

PENNSYLVANIA'S COURT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT  
TRAINING GRANT  
PROGRAM ASSESSMENT REPORT FOR  
FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR  
2008



**AOPC**

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ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
of PENNSYLVANIA COURTS

*Office of Children and  
Families in the Courts*

Pursuant to the Administration for Children and Families Program Instructions ACYF-CB-PI-06-05, the Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC), Pennsylvania's Court Improvement Project (CIP) hereby submits its annual Program Assessment Report for the CIP Training Grant for Federal Fiscal Year 2008 to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Administration of Children and Families (ACF) Region III. This annual program report addresses all training and education activities of Pennsylvania's 2008 CIP; the outcomes of court improvement activities; and how they help provide for the safety, permanency and well-being of children and youth in Pennsylvania's foster care system.

**I. Description of needs and activities undertaken with CIP funds to meet those needs during the program period**

The following list represents those needs that the OCFC 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); The Pennsylvania Children's Roundtable Initiative; and ongoing meetings with Department of Public Welfare/Office of Children, Youth and Families (DPW/OCYF) Officials. Some of these identified needs included:

- The need for a comprehensive training curricula for all Dependency Court Stakeholders (i.e. judges, attorneys and court staff);
- The need to enhance understanding of the etiology/symptoms of child abuse and neglect;
- The need to enhance understanding of the etiology/symptoms of grief, loss and attachments of foster children;
- The need for a centrally located clearinghouse of information regarding Dependency matters;
- The need for creative delivery of Dependency Education;
- The need for further education of judges in dependency law, procedure and child well-being; and
- The need for further education of judges regarding the effect their decisions have on children's safety, permanency and well-being, with regards to child's age and stage of development.

**II. Activities and progress towards the goals delineated in the 2008 strategic plan and results of the assessment of activities funded under this grant**

Many training opportunities have been provided by the OCFC and our partners over the past year. With the hiring of the office's new Administrator and staff; and the development of the Permanency Practice Initiative; the majority of the trainings provided counties with the basic knowledge of the programs in order to allow counties to implement these new initiatives. Future trainings will be more progressive, graduated curriculums that will build upon an already

established base and allow dependency court practitioners of varying experience to be educated in the most up to date policies and practices in child welfare.

## **OCFC Sponsored Training**

### 2007 Expanding Family Group Decision Making in Pennsylvania Conference

The OCFC along with the Pennsylvania Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) Leadership Team sponsored the 2007 “Expanding Family Group Decision Making in Pennsylvania” Conference, which occurred November 13 and 14, 2007. The conference introduced the practice of FGDM to those unfamiliar while, simultaneously, enhancing and expanding the knowledge of those already conversant with this practice. Experts in the practice of FGDM led 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 as well as an understanding of its application to dependency court and child welfare practice. For those not yet utilizing this practice, participants were able to glean the knowledge for development and expansion of the practice once they return to their own counties.

Approximately 120 representatives from 37 Pennsylvania counties attended the conference. In attendance were approximately 15 Dependency Court Judges; 20 C&Y Administrators; as well as OCYF staff; Child Welfare Training Program staff; Solicitors; GALs; and FGDM practitioners from across the state. Attendees to the conference included one team from each judicial district, including Dependency Court Judges; Children & Youth Administrators and other members of the County’s Children’s Roundtable as identified by the county.

Although not part of the FFY 2008, it should be noted that the OCFC also developed a follow up conference in November 2008. The “Making Lasting Change through Family Connections” Conference, built off the momentum gained in 2007. With FGDM already flourishing throughout Pennsylvania, the practice of FGDM has become the linchpin in the Pennsylvania Permanency Practice Initiative. The focus of 2008’s conference was to highlight the additional two strength-based, family-focused practices of Family Finding and Family Development Credentialing as well as the shift to 3 month court reviews for dependency matters (details regarding this conference will be included in the 2008 assessment).

### A National Forum on Children, Families and the Courts: Planning for the Future

In February 2008, the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, AOPC and OCFC partnered with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges to present this conference in Philadelphia. The conference highlighted a variety of areas related to children and families in courts, including specific dependency workshops. Approximately 230 attendees from across the country attended the

conference. Approximately 60 judges attended from family courts in Pennsylvania. Additional attendees included solicitors, CASA staff, C&Y staff, as well as, other court staff.

Additionally, the Honorable Max Baer, Supreme Court Justice, Sandy Moore, OCFC Administrator, Honorable Kim Clark (Allegheny), Honorable Todd Hoover (Dauphin), Honorable Carol Hanna (Indiana) and Honorable Kevin Dougherty (Philadelphia) provided a presentation on family focused strategies for Dependency Court Cases.

### Permanency Practice Initiative

As part of the Permanency Practice Initiative, training was arranged to provide counties with the most up to date information regarding the three major components of the initiative: FGDM, Family Development Credentialing and Family Finding.

