



Promising Court Practices:

Strategies to Achieve Timely Permanency

November 2009

INTRODUCTION

This report was prepared in response to a request from Carolyn Rodriguez, Casey Family Programs Senior Director for Strategic Consulting, for information to assist the state of Texas in exploring the ways in which the court system can improve outcomes for youth in long-term foster care. Specifically, The Texas Supreme Court's Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families is interested in improving outcomes for youth by reducing the time that they spend in foster care and by increasing permanency.

At the request of the Permanent Judicial Commission, Texas Appleseed, a non-profit, public interest law center, is conducting a study to examine the challenges and barriers faced by youth in long-term care. Casey Family Programs has partnered with Texas Appleseed to document court-driven initiatives from across the country working to move youth to permanency.

Following a review of the literature, as well as conversations with key advisers, ten states and one county were chosen as examples of court jurisdictions that have promising practices: California; Connecticut; Georgia; Idaho; Michigan; Minnesota; Missouri; Pennsylvania; Pima County, Arizona; South Dakota; and Vermont. Interviews were conducted with key leaders in each jurisdiction, and a summary of the work taking place in each jurisdiction is listed below, along with contact information. These summaries are not exhaustive and are provided as a sample of the reform efforts taking place in these jurisdictions and across the country.

KEY FINDINGS

Across the interviews, common themes emerged regarding efforts to increase timely permanency for children in care. These themes included common strategies used and key elements of success.

Types of Strategies

- **Inter-disciplinary teams:** the majority of states identified at least one inter-disciplinary team that was working towards systemic reforms that would improve permanency outcomes for children in care. Teams are often led by a judge, and other members typically include representatives from the child welfare agency and behavioral health agency, attorneys, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), and Guardian ad Litem (GAL), as well as other key stakeholders. Missouri's Fostering Court Improvement team is composed of staff from the Missouri Office of State Courts Administrator, the Missouri Children's Division of the Department of Social Services, the University of Missouri School of Social Work, and the Fostering Results project of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Social Work.
- **Youth participation in hearings:** there is a growing trend to ensure that children, especially older youth, attend and participate in their dependency court hearing. Several of the states interviewed discussed special efforts and initiatives related to improving youths' access to court, preparation for court, and optimum experience participating in court. Arizona recently amended one of their juvenile court rules, Juvenile Rule 41, to give foster children the right to attend and speak to the judge at every hearing.

- **Frequency of hearings:** some jurisdictions are holding review hearings more frequently, which provides judges with increased oversight and holds parties accountable to accomplishing tasks on a shorter timeline. As part of their Permanency Planning Initiative, participating counties in Pennsylvania have modified their court structure to hold review hearings every three months rather than every six months.
- **Data reporting and use:** providing data reports regularly to judges is a concrete reminder of how children are doing in their courtroom. Data reports often include information such as the number of children in care, the length of stay in care, and their permanent plan. Courts and agency partners are engaging in specific efforts to ensure that the data is used in real-time to inform decision-making and practice improvements. The Judicial Branch in Connecticut provides their data to the child welfare agency, which then uses the data to populate parts of their Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System. Reports are then provided to the Chief Judge, child welfare agency attorneys, and local court managers, who disseminate them to the local judges.
- **Permanency Roundtables/Case reads:** a growing practice to improve permanency for youth who have extensive lengths of stay in care is to hold a team meeting to review the case history with an eye towards permanence. These meetings are designed as intentional opportunities for creative, “outside the box” thinking in order to help youth achieve permanency. Casey Family Programs is supporting this practice through Permanency Roundtables in various jurisdictions, such as Georgia.
- **Bench cards/Checklists/Professional guides:** these tools can help make dependency court proceedings more meaningful, for example, by providing judges with key permanency-oriented questions to ask at each hearing, which helps to ensure that cases are moving towards permanence. Minnesota developed a bench book, which is a compilation of information ranging from child development to the various types of hearings that take place in juvenile court. The bench book has also been converted into a checklist for different groups of professionals, such as judges, attorneys, and GALs.
- **Cross and Joint training:** cross-training between key stakeholders builds understanding of each party’s role and responsibilities, and joint ensures that all parties are being trained to the same practice. In Idaho, all judges, lawyers, child welfare staff, and CASAs in one county will be trained together on the county’s new practice model. Training of judicial and legal staff is particularly important in jurisdictions where judges rotate on the bench, or jurisdictions where parent/child attorneys may have a primary practice in a different field. South Dakota is developing a training video for child attorneys, and will require pre- and post-competency tests as part of the training process.
- **Revision of state statutes/judicial rules/agency policies:** in some jurisdictions, implementation of a new strategy or reform effort requires changing an existing statute/judicial rule/agency policy to move forward; in other jurisdictions, it is the statute/rule/policy itself that is a barrier to timely permanence. Michigan’s Permanency Actions workgroup meets regularly to critically examine current statutes and to propose statutory amendments designed to improve outcomes for foster children. The Permanency Committee in Los Angeles County, California, examines agency policies with a similar lens.

Elements of Success

- **Collaboration:** a primary way in which the judiciary often leads by example is through collaborative relationships with the leadership of the child welfare agency and other key stakeholder groups. These collaborative relationships are most effective when they take place at the state level, the local level, and between the state and local levels. Regularly scheduled meetings are a practical way to maintain those relationships. Many jurisdictions reported that the reform efforts in their states would not have been possible without collaboration. Vermont's Justice for Children Task Force meets quarterly and includes team members from the courts, the Department for Children and Families, the Department of Mental Health, the Defender General's Office, the State's Attorneys Association, the Department of Health's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program, and the state legislature.
- **Judicial leadership:** one of the hallmarks of successful reform efforts is leadership from the judiciary branch, from the Supreme Court level to the local level. In Michigan, Justice Maura Corrigan serves as a liaison between the judicial branch and the child welfare system.
- **Data:** data is essential in order to determine whether reform efforts have a positive impact on outcomes. While this is an ongoing effort, as described above, many jurisdictions are providing regular data reports to their judges. When provided in a user-friendly format, this can be an effective way of holding judges accountable to the cases under their supervision. Pennsylvania has developed uniform templates for the various court hearings so that the forms are consistent across the state. The information from these forms is used to populate the new child dependency data system created by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, which tracks outcomes for children in care.

All of the jurisdictions interviewed below expressed their concern about the number of children that are lingering in care, and reported that they are working on implementing a variety of strategies to expedite permanency. Some of these strategies are specific to youth who have been in care for extended periods of time, while others are systems-change efforts designed to improve overall outcomes for all children in care. While most of these practices are new and therefore have not been evaluated, early results and anecdotal information suggest that they are helping children to achieve timely permanency.

California¹

California's permanency initiatives have been primarily spearheaded by California's Blue Ribbon Commission on Children in Foster Care. The Commission was started by Chief Justice Ronald M. George who appointed a high level, state wide panel in March of 2006 to make recommendations to the Judicial Council, the policy body for the California court system. The purpose of the Commission was to make recommendations focused on outcomes related to safety, permanency, well-being, and fairness for children and families. The commission is composed of judges, attorneys, legislators, child welfare directors, community leaders, tribal

¹ Information provided to Casey Family Programs on November 3, 2009, by Leah Wilson and Don Will, Managers at the Center for Families, Children and Courts, and on November 6, 2009, by Honorable Michael Nash, Presiding Judge, Los Angeles Juvenile Court.

leaders, foster youth, and caregivers. In 2008, the Commission made their recommendations, which focused on four areas of interest: efforts to prevent removal and achieve permanency, court reforms, collaboration among courts and their partners, and resources and funding. According to Leah Wilson and Don Will, Managers at the Center for Families, Children and Courts, four initiatives that started due to the Commission's recommendations are: increasing permanency for children in care, family finding and engagement, providing data and information to the local jurisdictions, and establishing local commissions.

Local Commissions

Thanks to the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendations, every county now has a local Blue Ribbon Commission consisting of court staff and child welfare staff that focuses on identifying and resolving local concerns. As a result of the local commissions, every county has the autonomy to focus on what they believe is a concern. In one county, cases of legally free children were being reviewed to determine if reunification was appropriate with the biological parent. In two other counties, Santa Clara and Los Angeles, specialized court calendars were established for children who have been in out-of-home care for an extended period of time. In those cases, the dependency court would set up frequent review hearings, similar to that of drug courts, meaning that the cases were reviewed every two weeks and all parties were required to attend and report back on what they had accomplished prior to the hearing.

Many counties have also implemented Family Finding and Engagement (FFE), an intensive search method to identify, locate, and engage paternal and maternal relatives of children who had been in out-of-home care for an extended length of time. While some counties have hired a full time FFE employee, many counties do not have the financial resources; in those situations, many counties have been creative and have sought assistance from CASAs or other volunteers, such as retired social workers. Ms. Wilson and Mr. Will explained that, while data is not currently being collected in order to measure the effectiveness of these initiatives, many counties have reported that their efforts have been successful, particularly in finding relatives for children. The jurisdictions that reported having the most success were those that had strong judicial leadership.

User Friendly Data

Mr. Will stated that there are efforts underway to improve data tracking and collection on a statewide level in California; currently, UC-Berkley collects the state's child welfare data and provides it to the Center for Families, Children and Courts (CFCC), but it is not provided in a "reader-friendly" manner. CFCC is currently in the process of attempting to distribute the information to local counties in a more user-friendly manner so that they can view their data in real time. The CFCC is also planning on adding outcome measures for the court and providing it to local judges so that the judges can see how the children under their supervision are doing.

