional day of discussion, exploration, and decision-making. She emphasized the critical importance of the group as we move forward permanency outcomes for Pennsylvania's abused & neglected children. Additionally, Sandy encouraged Roundtable members to utilize the information from today's meeting to continue helping children & families in their local communities. Finally, she encouraged all to call upon the staff of the OCFC, if needed.

The day closed with Justice Baer's genuine recognition and appreciation for the extensive discussion, clear decision-making, and continued support demonstrated during today's meeting. He further acknowledged the progress made to date as well as the work yet to be done, but did so with full confidence in the capacity, commitment and enthusiasm of everyone involved.

**\*Please note the date of next year's Statewide Roundtable has changed to May 28 & 29, 2009 at the Sheraton in Harrisburg.**