In June 2008, The OCFC in partnership with DPW/OCYF, FGDM Statewide Implementation Leadership Team, Community Action Association of Pennsylvania, Child Welfare Training Program, and the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network provided a brief overview of the Permanency Practice Initiative to judges and C&Y administrators. The training was to provide individuals with information regarding the Permanency Practice Initiative allowing counties to determine if they would like to participate during this initial phase. To be eligible for participation in Phase One of the PPI, counties had to agree to implement all practice components (Court and Agency) and have the signature of the Dependency Judge, President Judge (if different), CYS Administrator and County Commissioner. Fifteen counties were selected by a Review Committee (including representatives from OCFC, OCYF, CWTP and SWAN). These selected counties were recipient of PPI trainings.

The majority of training for the Permanency Practice Initiative in 2008 was for the practice of Family Finding. The OCFC brought Kevin Campbell, founder of the Family Finding practice, to Pennsylvania to provide information to the 15 counties selected to participate in the Permanency Practice Initiative. Trainings occurred in the Western, Central and Eastern parts of Pennsylvania on September 3rd, 4th and 5th. Nearly 300 participants who included judges, attorneys, court administrators, C&Y Staff, as well as staff from OCFC, OCYF, Child Welfare Training Program, and the Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network attended these overview trainings. It should be noted that PPI counties committed to and ensured that the primary dependency judge and the CYS administrator attended the overview Family Finding training. In addition OCFC staff, Supreme Court Justice Baer, Richard Gold (OCYF Deputy Secretary) and additional staff from SWAN, CWTP and OCYF attended the overview sessions.

Although not occurring during the 2008 Federal Fiscal Year, a Family Finding training session of six days starting in October 2008 to continue into early

2009 is currently being held. These trainings are offered to the initial 15 Phase 1 Counties only, specifically targeted to county staff assigned to conduct Family Finding searches.

### State Trial Court Judges Conferences Dependency Workshops – summer 2008

The AOPC offers the State Trial Court Judges Conference two times per year. The topics of the conference cover a wide variety of judicial arenas. The OCFC has a standing workshop session providing information related to Dependency Court Improvement. During the 2008 conference, Sandy Moore and Supreme Court Justice Max Baer had the opportunity to present on the Pennsylvania Permanency Initiative (PPI). This session was attended by over 50 judges from across the commonwealth.

### Additional Trainings/Presentations

- *International Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) Conference – June 2008* – Sandy Moore, OCFC Administrator and a panel of Pennsylvania Judges presented at the International FGDM Conference with regarding the use of FGDM as Dependency Court Practice.
- *The President Judges (PJ)/ Pennsylvania Association of Court Management (PACM) – June 2008* – Supreme Court Justice Max Baer provided a one hour session to the PJ/PACM attendees regarding the OCFC and the Permanency Practice Initiative. This group includes President Judges and Court Administrators from across the state.
- *Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth and Family Services (PCCYFS) – Policy Day – September 2008* - Angelo Santore, OCFC Judicial Programs Analyst presented to the membership of the PCCYFS, who include private providers of child welfare services from across the state. Approximately 100 PCCYFS members attended the presentation.

*Local Children's Roundtables* – Various presentations related to court improvement, including the Permanency Practice Initiative were presented to local Children's Roundtable meetings by Sandy Moore. Approximately eight counties were visited for this purpose on the direction of Pennsylvania's Court Improvement Program.

### Dependency Benchbook

In 2008, the OCFC initiated the development of a Dependency Benchbook for Pennsylvania. This Benchbook will provide judges specific information regarding the dependency process/best practices for courts. The guide will provide explanations of various hearing types, citing the new Dependency Court Rules, DPW regulation and updated state and federal legislation. The Benchbook will include appropriate child & family development science to include areas of grief and loss, attachment and bonding, drug and alcohol services and behavior health issues for foster children of various ages. The Benchbook will

aid judges in making the most appropriate decisions related to a child's case to provide safety, permanency and well-being in a timely. Upon completion the Benchbook will be used as a textbook for future training to both judges and attorneys.

The OCFC has identified the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) as a consultant to guide us as we develop our Benchbook. NCJJ was the entity that provided Pennsylvania's original CIP assessment, as well as, the reassessment. NCJJ was also responsible for writing Pennsylvania's Delinquency Benchbook and will be able to provide experience and insight to ensure that the Dependency Benchbook follows the same structure and path.

Through a competitive bidding process, the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) was selected as the vendor who will develop and write the Pennsylvania Dependency Benchbook. The NCSC is also partnering with the Kempe Center in Denver, Colorado to provide expertise in the area of child development.