The Permanency Committee

In Los Angeles County, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Juvenile Court developed policies to reduce the likelihood that children would stay in long term foster care. Led by Honorable Michael Nash, Presiding Judge for the Los Angeles Juvenile Court, LA County established the Permanency Committee (PC). The PC started five years ago after Judge Nash observed that a large number of children entering the courtroom had long term foster care identified as their permanent plan. The PC is composed of DCFS staff and juvenile court judges, as well as other key stakeholders. The purpose of the PC is to establish policies both within DCFS and the Juvenile Court to reduce the likelihood that children will stay in long term care.

One of the major policies established by the PC was that DCFS could no longer identify long term foster care as a permanent plan. Judges are also discouraged from allowing long term foster care as a permanent plan; if it is allowed, they are encouraged to continue to make efforts to establish a more adequate permanent plan for the child. While there is no data to track the outcomes of the PC's policies, anecdotal information suggests that fewer children have long term foster care identified as their permanent plan. Another effort that LA County is working on is to avoid termination of parental rights unless the child has an adequate permanent plan identified and has a high likelihood of being adopted. Judge Nash credits the strong relationship between the Juvenile Court and DCFS as the main factor in establishing all of the PC's policies. He also reported that he is currently working on compiling a list of all children in care age 10 and older that have long term foster care identified as their permanent plan. The purpose of the list would be twofold: first, to identify the children; and second, to notify the judge presiding over the case so that he/she could encourage DCFS to establish a more adequate plan and ensure that permanency is achieved.

Permanency Partners Program

Judge Nash also credited DCFS for their efforts in achieving permanency for children who have been in out-of-home care for an extended period of time. He described DCFS' Permanency Partners Program (P3), which began in 2004. The goal of the program is to establish permanency for the child through adoption, guardianship, or a mentoring relationship. In the first step of P3, the P3 worker, usually a retired social worker or a part-time worker, mines the child's case file to identify any relationships that the child might have had in the past. Working together with the youth, the primary social worker, and other important people in the child's life, the P3 worker explores options like reunification with the biological parent, adoption, and guardianship, in order to establish a permanent plan for the child. Judge Nash stated that while he did not know the exact number of children who had achieved permanency through P3, he did know that over the past several years, LA County DCFS has been able to significantly reduce the total number of children who have been in out-of-home care for an extended period of time.

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CONNECTICUT²

Connecticut has a number of strategies that were developed to expedite permanency for children in foster care. One of these strategies, Connecticut's Case Management Protocol (CMP), is currently being evaluated as part of the National Evaluation of the Court Improvement Program.

² Information provided to Casey Family Programs on November 6, 2009, by Marilou Giovannucci, Manager, Connecticut Judicial Branch.

Case Management Conferences

One of the key components of the CMP is the use of Case Management Conferences, which are facilitated meetings that take place within 7-10 days of the court-ordered removal. The Case Management Conference is facilitated by court staff and includes the parents' attorneys, the child's attorney, the child welfare social worker, and the child welfare agency attorney. The immediate goals of the Case Management Conference are to: gain an understanding of the issues that led to the child's removal from the home; examine ways in which those issues can be resolved; begin to craft a plan towards reunification; and develop a concurrent plan if continued out of home care is necessary, such as relative placement. The long-term goal of the Case Management Conference is that issues such as service needs, relative placements, and parent-child visitation will be addressed quickly, and that collaborative decision-making will lead to fewer contested hearings, which will then lead to timely permanency.

C-CORE Initiative

According to Marilou Giovannucci, Manager at the Connecticut Judicial Branch, the Connecticut Judicial Branch and the Department of Children and Families (DCF) often collaborate together on permanency initiatives, understanding that they will be more successful if they work together. One of the permanency strategies that DCF is launching in response to their negative Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) results is their C-CORE initiative, and they have invited Ms. Giovannucci's office to participate. C-CORE is designed to be like a mini-CFSR, with focus groups, file reviews, interviews, etc. The goal is to encourage early concurrent planning, thereby leading to earlier achievement of permanency.

Recovery Specialist Voluntary Program

Another new collaborative effort in Connecticut is the Recovery Specialist Voluntary Program (RSVP), which Ms. Giovannucci described as a "hybrid design of dependency drug court." Although Connecticut does not have a drug court, the hope is that the RSVP will be almost or as effective as a drug court program. The RSVP was designed in response to an identified issue: that permanency for children whose parents have substance abuse issues is often delayed. The RSVP's aim is to support parents through their recovery so that safe reunification can take place more quickly. The program starts with early identification of substance abuse issues, and involves a structure for ongoing communication between the child welfare agency, the substance abuse provider, and the attorneys for all parties. The key component is a coaching/mentoring model, through which the parent receives recovery coaching and support through a private agency. The RSVP is currently operating in three pilot sites and is funded through a Technical Assistance grant, in addition to re-allocation of existing dollars from the child welfare and mental health agencies. Early outcomes have been promising, and a process evaluation will begin shortly.

Accountability through Data Sharing

Connecticut feels strongly that collecting and tracking data is a key strategy for improvement, and as part of their Court Improvement Program, they have a standing committee on data sharing. Currently, the judicial data system provides their data to the child welfare agency, which then uses that data to populate parts of their Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). The child welfare agency is currently conducting a proof of concept to ensure that this form of data sharing will be effective; the goal is to eventually implement electronic data sharing. New "fillable" forms have recently been developed, with the goal of implementing electronic filing, which will contribute to the data sharing system.

The Connecticut Judicial Branch is using data to provide exit outcome reports to the Chief Judge, child welfare agency attorneys, and local court managers, who disseminate them to the local judges. The report includes the number of children that have exited care, how long they were in care, and how they exited care, including those who aged out without permanency. Ms. Giovannucci reported that they have seen the number of youth aging out of care decrease since they started producing the exit outcome reports two years ago. Accountability through data will be increasing, as the docket will be going online soon, and will include the number of days that a case has been pending. Furthermore, the Judicial Branch has started to collect – and will soon disseminate – data on nine key nationally accepted performance measures, documenting certain key decision points and the percentage of cases that reach those decision points. Ms. Giovannucci credits their ability to disseminate data in a meaningful way to a case flow management specialist that is skilled at crafting data reports that are user-friendly and easy to understand.

Technology in the Courtroom

Another strategy that the courts are using involves expansion of technology in the courtrooms. Currently, all of the courtrooms are equipped for teleconferencing, and videoconferencing will be implemented in all of the courtrooms over the next few years. One of the expected outcomes of these technologies is that out-of-state relatives will be able to participate in hearings by phone or videoconference, if they have it available, leading to increased and expedited relative placements. In addition, one of the barriers that currently increases the length of a case is the continuance of hearings due to lack of transportation for incarcerated parents. The goal of the new technology is that incarcerated parents will still be able to participate in hearings, even if transportation is not available, so that the case can stay on track without unnecessary delays. Another technology available in the courtroom is audio recording of all the proceedings, so that judges do not have to wait for the court transcript before writing their notes. This has been particularly important in expediting termination proceedings, where judges are required to write notes about their decision.

Statutory Reviews

Ms. Giovannucci emphasized the importance of looking at statutes and how they can be used to streamline the permanency planning process. In Connecticut, state statute includes non-custodial parents as parties to the case; if the non-custodial parent is not identified, there is a statutory process in place to identify and locate the parent. Children are also allowed to come to court, although they rarely do so. However, the courts do have a protocol for ensuring that the child's social worker and/or attorney have spoken to the child to invite them to their hearing and to report to the court on the child's desired outcome. One recent statutory change that passed last year requires the child welfare agency to identify relatives that might be appropriate relative placements.

To ensure that parents are aware of statutes, particularly the timeline to permanency provided for by the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), judges are provided with a "canvas" for use at the removal hearing. The canvas guides judges through the process of advising parents of their rights and includes an explanation about the ASFA timeline. Judges are now consistently addressing parents at the beginning of a case to emphasize the importance of actively participating in their case, because there is a time limit. The bench book, covering all of the court proceedings, was also recently revised in order to guide judges through subsequent hearings and to provide them with appropriate questions to ask at each hearing. A new checklist specific to older youth in care will also be developed to address their unique needs.

Training

In addition, Connecticut provides legal and judicial staff with considerable training regarding dependency proceedings. For example, attorneys receive training on how to prepare for dependency cases, how to engage children, and how to litigate dependency proceedings, among other topics. Ms. Giovannucci highlighted the need to provide ongoing learning as well; she cited one example of two very experienced juvenile judges that recently attended the Child Abuse and Neglect Institute. Despite their experience and knowledge, they reported afterwards that the Institute had reminded them of best practices which they had “forgotten to do” in their courtrooms, and which they were newly committed to practicing. Given the role of the judiciary, it is vital that they have an understanding of the importance of permanency and best practices that can contribute to timely permanency.

