

PENNSYLVANIA'S COURT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT
TRAINING GRANT
PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR
FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR
2006



AOPC

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

*Office of Children and
Families in the Courts*

Pursuant to ACF ACYF-CB-PI-06-05, Pennsylvania's Court Improvement Project (CIP) hereby submits its annual Program Assessment Report for the CIP Training Grant for Federal Fiscal Year 2006 to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Administration of Children and Families (ACF) Regional Administrator Alan Ademski as well as to the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues. This report covers all activities supported by CIP Training Grant funds and how these activities help provide for the safety, Permanency and Well-Being of children and youth in Pennsylvania's foster care system.

I. A description of the needs that the State court has addressed with CIP training grant funds, the programs and activities that the state court developed and implemented to address the needs, and the resultant outcomes

The following list represents those needs that Pennsylvania's CIP has identified and addressed throughout the fiscal year. These needs were identified as a result of the recommendations of the 2005 CIP Reassessment produced by the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) as well as from the action plan formulated by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) and Department of Public Welfare (DPW) officials who attended the national Summit on Justice for Children held in Minnesota in 2005. Additional needs were identified by sessions of the Pennsylvania Bar Association Children's Rights Committee; discussions with Dependency Court Judges, ongoing meetings with DPW Officials; and information, suggestions and ideas gleaned from Pennsylvania's Children Roundtables Initiative. Some of these identified needs and issues related to training were:

- Judges being assigned to dependency court with little or no training in dependency law and procedure and child well-being.
- Lack of case management skills in judges and administrators.
- Inadequate training of attorneys.
- Insufficient numbers of attorneys, especially children's attorneys.
- Dearth of judicial and legal training on dealing with special needs children.
- Insufficient judicial resources, including properly trained masters.
- Lack of awareness of judges of the effect of their decisions on the child's safety, permanency and well-being, depending on the stage of their development.

Based on these needs and issues Pennsylvania's CIP then developed activities and the resulting outcomes for each of those activities.

1. Identify meaningful training topics and initiatives; Develop multi-faceted curricula

The OCFC has met with Stephen M. Feiler, Ph.D, Director of the AOPC's Judicial Education Department to identify comprehensive training opportunities that currently exist, and to begin development of training curricula for judges, attorneys, child welfare officials and other stakeholders regarding dependency court cases.

OCFC has also initiated work with national resources, such as the American Bar Association, Center on Children and the Law; National Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues; National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning. OCFC is committed to providing dependency courts in Pennsylvania with a national perspective as well as a state perspective.

Some of the topic areas where trainings are being developed include:

- Etiology/symptoms of abuse and neglect and promising interventions associated with emotional/behavioral deficits that contribute to maltreatment
- Behavioral expectations of children and youth based upon cognitive developmental stages
- Strategies to deal with emotional issues and outbursts
- Encouraging active and meaningful children and youth participation in permanency hearings
- Family Group Decision Making

Additional training opportunities will be identified through the recommendations of the Statewide Interdisciplinary Advisory Committee (State Roundtable).

2. Develop comprehensive training for Judges, attorneys and stakeholders involved in dependency cases

Every Saturday of the Pennsylvania State Trial Judges Conference, which is held annually, has been designated as a Dependency Judges luncheon and training. This year Dr. Cindy Christian, Chair, Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention at Children's Hospital of Philadelphia presented "What Doctors Need to Know."

The OCFC along with the Pennsylvania Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) Leadership Team has sponsored the 2007 Expanding FGDM in Pennsylvania Conference, which occurred November 13 and 14, 2007. Planning for this conference began in the summer of 2007 and was coordinated by the OCFC and the FGDM State Leadership Team. The

conference goal was to introduce the practice of FGDM to those unfamiliar with the practice while, simultaneously, enhancing and expanding the knowledge of those already conversant with this practice. The experts in the practice of FGDM lead the conference and answered all questions regarding the process itself and best practices for its implementation. Attendees were provided a superior understanding of this innovative practice; an understanding of its application to dependency court and child welfare practice. For those not yet using this practice, participants were able to glean the knowledge for development and expansion of the practice in their county. Attendees to the conference included a team from local judicial districts, including the principal Dependency Court Judges; Children & Youth Administrators and other members of the County's Children's Roundtable.

3. Develop mechanisms for Dependency Court Judges to share information

The OCFC has begun development of a court improvement project website. The website will provide judges, child welfare directors and other local CIP staff to access various information related to OCFC, CIP, training, data, etc. The site will also provide a clearinghouse of information related to ongoing projects throughout the state. Those counties interested in specific practices and programs will be able to research the various topics all at this website.