A Benchbook committee, which comprises of Dependency Court and Superior Court Judges led by the Honorable Chester Harhut, Lackawanna County, has been convened and had its initial meeting with NCJJ and NCSC on October 17, 2008. On January 30, 2009 NCJJ, NCSC and OCFC will meet a second time with the Benchbook Committee. The final copy of the Benchbook will be provided to OCFC by August 15, 2009.

#### Graduated Curriculum for Dependency Judges

After the completion of the Benchbook, a committee will be gathered to develop a graduated curriculum for Dependency Judges. This curriculum will utilize the Benchbook as textbook or guide for Dependency Court training. The Benchbook will be completed in August 2009 with curriculum development to follow. The bulk of this work will be completed after October 1, 2009 and is identified in the 2009 grant application, as most of the work and funding will come during that year.

All trainings provided by the OCFC include an evaluation process. This process gauges the effectiveness of the OCFC trainings, curriculum and identifies topics and ideas for future trainings.

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 issues of attachment, grief and loss

- Encouraging active and meaningful children and youth participation in permanency hearings
- Family Group Decision Making
- Family Finding
- Family Development Credentialing

## **Training under Development**

### 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Dependency Conference

The OCFC, working in collaboration with OCYF and JCJC, will be presenting the first annual Children's Roundtable Plenary Session in September 2009. This conference will provide a variety of workshops, keynotes and presentations related to Dependency/Permanency issues. The conference will be open to members of children's roundtables from across the commonwealth, plus various statewide partners, which include OCYF, Juvenile Court Judges Commission (JCJC and many others).

### Training/Program Guide for Dependency Court Stakeholders

Initially legal training for parent advocates, GAL, child advocates was not to occur until 2009. However, during the 2008 Fall Leadership Roundtables it became clear that there was a need to begin development of this training immediately. The OCFC is partnering with OCYF as well as others to develop these trainings.

The trainings will address best practices in legal representation for dependency matters and target both experienced practitioners of dependency cases and those new to the field.

Additionally, the OCFC will develop specific training sessions and quick reference program guides to mirror the Dependency Benchbook, once completed. The training will be provided in a variety of arenas, such as the annual dependency conference, roundtable meetings and special sessions as requested. Training development and program guides will occur after completion of the Pennsylvania Dependency Benchbook in fall 2009.

### Web-based Distance Learning

A section of the OCFC website, in planning stage currently, will be devoted to distance learning, which will allow judges and attorneys to interactively receive necessary information and training without leaving their judicial districts. The OCFC is currently in the process of developing a website and hopes to be live by summer 2009. The office is currently developing a RFP to determine the vendors to help create and host the site.

## Expedited Appeals Training

In 2008 a sub-committee led by the Honorable Maureen Lally-Green, comprised of members from the Appellate Rules Committee, Juvenile Rules Committee, Domestic Relations Rules Committee and Orphan's Court Rules committee and Sandy Moore, OCFC Administrator was convened. This group's task was to provide proposed rules to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court aimed at expediting dependency court appeals. Once these proposed rules were developed, training was provided by Judge Lally-Green both at the Statewide Roundtable meeting in June 2008 and at a subsequent State Trial Court Judges conference.

Once the proposed rules are officially adopted by our Supreme Court, training will be developed to inform judges, attorneys and child welfare agencies. Training will be provided in a variety of arenas, such as the annual dependency conference, roundtable meetings and special sessions as requested. The expedited appeals rule process is anticipated to be completed in summer of 2009.

### **III. Pennsylvania's overall Training activities and progress towards meeting the recommendations delineated in the 2005 CIP Reassessment**

- Recommendation #12: In similar fashion, the Statewide CIP Committee and the AOPC should examine and document the lack of attorney resources; specifically, attorneys for parents and child advocates (GALs) for children, and examine ways to begin addressing these. The expanded use of dispositional advisors/caseworkers to support parents' attorneys may also be critical in this regard. Early appointment and adequate advocacy resources for parents and children should be part of any pilot effort funded by CIP to front-load the court process – As mentioned in the previous section, the OCFC is in the process of developing training for judges and court stakeholders. We plan to provide attorney training and best practice guidelines, specifically to Guardians Ad Litem and Parent Advocates. Additionally, OCFC has begun to coordinate efforts with OCYF to provide training to Guardians Ad Litem through CAPTA. Plans for distance learning are also underway along with training for expedited appeals. *Additionally, front-loaded services are a priority for all fifteen of the Phase One Permanency Practice Initiative underway.*

### **IV. Recommendations of the State Interdisciplinary Advisory Committee (State Roundtable)**

The State Roundtable provided no specific recommendations regarding training activities during the last meeting. However, several members of the State Roundtable volunteered to participate in the Dependency Conference

Planning Committee. The 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Dependency conference is planned for September 2009. The initial meeting of the conference planning committee occurred in October 2008.

**V. Results of any Assessments of Activities Funded Under this Grant**

There have been no assessments related to training activities under this grant.