Identify Post-Termination Permanency Barriers

Some of the permanency challenges in Connecticut are specific to delays that take place between termination and adoption, and there are efforts underway to address those delays. One of those challenges was a child welfare agency policy that required a wait period of six to twelve months after termination, before an adoption could be filed. This policy has now been revised. Another barrier is the appeals process; currently it can take up to two years before an appeal is heard, and another year before it is decided. While the case is pending, a child’s adoption cannot be completed. Ms. Giovannucci reported that one of the judges is working to change the appellate rules so that the process is timely. A further challenge is that adoptions are currently processed by the probate court, not the juvenile court, even though the probate court is not an expert in juvenile matters. Connecticut’s Program Improvement Plan (PIP) includes a proposal to move adoptions from the purview of the probate court to the juvenile court, but that will require a legislative change. In the meantime, the probate court has created a special docket for children’s issues, including adoptions.

Judicial Leadership and Collaboration

It is particularly important that the top-level leaders, such as the Chief Justice and the Chief Court Administrator, are familiar with child welfare practice, as judicial leadership is key to the success of reform initiatives. Equally important is that reform initiatives need to be collaborative. Ms. Giovannucci credits the successes in Connecticut to the collaborative efforts of the judicial branch, the bar, and the child welfare agency; they have learned from past failures that they are most successful when they work together rather than individually. Ms. Giovannucci also stated that improving permanency outcomes for children cannot depend on one solution alone, but rather, requires a “multitude” of efforts to achieve this goal.

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Georgia³

Ms. Barclay, Assistant Director of the Administrative Office of the Courts, stated that Georgia’s catalyst for change occurred after Georgia failed to pass Permanency Composite 3, achieving

³ Information provided to Casey Family Programs on November 4, 2009, by Honorable Michael Key, Judge, Troup County Juvenile Court, and on November 5, 2009, by Michelle Barclay, Assistant Director, Administrative Office of the Courts.

permanency for children in foster care for long periods of time, of the Child and Family Services Review. After Georgia failed to pass, concern was raised regarding the number of children who had been in long term care for an extensive amount of time. Georgia decided to tackle this issue state-wide through two strategies: Permanency Round Tables (PRT) and the Cold Case Project.

Permanency Roundtables

Georgia has partnered with Casey Family Programs to conduct PRTs for all children who have been in care for an extended amount of time. PRTs are structured professional case consultations designed to expedite permanency for youth in care through innovative thinking, the application of best practices, and the “busting” of systemic barriers. A PRT team consists of the following members: a facilitator; the caseworker; the supervisor; a master practitioner; and permanency consultants. Legal experts are often also available to the team, either in the room, on-site, or by phone. Other potential team members can include: former CPS caseworkers; a service provider; agency administrators; constituent advocates; cultural guides; and mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence providers. Georgia is currently still in the process of conducting PRTs, but for those children who have already had PRTs, Ms. Barclay relayed that anecdotal information suggests that those children are achieving permanency. The results of the PRTs are provided to judges for their review. In addition, Georgia trained judges on the PRT process so that their practice would align with that of the child welfare agency.

Cold Case Project

Another effort to reduce the number of children in care is the Cold Case Project (CCP). The CCP started prior to PRTs under the Administrative Office of the Courts, with funding from the Court Improvement Project (CIP). The CCP uses a predictive model, similar to the model used in the health care industry, to identify children who have been in out-of-home care for an extended period of time. Using seven factors (eligibility for federal funding, number of months in care, termination of parental rights for both parents, year of birth of the caregiver, current institutional setting, the child's age, and the number of placements), the CCP identified 500 children. Attorneys were then contracted to review the cases and identify any shortfalls or things that social workers might have overlooked. Once a case is reviewed by a lawyer, Ms. Barclay, the current social worker, and the social worker's supervisor meet to brainstorm new ideas for permanency for the child in care. The social worker is then asked to explore the new options with the child. The idea of the CCP is similar to PRTs in that it is intended to provide a new set of “eyes” on a case that has been in the system for a long time. The CCP has reviewed 100 cases to date and a plan is in place to review more cases during the coming year. Data is being collected and the CCP will be evaluated by the end of the year to determine its impact. Anecdotal information suggests that the program has been effective. Ms. Barclay reported that one of the benefits of the CCP is that Georgia is beginning to see themes in the cases that have been lingering in the system. To date, the CCP has identified a number of factors that significantly determine whether or not a case will be in the system for a long time. These are generally cases in which relative searches are not diligently conducted, children are not consulted regarding their permanency, services are not being adequately provided to the child, children are not participating in court hearings, and relatives are identified but not contacted. Ms. Barclay indicated that Georgia is learning from these reviews and, because of the themes identified, they are now emphasizing the importance of including these practices in each case.

Operation Home Team

Troup County, Georgia is engaging in many positive efforts locally, such as the Operation Home Team (OHT) program. OHT is an upfront program designed to prevent the removal of children from their home. The program began under the guidance of Judge Michael Key of the Troup County Juvenile Court, who developed OHT's protocols in collaboration with the county's social service director, the local social service administrator, the supervisor of all the child welfare units, court staff, CASAs and attorneys. The team is built around the family, with the parents as the primary participants. When a social worker files a dependency petition, Troup County's judicial guidelines require that a hearing be held within 72 hours. Prior to the hearing, the OH team discusses the issues of concern and determines the level of risk. The team can include, but is not limited to, the parents, the parents' attorneys, the child's attorney, any service providers, the social worker, court staff, and the CASA. Other team members can include law enforcement, if they are involved with the family, and education staff, such as teachers or school counselors. Judge Key relayed that in some cases where substance abuse had been the key issue identified in the petition, the team was able to arrange for a preliminary substance abuse evaluation to be completed prior to the 72-hour hearing. He indicated that having all parties involved at the team meeting prior to the hearing allows everyone to better understand the issues of concern and helps everyone to evaluate the level of risk present. At the 72-hour shelter care hearing, the services needed by the family are identified and everyone involved works to get these services in place as soon as possible. Judge Key stated that in some cases, even though risk was present, the safety of the child was not necessarily compromised and thus removal was not required. He indicated that this assessment would not have been possible without the OHT meeting, and that the OHT was preventing the need for placement in some cases.

Another important feature of the OHT is that it provides legal representation for all parties as early as possible, including children. Judge Key stated that all parties have legal representation by the 72-hour hearing, and all parties are also required to attend the first hearing, even children. Even though children are not required to attend all hearings in Troup County, he does require children six years and older to attend the first hearing so that he can confer with them personally. After the 72-hour hearing, he does not require children to attend hearings, but he always ensures that children understand that he has an open door policy and that they can always provide their input in person or via a letter at any time.

OHT also requires that a Family Team Meeting (FTM) be held within 9 days of the 72-hour hearing. At the FTM, services are reviewed and relative searches are expected to be conducted. At the 30-day hearing, OHT protocol requires that all assessments be completed, such as substance abuse and mental health evaluations. Judge Key indicated that in cases where this is not possible, at least the recommendations from the evaluations should be ready for the hearing, even if the full written evaluation is not completed. After the dispositional hearing, OHT moves the review hearing, which is usually held six months after the dispositional hearing, to within 45-60 days of the dispositional hearing. At that time, the team reviews the case and identifies needed services. They also review the relative search and ensure that relatives are being located or, if relatives have not been located, they identify the existing barriers. The team also develops what they call milestones, which are goals that are set and, when met, lead to increased visitation. Judge Key reported that as a result of holding the first review hearing sooner, Troup County was actually reviewing cases three and sometimes four times during the first year of the case instead of only twice, which helped to move the case along more quickly.

Heartbeat List and Situation Room

With regards to children who had been in out-of-home care for a significant amount of time, Judge Key relayed that Troup County's efforts began two years ago at an annual meeting of the thirteen counties with the largest number of children in out-of-home care. At that meeting, the state provided each county with the number of children in their jurisdiction that had been in out-of-home care for more than 18 months. Judge Key described Troup County's numbers as "horrible." He stated that after that meeting, Tanya Brooke, the Director of Child Welfare in Troup County, went back to Troup County and started the "Heartbeat" list and the "situation room." On the Heartbeat list are the names of all the children who have been in out-of-home care for more than 18 months, and in the situation room are the names and the pictures of these children. Once every month, Ms. Brooke personally meets with the supervisor of the social worker in charge of each child in order to identify the barriers to achieving permanency for that child. Judge Key indicated that he sometimes participates in these meetings, but they are primarily led by Ms. Brooke. Through this strategy, Troup County has been able to significantly reduce the number of children in out-of-home care. Judge Key relayed that although this effort initially began with only children who had been in out-of-home care for more than 18 months, it was later expanded to include all children in care. Judge Key explained that the reason they call the list the Heartbeat list is to remind everyone involved that each child is not just a number or a case, but a "little heart that [is] suffering being in care without a permanent plan."

Troup County's Permanency Roundtables

For those cases that have still not been able to achieve permanency, Judge Key stated that he and Ms. Brooke decided that the cases need a new set of eyes. They were in the process of attempting to set up a review process when they heard of Casey Family Programs' Permanency Roundtables. Judge Key relayed that having Permanency Roundtables in Troup County was beneficial because it began to make Troup County think "outside of the box." Anecdotal information suggests that the PRTs were successful in helping move cases towards permanency. Judge Key gave examples of cases in which the child welfare department had not placed children with relatives when they were young because the relatives had prior CPS history, but through the Roundtable process, the relatives were once again revisited as placement options, since the children were now older and the risk was not as significant. In other cases, staff often knew if a youth, who was about to turn 18 within a year, had a connection with their biological parents and was going to go home to their parents once they turned 18. As a result of the PRTs, the department provided a transition plan and transition services for some of these youth instead of just allowing them to age out of care, so that the youth could return home safely and with supports in place.