A list serve is also being developed. Using a list serve will allow information to be provided directly to judges and others via email notification. The list serve can be used in tandem with the website to provide local judges and agencies with the most updated CIP information as possible.

The OCFC is working with AOPC staff to develop distance learning. This will provide judges with the opportunity to learn basic information without having to travel away from their courts. Additional, training and information can be provided to local judicial districts based as requested by the counties.

Lastly the OCFC would like to develop and distribute a dependency court bench book. This will provide judges with information they can reference at their fingertips. The guide will provide explanations of various hearing types, citing the new Dependency Court Rules, DPW regulation and updated state and federal legislation to enable judges to make the most appropriate decisions related to a child's case in hopes of providing timely safety, permanency and well-being for the children that come into courtrooms in Pennsylvania.

4. Effectuate "hands-on" personal training and assistance to new dependency judges.

To provide additional child welfare training to judges the OCFC has been working to develop training at new Judge School regarding dependency law and child development. Judges have indicated that they would like to be able to work more with new judges to mentor them and allow those new judges to observe other dependency courts. OCFC would also like to develop a Dependency Judges Mentoring Program and regional training to ensure that judges are provided the best possible education from their peers on the bench.

The OCFC also plans to bring judges from a national level to Pennsylvania to work and train dependency judges from the national child welfare perspective.

II. Pennsylvania's overall progress towards the goals delineated in the strategic plan and results of the assessment of activities funded under this grant

Perhaps the largest success Pennsylvania has enjoyed this fiscal year was the implementation of the Pennsylvania Children's Roundtables Initiative. As described in the Program Assessment Report for the Basic Grant, this process has connected the courts and child welfare on a local and state level that has never been possible before in Pennsylvania. This year, 58 of 60 of the Pennsylvania Judicial Districts participated in the Children's Roundtables, which are held locally and are chaired by a county judge and the county's C&Y administrator. All ten of the regional roundtables were held this year. These roundtables include representatives from each county roundtable and were facilitated by both Justice Baer and Andrea Hoffman Jelin. Lastly, Pennsylvania held its first State Roundtable, which has become the Statewide Interdisciplinary Advisory Committee. All roundtables will be ongoing events with local roundtables meeting as necessary (depending on the county/judicial district); all ten leadership roundtables will occur two times each year, once in the fall and once in the spring; and the statewide roundtable occurring annually in June. The Children's Roundtable Initiative will be the motivating force in identifying training for dependency cases.

III. Recommendations of the Statewide Interdisciplinary Advisory Committee (State Roundtable)

This Committee, chaired by Justice Baer, is comprised of Pennsylvania's leaders who each play a unique and vital role in making the system responsive to the issues facing the children and families of Pennsylvania. The group will meet annually to develop policy with regard to effectuating best practices and programming as vetted through the Children's and Leadership Roundtables.

The membership of the Advisory Committee includes the following individuals:

- AOPC Leadership, including Court Administrator of Pennsylvania, Zygmunt Pines;
- Department of Public Welfare Deputy Secretary Richard Gold, Office of Children, Youth and Families;
- James Anderson, Executive Director, Juvenile Court Judges Commission;
- Chairperson, Pennsylvania Bar Association Children's Rights Committee (Kenneth Horoho);
- A parent's attorney who has been active (John Perrott);
- Representatives from each of the regional interdisciplinary groups described above;
- The Administrative Judges of the Family Division of the Court of Common Pleas of Philadelphia and Allegheny Counties, the two largest jurisdictions in the state that combined have approximately 60% of the dependency cases in the state;
- Other individuals as are subsequently identified with substantial knowledge of and interest in the child welfare system in Pennsylvania.

IV. Summary

The Pennsylvania CIP has developed a new statewide infrastructure with the aid of a very visible and active Supreme Court and the creation of the OCFC, which is dedicated solely to dependency court improvement statewide; developed and maintained partnerships with DPW/OCYF as well as with other child welfare agencies/organization; fully participated in the CFSR/PIP process and has committed itself to the best possible handling of cases involving dependent children. CIP continues to be committed to improving the lives of children and families as they progress through the Pennsylvania Court system.

The Pennsylvania CIP is pursuing a paradigm shift to family-centered, strength-based practice. The foundation of this initiative is to ensure safety, permanency, child and family well-being. Accordingly, all of our training and practice will be geared to addressing the systemic factors that comprise safety, permanency, child and family well-being and effectuating appropriate outcomes.