Judge Key could not credit one specific effort with reducing the total number of children in care in Troup County; rather, he thought that they were all beneficial. Judge Key reported that in 2004, there were 223 children in care; in 2005, 197; in 2008, 150; in October, 2009 there were 62 children in care; and by January 2010 Troup County is projected to have just 50 children in care. Judge Key emphasized the fact that the reduction could not have happened without collaboration between the child welfare agency and the court. He also indicated that he believes that strong judicial leadership is needed if court improvement is to be successful.

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IDAHO⁴

From the outset, Ms. Debra Alsaker-Burke, Child Protection Program Manager for the Idaho Supreme Court, and Shirley Alexander, Child Welfare Program Manager for the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (DHW), emphasized that systems change efforts in Idaho are the result of a partnership between the Department and the courts. The courts create the venue and the opportunity, and the Department provides the data and the feedback. Without the sharing of data and of strategies, progress towards improved permanency outcomes would not be possible.

Juvenile Rule 40

One of the primary initiatives for permanency in Idaho was an amendment of Idaho Juvenile Rule (IJR) 40, which was the result of the work of the Child Protection Committee, Idaho's Court Improvement Program. The amended Rule 40 requires that after the adjudicatory hearing, notice of any further hearings must be provided to the caregivers and to any child age 8 or over. Rule 40 also gives caregivers and children age 8 and over the right to be heard, either in person or in writing, at any future hearings, but does not require their attendance. The Child Protection Committee advocated for the amendment to Rule 40 following conversations with young foster care alumni, who reported unanimously that they would have liked the opportunity to attend and to be heard. Anecdotal evidence indicated that at least some of the foster care alumni might have been able to achieve permanency earlier if they would have had the opportunity to speak with the judge about their permanent plan.

A pilot program in five counties is examining the impact of Rule 40; anecdotal evidence suggests that amending Rule 40 has had a positive impact on permanency for some youth. Interviews and focus groups conducted with youth, foster parents, and key stakeholders found that while youth are indeed receiving notice, the number of youth that actually attend their hearings is highest in counties where social workers and attorneys believe that the effort of getting youth to the hearing is worthwhile. Although no one has expressed outright opposition to Rule 40, there has been some resistance from various individuals who are conflicted about the appropriateness and/or usefulness of bringing youth to court. The focus groups and interviews revealed that some counties will need to shift their paradigm and therefore their practice in order to make the spirit of Rule 40 meaningful for youth.

When youth do attend their court hearings, they are not always being actively engaged and therefore the quality of the hearing is not necessarily improved. Due to the fact that Rule 40 is an unfunded mandate, training has been limited to a brochure and video that were distributed in local regions, as well as some preliminary training about the purpose of getting children to court. Training is needed to appropriately prepare youth before court, what to do with them once they are at court, and how to debrief them after the hearing. A workgroup will be established in 2010 to develop a training curriculum that will address those topics in greater detail; the plan is to pilot the curriculum in one or two counties before expanding it to the rest of the state. A further goal is to teach youth advocacy skills, perhaps through a Youth Academy model that empowers

⁴ Information provided to Casey Family Programs on November 3, 2009, by Debra Alsaker-Burke, Child Protection Program Manager, Idaho Supreme Court, and Shirley Alexander, Child Welfare Program Manager, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare.

youth to advocate for themselves in court. Future plans for Rule 40 include the provision of resources and training in the pilot counties, followed by continued evaluations.

Legal Representation Workgroup

Another effort that had an unexpected but successful outcome was the result of an inter-agency Legal Representation workgroup that was formed to address the challenge of legal representation for the Department. Idaho statute is not clear about whether or not the Department is a party in child protection cases, which has led to inconsistency in representation by prosecutors. The workgroup is made up of representatives from the courts, DHW, the Attorney General's Office, and the chairperson of the Child Protection Committee. As part of this workgroup's efforts, it was discovered that a county had a significant backlog of cases. The Department subsequently asked each county to create a matrix of their cases and to identify the barriers in cases that were backlogged. In situations where these backlogs were the result of court barriers, such as a need for additional permanency review hearings, the workgroup was able to work collaboratively to develop solutions. Over 6-8 months the courts provided additional judges, the Attorney General's Office provided additional prosecutors, and DHW hired additional staff to address the backlog.

This experience has emphasized the importance of having data available in order to identify issues, and the creation of the Legal Representation workgroup has provided a forum for problem-solving these issues. Currently the workgroup is addressing issues on a county-by-county basis, but the goal is to eventually tackle statewide issues. One strategy for increasing the data available is the development of uniform court reports, which will provide the data that the courts need to populate their data system more effectively, as well as the information that a judge needs to make decisions about a case. At this time, court reports are narratives that may or may not have all of the pertinent information that a judge needs. A subcommittee made up of members of the Child Protection Committee and of DHW social workers is currently developing a template for court reports. The goal is to help standardize practice and clarify how decisions are made by the Department, as well as provide key data elements that the courts can collect and then track. The template is being developed, and the goal is to roll out a joint training on the template in March 2010.

Training and Collaboration

Additional efforts to improve permanency for children include training that brings prosecutors to the social worker academy training in order to teach new social workers how to partner effectively with the court. A similar training is planned for prosecutors who are new to the child welfare system. Another upcoming training will be provided to all judges, lawyers, Department staff, and CASAs in one pilot county on a new practice model called Staged Case Planning. In Staged Case Planning, both safety issues and risk issues are identified up front, and once the safety issues have been addressed, the child can return home. The risk issues will be addressed in the home, with the overall goal of safely increasing timely reunifications. The goal of the joint training is that everyone will be trained to the same definitions of safety and risk so that all parties have a shared understanding of the new practice model.

Ms. Alexander and Ms. Alsaker-Burke credit the momentum of the above initiatives to the strong collaboration that is already in place, but they recognize that there is still room for improvement in their collaborative process. Their goal is to establish an effective infrastructure for multi-agency systems change at the state level. They have learned that collaboration needs to be multi-dimensional: at the state level, at the local level, and between the local and state levels. Collaboration also needs to include a more formalized system for data sharing, which is still

needed in Idaho. Ms. Alexander and Ms. Alsaker-Burke acknowledged that sometimes working collaboratively with multiple agencies to identify and address common goals can be a slow process, but they also agreed that their persistence has resulted in significant achievements.

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MICHIGAN⁵

Currently in Michigan there are several significant court-driven programs with the specific aim of achieving timely permanency for children in foster care: the Permanency Actions workgroup, the Permanency Forum (formerly known as the Adoption Forum), the Parent Representation Project, and Baby Court. As the Justice that serves as the liaison between the judicial system and the child welfare system, Justice Maura Corrigan has spearheaded many of these programs, together with Dan Wright, Director of Child Welfare Services for the State Court Administrative Offices.

Permanency Actions Workgroup

The Permanency Actions workgroup was started by Justice Corrigan in 2006 as the result of amendments in Michigan state statutes that shifted the burden of proof in termination of parental rights hearings away from the state and onto parents. Justice Corrigan observed that this statutory shift led to an increase in the number of termination petitions that were on file and pending, to the point that petitions had doubled by 2003-2004. To address this increase, Justice Corrigan convened a workgroup of judges and staff from the child welfare and judicial agencies to take a critical look at current statutes and to propose statutory amendments. The Permanency Actions workgroup meets on a quarterly basis and to date every amendment that the workgroup has proposed has passed unanimously through the legislature with bipartisan support. These amendments have put the burden of proof back on the state, and have also mandated practices such as concurrent planning and continuation of parent-child visitation even if a termination petition has been filed. One recent effort led to the establishment of subsidized juvenile guardianships, which will allow children to achieve permanency while maintaining oversight by the judge assigned to the case. Currently, the Permanency Actions workgroup is drafting a new statute that would allow parental rights to be restored in cases where this would be appropriate, particularly for older youth who have a connection to their parents and who would likely return home on their own after they turn 18.

Permanency Forum

In 2008, Justice Corrigan and the Department of Human Services Director, Ismael Ahmed, began the Permanency Forum with the formation of cross-disciplinary, public-private teams in 13 counties. The exact composition of the teams varies by county, but all of the teams are led by judges who then chose team members that they thought would be effective at cutting through

⁵ Information provided to Casey Family Programs on November 2, 2009, by Honorable Maura Denise Corrigan, Justice, Supreme Court of Michigan, and Dan Wright, Director of Child Welfare Services, Michigan State Court Administrative Offices.

delays and barriers. In general, teams are made up of key stakeholders such as CASAs, lawyer GALs, parents' attorneys, county DHS directors/supervisors/social workers, and private agency supervisors/social workers. Some teams also include foster parents and one includes a former foster youth. The teams were tasked with examining court practices with a primary focus on four performance measures related to the Child and Family Services Review: timeliness, due process, permanency, and safety. Initially called the Adoption Forum, the project first targeted children who had been waiting over a year for their adoptions to be finalized, even though adoptive parents had already been identified. In addition, they were asked to identify the barriers that were preventing these adoptions from being finalized and to draft recommendations both for recruitment of adoptive families as well as for changes at the state level. In 2008, the number of adoptions in the original 13 counties had increased by 14 percent and the Permanency Forum has now grown to 23 of Michigan's largest child welfare jurisdictions.

Parent Representation Project

The Parent Representation Project, which also began in 2008, is an effort to improve the quality of legal representation that parents receive in child protection proceedings. Michigan partnered with the American Bar Association's (ABA) Center on Children and the Law to assess current practices for representation of parents. One of the key findings was that although many parents' attorneys had adequate skills, they were not meeting with or counseling parents outside of the courtroom, leading to the absence of a relationship of trust. Subsequently, many parents had been going through the motions of the child protection process without a clear understanding of the proceedings. In response to this finding, a symposium was recently held in October 2009 that brought a national expert to present to judges, legislators, child welfare advocates, attorneys, and child welfare agency staff on the topic of improving parent legislation. An advanced training is scheduled for December 2009, and then a pilot project will be held to develop different ideas for organizing parents' counsel so that they can get the training and support that they need. Based on the experience of other states, Michigan believes that when parents are adequately represented by counsel, out of home placements will decrease and reunifications will increase, leading to improved permanency outcomes for all children.

Baby Court

Another recent initiative is Baby Court, adopted from the Baby Court program developed by Judge Cindy Lederman, Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Court in Miami-Dade County, and Dr. Joy Osofsky, Professor of Pediatrics and Psychiatry at Louisiana State University. There are currently two Baby Courts in Michigan, one in Midland County and one in Genesee County; in addition, Michigan's largest county, Wayne County, is currently in the process of establishing its own Baby Court. Like Drug Courts, the Baby Courts are specialty courts that screen participants in order to ensure that they will be a good match for the program and therefore have a higher likelihood of success. The goal of Baby Courts is to help parents improve their parenting by providing them with an infant mental health therapist that provides intensive, hands-on dyadic therapy between the parent and child. In order to be selected for Baby Court, the child is assessed for cognitive or other delays as soon as the dependency petition is filed, and then the Baby Court team determines whether or not the case would be appropriate for the program. If the parent agrees to participate, the judge speaks directly to the parent at the outset in order to communicate that the team is there to help the parent succeed, but that the parent is responsible for participating and doing the work. Although the program is too new to have any substantial outcome data, Midland County and Genesee County have already graduated their first cohort of parents that were successfully reunified with their children.

A more general strategy that is being used by many judges throughout Michigan is to hold more frequent hearings in order to ensure that progress is being made on cases. In Michigan court rule requires review hearings every 91 days, but after a training last year on the benefits of more frequent hearings, many judges are holding hearings more often. Judges have also made an effort to clarify expectations for the next hearing, so that each individual knows what they will need to get done in the interim, and what they will need to bring to the next hearing in order to make it effective and meaningful.

Using Data as a Tool

For those children who have not yet achieved permanency, data is being used as a tool to ensure that the children are not forgotten. Every month, judges are provided with a list of the names of children and the date at which they will have been in care for one year. Children who remain in care after parental rights have been terminated are also included in the list. According to Justice Corrigan, before this data was tracked, cases would be overlooked and significant time would go by without those children achieving permanency. Now that the data is being shared and disseminated, there is greater accountability to help ensure timely permanence for children in care.

Data sharing was cited by both Justice Corrigan and Mr. Wright as an element that has been critical to the success of their permanency initiatives; given the fact that the judicial system and the child welfare system maintain two separate data systems, sharing the data has required significant collaboration. Each agency has now identified staff to share data stage-by-stage, which has been one of the key outcomes of the agencies' efforts to more effectively collaborate.

Training

In addition, the agencies have increased cross-training in order for staff from each agency to understand each other's roles. However, total joint training between the judicial agency and the child welfare agency is an area that was identified as one that could use improvement; for example, the judicial staff has received training on concurrent planning but only two county child welfare agencies have begun to roll out their concurrent planning training. This is leading to a "silo effect," whereas joint training would enable both agencies to learn the same information at the same time, which could lead to faster results. Similarly, use of the new juvenile guardianships that were created by the Permanency Actions workgroup has been slow, in large part because the local child welfare agencies are not familiar with the process, which was created at the state level. A system-wide joint training program would help to address these issues.

Judicial Leadership

Underlying the success of all of these efforts is the common theme of judicial leadership; Justice Corrigan believes that while judicial leadership should begin at the Supreme Court level, local judges need to be empowered to take on the challenges they face at the local level. With strong judicial leadership and strong inter-agency collaboration, local teams have the knowledge and the expertise to resolve the barriers to permanency faced by the foster children in their communities.

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MINNESOTA⁶

In Minnesota, the Children's Justice Initiative (CJI) is a driving force from both the Minnesota Judicial Branch and the Minnesota Department of Human Services to reform the child welfare system and improve outcomes for abused and neglected children. The CJI is part of Minnesota's Court Improvement Program, and CJI teams are located in each of Minnesota's 87 counties; they are led by judges and include the director of the county agency. Other team members include tribal representatives, GALs, attorneys, and other key stakeholders. Teams meet regularly to identify and implement strategies to improve the lives of youth in foster care.

Identifying Areas of Concern

Each year, the CJI holds either a statewide conference or a regional meeting in each of Minnesota's 10 judicial districts; during the 2008 regional meetings, permanency data from the second Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) was shared with the attendees. State and county data were presented, indicating whether the jurisdiction was: in substantial compliance; not in compliance but reasonably close; or out of compliance with significant progress to make. One of the identified areas of concern was that of re-entries, and teams discussed the reasons behind Minnesota's extremely high rate of re-entries into care. Judges indicated that early judicial training was very focused on the importance of the twelve-month timeline and why it is not beneficial for children to linger in care. While that was important information, judges indicated a need for additional training. For example, training on how judges can evaluate safety in the home before reunification takes place, in order to avoid re-entries into care. It was also suggested that the quality of hearings would be enhanced, and permanency would increase, if parents attended court hearings on a routine basis and heard directly from judges.

Permanency for Older Youth

CJI teams also focused on issues of older youth in long-term foster care. In August 2009, state legislation, consistent with the federal Fostering Connections to Success Act, was passed that requires social workers to have more specific contact with youth regarding their long-term plans. From the perspective of the court, this is a conversation that is not taking place between the judges and the youth because youth generally do not attend court hearings. At this time, there is no mandate or policy requiring a child's attendance at court. CJI teams are being tasked with developing strategies at their local county level that ensure that every child, and especially older youth, attend their court hearing. A goal for the 2010 CJI regional meetings is to share data about youth fourteen years old and older whose parents' rights have been terminated but who have not yet achieved permanency. The plan is that the goals set for the following year will be to find a permanent home for each of these youth. Possible strategies might include relative searches, or reinstatement of parental rights where appropriate, which is allowed by state statute in Minnesota. A proposed change in statute would also allow for parental rights to be suspended rather than terminated, with the hope that this may lead to increased permanency for some youth.

⁶ Information provided to Casey Family Programs on October 30, 2009, by Judith C. Nord, Staff Attorney / Children's Justice Initiative Manager, Court Services Division, Minnesota State Court Administrator's Office.

Resource Information

As the CJI Manager, Ms. Judith Nord supports the work of the teams by providing resource information, such as bench cards prepared by the American Bar Association's Center on Children and the Law. These bench cards provide tips on how to engage a child at different ages/developmental stages. Further, a checklist is being developed to help guide judges as they ask questions about a youth's preparation for becoming an adult; this checklist will be included in the judge's bench book. The bench book, the result of an earlier permanency initiative, is a compilation of approximately 25 chapters with information ranging from child development to the various types of hearings that take place in juvenile court. To help guide their work, the information in the bench book is being converted into a checklist of questions for different groups of professionals, such as judges, attorneys, and GALs. In addition to these initiatives, the CJI's advisory committee is developing a list identifying action items that both courts and social workers can take to improve outcomes for older youth in care.

Currently, Minnesota's data comes from a variety of sources (the CFSRs, case management reviews, focus groups, and anecdotal information), and it is difficult to identify the outcomes of these permanency initiatives. However, the statewide court information system is beginning to track performance measures and the hope is that the first group of data will be available in the spring of 2010.

Effective Legal Representation

Anecdotal information suggests that one program that has had a positive impact on permanency outcomes for children is the statewide Guardian ad Litem program; their mandatory pre-service training is credited with its success. Conversely, a significant challenge in Minnesota is that of appropriate legal representation for parents, who are only appointed an attorney if they qualify financially and if a judge decides that it is appropriate. Due to the fact that attorneys for parents are not mandated by state statute, the Public Defenders' Office ceased providing representation as of July 1, 2008 due to budget constraints. Since then, counties have been seeking attorneys to work with parents, but often these attorneys lack experience with cases of child abuse and neglect. Therefore, training for this group has become a critical issue. Anecdotal information suggests that lack of appropriate parent representation is having a negative impact on permanency outcomes for children; for instance, attorneys who are trained in the adversarial process have advised parents to refuse services, consequently slowing down the process of reunification.

Collaboration

One key to the continuing efforts of the CJI teams is that each team has a succession plan, ensuring a smooth transition when there is turnover. Similarly, each team has put in place a "leavening process" in which team members share the policies and practices that they develop with their counterparts throughout the county. Ms. Nord identified judicial leadership and collaboration amongst the team members as the two key elements for making the work successful. In Minnesota, teams are encouraged to build relationships and respect, rather than to talk about the challenges within their county. In 2001, teams were brought together for a statewide conference to develop strengths around building a team, working together, and developing agendas together. The idea behind collaboratively developing agendas for each meeting is that each person is more likely to contribute and participate, and therefore is more likely to take action to solve problems.

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MISSOURI⁷

Missouri has a number of court-driven efforts underway to address permanency, most notably their Fostering Court Improvement (FCI) project, which is currently the largest court program in the state. Missouri's FCI was started in 2005 as a collaboration between the Missouri Office of State Courts Administrator, the Missouri Children's Division of the Department of Social Services, the University of Missouri School of Social Work, and the Fostering Results project of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Social Work. The hallmark of Missouri's FCI is that it is led by the judiciary and driven by the data.

FCI Project Implementation

In Missouri, FCI began with four judicial circuits and has phased in additional circuits; currently, ten of Missouri's forty-five circuits have volunteered to participate in this program. Circuits are provided with data regarding youth in their jurisdiction, and develop their reform priorities and strategies based on that data. FCI plans to expand the program to another 3-5 circuits every year or every other year, as capacity and resources allow. As expansion continues, the initial sites are being utilized as models/mentors for the newer sites. One of the key criteria for identifying the readiness of a circuit for the FCI project is the willingness of the judicial, legal, and child welfare agency representatives to work together and make changes; otherwise, experience has shown that the circuit will not be successful in enacting change. As a first step in this collaborative process, it is recommended that teams attend a three-day collaboration training to ensure that they will be able to work together effectively.

Key features of successful FCI teams include:

- they are led by the judiciary;
- they are represented by community stakeholders, such as schools, treatment facilities, drug court, private agencies, CASA, defense attorneys, and the juvenile justice agency;
- each team includes a court clerk and a quality assurance specialist from the Children's Division;
- the courts administer and oversee the program, and serve as a clearinghouse for information regarding both what is working well and challenges.

Performance Measures

The Office of State Courts Administration, in collaboration with the Children's Division, collects and disseminates data on fifteen FCI court performance measures in the categories of permanency, due process, timeliness, safety, and stability. One of the "lessons learned" in the beginning stages of developing the FCI project was the importance of choosing appropriate performance measures and determining how to collect the needed data. Now the courts provide data on nine of the fifteen measures and the child welfare agency provides the remainder of the data. Each FCI team is provided with the outcomes of the performance measures regarding the

⁷ Information provided to Casey Family Programs on October 26, 2009, by Norma Rahm, Court Program Manager, Andrea Cleeton, Family Preservation Program Specialist, and Kimberly Abbott, Family Court Specialist, of the Missouri Office of State Courts Administration.

foster youth within their circuit, and the team then determines the issues to address based on the data and the needs of their local community.

Strategies towards Permanency

When the city of St. Louis joined the FCI project, they determined that older youth, particularly African-American youth, were staying in care for long periods of time. They identified this group as their target population and implemented strategies to move them towards permanency. They conducted case readings and staffings with the youth and their social workers in order to get the youths' perspectives. This work has led to the expansion of family search and engagement to find connections for these youth. Springfield, which is a quasi-urban area, and Jefferson County, which is a rural but large county south of St. Louis, are also adopting these strategies to address permanency for youth in long-term foster care.

Other circuits have implemented strategies, such as improving engagement with fathers and increasing use of relative care, while others are increasing the number of guardianships to establish permanency for youth. There is also an overall effort to engage families earlier in the dependency process and to achieve permanency for youth more quickly.

According to Ms. Norma Rahm, Court Program Manager for the Missouri Office of State Courts Administration, some of the sites that have been most successful have strong judicial leadership and an expectation that every member of the team is coming prepared to work. Regular monthly meetings with clearly defined tasks to complete between meetings also help to move the work of the team forward. The collaboration has brought permanency to the forefront of the conversation and has improved working relationships among the agencies. This has led to cross-training and a greater understanding of each professional's role in achieving permanency. For example, trainings have been provided to the judges on topics such as services and resources available under the Chaffee legislation and other opportunities available to older youth, as well as the importance of having youth participate in their own court hearings.

Data Accountability

The importance of data has also been a training topic; for example, the clerks who are responsible for entering data from court hearings were trained to understand the relevance of having accurate data and how it would be used. Missouri has used data to move children through the dependency system by tracking mandatory time frames for cases. Every time a case is not heard on time, the court must report to the Missouri State Supreme Court regarding the reason for the delay; that information is then used to develop plans for addressing the barriers to timely hearings. Now, approximately 95 to 97 percent of all case hearings are being held on time.

Outcome data related to the above practices and strategies has been difficult to capture; for example, even though the majority of all hearings are now being heard on time, it is not clear whether this one improvement has led to better outcomes. As Ms. Rahm expressed, it is difficult to directly correlate positive outcomes to just one strategy. There is an effort to collect data and outcomes related to new strategies, but the challenge is determining how to capture that data so that it can be used to drive further court reform.

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PENNSYLVANIA⁸

Pennsylvania has made significant strides in the last three years to improve outcomes for foster children through statewide systems reform. Throughout most of the state's history, the 67 counties and 60 judicial districts were individualized and worked independently of one another. However, a unique structural change, designed to build collaboration between the judicial system and the child welfare agency, has led to significant reform efforts in a relatively short period of time. This structure, known as Roundtables, is a three-tiered system at the county, regional, and state levels. The Roundtables provide a forum and a structure for identifying barriers faced by children in foster care, and for developing solutions to those barriers.

First Level: Local Children's Roundtables

These roundtables are convened in each county by a dependency judge and are co-facilitated by the judge and a children's administrator. Participants include representatives at the local level who affects dependency for children, including attorneys, solicitors, GALs, and representatives from the mental health, drug and alcohol, and foster parent agencies. Children's Roundtables meet regularly, although the frequency of the meetings is decided locally based on each county's need.

Second Level: Leadership Roundtables

There are eight leadership roundtables in the state. The 67 counties are assigned to a Roundtable based on the size of the county, so that like-sized counties, which presumably have similar challenges and resources, meet together at the same Roundtable. Each Children's Roundtable is represented at the Leadership Roundtable by their local judge, children's administrator, and one additional representative of their choosing. The co-chairs of the Leadership Roundtables are a judge from one county and an administrator from another county. The Leadership Roundtables meet twice a year, in the fall and in the spring.

Third Level: State Roundtable

This Roundtable meets once a year in the summer and is attended by the co-chairs from each Leadership Roundtable, in addition to the children's administrator and judge from Philadelphia and Allegheny County. Since these are the jurisdictions with the largest number of children in care, they have "standing seats" at the State Roundtable, in addition to the representatives from their Leadership Roundtable. The State Roundtable is co-chaired by: Justice Baer of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania; Richard Gold, Deputy Secretary for the Office of Children, Youth, and Families (OCYF); and Sandra Moore, Administrator for the Office of Children and Families in the Courts.

⁸ Information provided to Casey Family Programs on November 5, 2009, by Sandra Moore, Administrator, Pennsylvania Office of Children and Families in the Courts.

The structure of the Roundtables has been very successful in large part because the issues that are addressed at the State level are those that have been brought from the local level up to the Leadership level, and then to the State level. Staff from the Office of Children and Families in the Courts attend the Leadership Roundtables in the spring to capture themes from across the Roundtables, and these themes are used to set the agenda for the State Roundtable in the summer. The solutions developed at the State Roundtable are then brought back to the Leadership Roundtables in the fall, and from there they are taken back to the local Children's Roundtables. Thus, the Roundtables are a mechanism for effectively moving issues from the local county level up to the state level, and then to bring solutions back down to the county level, rather than having a strictly state-level structure that makes decisions that are imposed upon the counties. The information sharing and problem-solving is based on the principles of the Family Group Decision-Making model, which is solution-focused and invites those who will be impacted by the decision to be part of the decision-making process.

A new Children's Roundtable Summit will be held this year for the first time, with participation from teams from 52 counties. The focus of the Summit will be to develop action plans to move youth to permanency. In preparation for the Summit, a subcommittee of the State Roundtable was formed to develop a mission statement, value and belief statements, and guiding principles for the Roundtables. "Families for Children" is the title of this document, with family as the key element upon which the document is based. Another subcommittee is developing a dependency bench book which details what should happen at every hearing and what judges should ask to make the hearings more effective and meaningful. This subcommittee is the only one represented solely by judges, an intentional decision to ensure that the bench book would be written for judges, by judges.

Permanency Practice Initiative

A significant effort that resulted from the State Roundtables was the Permanency Practice Initiative (PPI), a combination of four innovative practices: Family Group Decision-Making (FGDM), Family Finding, Family Development Credentialing, and the 3-5-7 Model, which is a grief and loss model that can be used to help prepare children for permanency. A multi-disciplinary oversight team was formed to develop the phased roll-out plan for the PPI. Counties were invited to volunteer for Phase 1 of the roll-out, and they were required to demonstrate their commitment by providing a letter of interest signed by four key stakeholders: the dependency judge, the president judge (if different from the dependency judge), the children's administrator, and the county commissioner. Counties also had to agree that their dependency judge and children's administrator would engage in training on the above practices. Fifteen counties were chosen in September 2008; these counties were provided with training, resources, and support, and were given six months to prepare before launching their programs in March 2009. Fourteen of the fifteen counties successfully met the timeline.

As part of the PPI, counties were required to implement all three family practices, as well as the 3-5-7 Model, but they were allowed to choose their own parameters for the cohort that would receive these services, i.e., older youth, children age 0-5, etc. However, counties were required to modify their court structure by holding review hearings every three months instead of every six months. One of the incentives for counties, which was also a key factor in the program's success, was that the state OCYF committed to funding these initiatives at 95 percent, which was significantly higher than the funding provided for most programs. Further, the OCYF guaranteed that counties could save and reinvest any state money that they saved by lowering the number of children in out-of-home care.

Preliminary data indicates that the PPI has had positive outcomes; for example, Dauphin County, which chose to focus on children age 0-5, started in September 2008 with a cohort of 125 children. By May 1, 2009, they had 102 children in the cohort, despite an increase of 32 new children age 0-5 who came into care. Because Dauphin County was able to reinvest their savings, they have now expanded the cohort to children age 0-10, and the expectation is that eventually all counties will expand these services to all children, thanks to the reinvestment of their savings.

Furthermore, when Phase 2 of the PPI began, there was a very large response from counties wishing to join this program, which indicates that they had heard positive feedback from their Phase 1 colleagues. Phase 2 counties are being connected with like-size Phase 1 counties, so that they can utilize the lessons learned during the first phase of the initiative. There are now 27 counties actively involved in the PPI, accounting for 71 percent of children in care. Philadelphia, which has the largest number of children in care in the state, is not currently a part of the initiative, but they have started to launch some of these practices on their own, including FGDM and Family Finding, as well as a pilot of the three-month reviews.

NGA Participation and Accountability

In addition to the work of the Roundtables and the PPI, Pennsylvania is part of the NGA Policy Academy on Safely Reducing the Number of Children in Foster Care. As such, sixteen counties from across the state are participating in a leadership team, with the specific goal of reducing the number of children in out of home care. Since April 2008, the sixteen counties have seen a ten percent reduction; about half of those counties are also involved in the PPI. As a result of the work of the NGA leadership group and the PPI, about 35 counties, with approximately 82 percent of all children in out of home care, are involved in efforts to strengthen families and expedite safe permanency for children.

As part of the work of the NGA leadership team, the Deputy Secretary for the OCYF, along with his Regional Director team, has taken a personal approach to hold counties accountable to expediting timely permanency for children in care. The Deputy Secretary and each of the Regional Directors are personally engaged in case staffings with social workers in each of the counties, to look at practice, as well as policy and systems barriers. Another strategy for accountability was to look at the data, which was initially a challenge due to the various data systems across the state. One of the first steps taken to address this barrier was to develop templates for the various court hearings so that the forms would be consistent across the state. In this way, data could be gathered in a consistent fashion, which was then entered into a new child dependency data system created by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. In less than a year, the new data system has been rolled out to 65 of the 67 counties in the state. The initiative to develop a new data system has been successful in part because of the judicial leadership from the Supreme Court, in addition to the collaborative consensus from the State Roundtables that collecting the data was essential to effectively track outcomes.

Leadership and Collaboration

In addition to the importance of having judicial leadership, Ms. Sandra Moore, Administrator, Pennsylvania Office of Children and Families in the Courts, shared that it is important to have leadership at the top levels that is visible and vocal. The leaders also need to be willing to model the changes that they want to see in others; for example, one of the challenges in Pennsylvania was how to begin the dialogue and collaboration between the judicial branch and the child welfare agency, and the decision was made that the effort needed to begin at the top. Justice Baer, Deputy Secretary Gold, and Ms. Moore collectively agreed that they would not ask the

counties to do anything that they would not do themselves, so they began to role model the collaborative relationship that they wanted to see in the counties. Courts and child welfare agencies had expressed some concern about developing relationships as they were concerned about issues of confidentiality, conflict of interest, etc., but Justice Baer, Deputy Secretary Gold, and Ms. Moore helped them to understand that collaborative communication on an administrative level is acceptable and even encouraged. The effort towards collaborative communication was further modeled at a 2007 statewide conference on FGDM, where multi-disciplinary teams from 45 counties were brought together to focus on a specific practice. The shared learning and shared focus on solutions provided a concrete way to help develop collaborative relationships that could then continue on into the other practices taking place in each county.

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PIMA COUNTY, ARIZONA⁹

As a nationally recognized Model Court, the Pima County Juvenile Court has undertaken a number of strategies to improve outcomes for children in care, many of which have been adopted statewide. One example is a protocol instituted by the Model Court that required that foster children receive notice of their court hearings. Notice was to be given by the judge directly to the child, if age 12 or older, at the preliminary protective hearing, along with an explanation of the child's right to be present and to be heard at every hearing. If the child was not present at the preliminary protective hearing, notice was given to the child's attorney with clear instructions to provide notice to the child. When the child did attend their first hearing, the judge would ensure that the child understood how to participate in the court proceedings; for example, how the child could access their attorney, when the next hearing would be held, and how the child could get to court. Despite some initial barriers faced by the child welfare agency, the judicial leadership of the Model Court ensured that there was follow through with the protocol through ongoing dialogue with the agency. As a result, Judge Stephen Rubin of Pima County Juvenile Court reported that children started attending court hearings more frequently.

Although the impact of youth attendance at hearings is unclear, Judge Rubin indicated that there was some anecdotal evidence that this practice led to permanency for some youth. Having the youth at court provided the judge with the opportunity to ask the child directly where the child wanted to live, and some children were indeed able to identify homes that resulted in permanent placements. Furthermore, Judge Rubin felt that having children present in the courtroom was a good way of holding everyone accountable, by reinforcing the importance of the proceedings taking place. As a result of this initiative by the Model Courts, the Arizona legislature recently revised Juvenile Court Rule 41, giving children the right to be present and to be heard at every hearing.

Identifying Barriers for Older Youth

A similar initiative has been implemented to help support older youth as they age out of care. The final closure hearing that is held when a youth turns 18 was traditionally a non-appearance

⁹ Information provided to Casey Family Programs on November 5, 2009, by Honorable Stephen M. Rubin, Judge, Pima County Juvenile Court.

hearing, but youth are now encouraged to attend their closure hearing, unless permanency has already been established. Although aging out of care is never a preferred plan, when it does happen, the court wants to acknowledge this milestone in the youth's life and to ensure that the youth has the resources needed. To better prepare older youth, Pima County is in the process of becoming a Passport to Adulthood site, to address the specific needs of youth in care that are age 12 and older. The Passport to Adulthood tool ensures that efforts regarding a youth's health, housing, education, employment, permanency resources, life skills, immigration status, and Indian Child Welfare Act compliance are documented, and provides key questions that judges can ask to hold social workers accountable to these efforts.

An earlier initiative of the Model Court was to focus on permanency for youth who had been in care longer than two years. A Permanency Committee was established, with subcommittees to look at various approaches to permanency. One of the subcommittees, tasked with identifying the barriers to permanency, created a survey that was sent electronically to key stakeholders, including judges, child welfare administrators/supervisors/staff, attorneys, foster care licensing agencies, and behavioral health networks. One of the surprising outcomes of the study was that the average age of the children was ten, although the subcommittee had assumed that the children would be older adolescents. The survey also revealed that the most significant barrier identified was a lack of permanent homes for sibling groups, which was the highest rated barrier across almost all of the groups surveyed. The second largest barrier identified was a lack of appropriate and permanent relative or fictive kin placements.

As part of this process, the Permanency Committee realized that a significant part of their effort would need to be data-driven, so a data report was compiled that provided key information about the number of children that had been in care longer than two years, including their age, length of time in care, assigned judge, permanency goal, current placement, and whether they are part of a sibling group. This data was not available from one single source, so collecting the data required a collaborative endeavor between the court, the child welfare agency, and the Foster Care Review Board (FCRB).

Using the data report, a file review of each case was conducted by the judge assigned to the case. The file review revealed that even though some children had a permanent plan of APPLA (Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement), they were in homes that were committed to caring for them permanently, but could not legalize that commitment for financial or other reasons. Judge Rubin acknowledged that it required a philosophical shift in order to acknowledge that sometimes it was in the best interest of the child to leave the child in their current placement, even if it was not a legally permanent one, in order to preserve the permanent connections that had been made. This was a difficult decision and was only done in cases where both the caregivers and the child were clear in their desire that the child should remain in the home, and that the relationship was indeed a permanent one. These cases highlighted some of the barriers to achieving legal permanency, some of which have since been addressed by the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act.

Permanency Collaborative Review

Through the case file reviews, a cohort of 27 children was selected based on the following criteria: over two years' length of stay in care; legally free; permanent plan of APPLA; and currently not in a permanent placement. This cohort was chosen as the pilot group for a new Permanency Collaborative Review (PCRV) hearing, which was held to focus solely on expediting permanency for each child. To minimize the workload impact, the child welfare agency and the judges agreed that social workers would not need to provide a written court

report for the PCRV hearing and that judges would not make any reasonable efforts finding or orders. An already-existing structure for Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings was also used to minimize workload impact. The CFTs were incorporated into the PCRV structure by holding the CFT at the courthouse before the hearing. The CFT, in conjunction with the PCRV, provided an opportunity for the judge to lead the team, including the child, in developing an action plan that would move the case forward towards permanency. The pilot was successful in securing legal permanence for 46 percent of the children in the cohort; however, the child welfare agency felt that they did not have the resources to commit to an ongoing implementation of the PCRV hearings, so the pilot was not implemented on a larger scale..

Using Data as a Tool

As a result of this experience, the court has realized the importance of using data to move cases towards timely permanency. Judges now receive a monthly report that provides a general dependency data snapshot, as well as a detailed report that provides information about the foster children under their supervision, such as the length of time that the case has been open and the identified permanent plan. As with the Permanency Committee endeavor, the data for these reports is collected from three systems: the judicial system, the child welfare agency, and the FCRB. A Model Court data subcommittee has been formed to examine the data every quarter to identify trends, in addition to developing mechanisms for improved data sharing. Some of the challenges include confidentiality and funding, as well as technical issues such as the lack of a common identifier.

Judge Rubin credits the progress that has been made in Pima County to the collaborative relationships between the key stakeholders, which has been the result of over ten years of working together on the Model Court initiative. Although it can be a challenge to get all of the stakeholders together, it needs to be a priority in order to keep everyone focused on permanency.

For further information, please contact:

- Honorable Stephen M. Rubin, Judge, Pima County Juvenile Court
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SOUTH DAKOTA¹⁰

South Dakota's Court Improvement Program (CIP) workgroup, a statewide, cross-disciplinary team, is the state's primary advocate of court reform in the child welfare system. The CIP workgroup, which consists of two judges, a tribal representative, a CASA representative, a state's attorney, a child's attorney, a court administrator, the Director of Child Services and two regional managers, and the CIP Coordinator, has developed various strategies to address permanency for youth in long-term care.

Resources

One of the earlier accomplishments of the workgroup was to develop the South Dakota Guidelines for Child Abuse and Neglect, which is a manual that details the dependency process, including a child's options for permanency. The workgroup has plans to update the Guidelines in

¹⁰ Information provided to Casey Family Programs on October 30, 2009, by Sara Kelly, Court Improvement Program Coordinator, South Dakota Unified Judicial System, and Virgena Wiesler, Director of Child Protection Services, South Dakota Department of Social Services.

2010, and revisions will include further information about the importance of permanency for youth. A similar effort is underway to develop a “professional reference guide” for judges, as well as for law enforcement, attorneys, and both public and private child welfare agencies. A goal of the professional reference guide for judges is to make the permanency review hearings more meaningful by ensuring that judges are asking the right questions and holding staff accountable to achieving permanency.

Addressing Barriers/Judicial Champions

Members of the CIP workgroup recently attended the Third National Judicial Leadership Summit, and part of the action plan they developed there is to identify all children that have Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) as their permanent plan and to address the barriers to achieving permanency for those youth. Currently, the workgroup is identifying the relevant children in each circuit; once they have been identified, a team meeting will be held for each child. In addition to the child, other team members will include the professionals involved in the child’s case, and the intent is that the team will include a judicial representative. The desired outcome is to achieve permanency for each child, and the CIP workgroup believes that this is an achievable and measurable outcome.

The CIP workgroup feels strongly that it is important to have judicial champions, and this is one area identified as needing improvement. South Dakota does not have a family court, so as judges rotate on the bench they have varying levels of experience and expertise with abuse and neglect (A&N) cases. Training for the judges was provided for the first time in 2007, and the next training is scheduled for 2010. At this time, a monthly data report is sent to the presiding judge of each of South Dakota’s seven judicial circuits, and the presiding judge then shares the data with the A&N judges in their circuit. The report lists all of the children in custody in a given jurisdiction and includes key data such as how long they have been in care, the date of the last hearing, and who is assigned to the case. Anecdotal information indicates that the judges are looking at the cases under their purview and are following up on the status of these cases. Future plans stemming from the action plan developed at the Judicial Leadership Summit include sharing data from all of the circuits with each other, so that judges can see what is happening in other circuits as well as their own.

Developing Attorney Training

Another initiative currently underway is aimed at improving representation for children by providing a video training for children’s attorneys. Although all children involved in Abuse and Neglect cases in South Dakota are appointed an attorney by state statute, there currently is no training curriculum for these attorneys. Therefore, the quality of representation can vary significantly, which is believed to have an impact on outcomes. The Unified Judicial System recently contracted with a marketing company to develop a video that will train attorneys on laws such as the A&N statutes of South Dakota and the Indian Child Welfare Act, and on other topics such as permanency. Any attorney assigned to represent abused or neglected children in South Dakota will be required to complete the video training, as well as pre- and post-competency tests in order to measure their subject knowledge. At this time, there is no state statute requiring legal representation for parents and there is no formal training for their attorneys.

Leadership

One of the key successes of the CIP workgroup was to acquire a position for a CIP Coordinator, Ms. Sara Kelly; prior to the creation of this position two years ago, there was no one person responsible for coordinating the CIP work taking place in the state. Although this position began

as a contract position, it is now a permanent position funded by South Dakota's Unified Judicial System. Ms. Virgena Wiesler, Director of Child Protection Services in South Dakota's Department of Social Services, credits this position and Ms. Kelly in particular with moving forward the court reform initiatives of the CIP workgroup.

Other elements of success identified by Ms. Wiesler and Ms. Kelly include support from the Chief Justice as well as having an effective working relationship between the judicial system and the child welfare system. Although much of the work of the CIP workgroup is relatively new and many efforts are still underway, these two elements have been critical to the successes to date.

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VERMONT¹¹

In January 2009, Vermont's new juvenile statute governing child protection and delinquency cases went into effect, the result of an 18-month collaborative effort by key child welfare stakeholders. The new statute included revisions to incorporate best practices as well as a reorganization of the previous statute in order to make it more user-friendly. A committee chaired by Administrative Judge Amy Davenport met regularly over the re-writing period to make revisions to the statute; the final proposed legislation only included revisions that had consensus from every team member.

Statutory Review

Many of the key revisions were written with the goal of achieving timely permanency for children in care. Examples include: setting concrete timeframes for getting to certain court milestones; a provision to identify and locate non-custodial parents; a provision requiring consideration of non-custodial parents and kin as placement options; and a provision requiring that parent-child visitation be addressed at every stage of the court process. The revised statute also includes an assumption that children age 10 and older will be at the initial removal hearing unless their attorney feels that attendance is not in their best interest. To support youth attendance at court, a workshop on effective youth participation was provided at a recent statewide child welfare conference, and ABA bench cards on effective age-appropriate youth engagement strategies were distributed. A report on effective youth participation is forthcoming.

The new statute also created a new hearing called the "post-disposition review," which is to be held 60 days after the dispositional hearing. The intent of this hearing is to decrease time in between court appearances, as many months can go by between the dispositional hearing and the first permanency review hearing. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in most cases the post-disposition review has been useful in keeping parties focused on case planning and permanency.

¹¹ Information provided to Casey Family Programs on November 4, 2009, by Shari Young, Juvenile Court Improvement Manager, Vermont Office of the Court Administrator.

Justice for Children Task Force

One of the driving forces for improving outcomes for children in foster care in Vermont is the Justice for Children (JFC) Task Force, which is chaired by the Chief Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court. The JFC Task Force is an interdisciplinary collaboration of decision-makers in those agencies that have a direct impact on children in foster care, such as the Courts, the Department for Children and Families, the Department of Mental Health, the Defender General's Office, the State's Attorneys Association, the Department of Health's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program, and the state legislature. The JFC Task Force is charged with identifying systemic barriers, developing solutions, measuring the effectiveness of changes once implemented, and reporting back to the Supreme Court with recommendations. The Task Force meets four times a year and has three subcommittees that are tasked with looking at issues that have been identified as priorities. Improving legal representation of parents and improving access to mental health and substance abuse treatments are two topics of interest at this time.

Inventory of Practices

Another initiative led by the JFC Task Force was a strategy borrowed from Minnesota and designed to promote best practices at the local level. A list of best practices at each stage of the dependency process was sent to each region and stakeholders were asked to rate the extent to which they engaged in those practices. The results were collected and presented as an "inventory of practices" statewide and for each local region. The JFC Task Force then developed activities meant to address the issues at a statewide level, and asked each region to choose two outcomes that they wanted to change as a result of the inventory.

Increasing Communication and Collaboration

Also at the local level, judges are encouraged to hold bench bar meetings, which are led by the judge and attended by court staff, social workers, attorneys, and GALs. The opportunity to meet outside the court room increases trust among parties and allows them to address issues in real time. Although bench bar meetings are not occurring consistently across the state, those judges that are holding meetings regularly have reported that they are an effective way of collaborating to come up with solutions.

One simple yet effective way of increasing communication among parties was the creation of a contact sheet, which the court staff provides to all parties at the beginning of a dependency case. The contact sheet lists the names and phone numbers for all parties, and is intended to facilitate communication outside the court room. Another effort to increase communication and collaboration are court scheduling meetings, which are being used in two counties. The purpose of these meetings is to determine which dependency hearings might be contested and therefore need protracted time on the calendar. As a result of these meetings, attorneys are talking about cases before the hearing, and court time can be used more effectively for those cases that are ready to move forward.

Using Data as a Tool

Vermont is also striving to improve its use of data; it will soon become a Fostering Court Improvement state, although there are some glitches to be worked out before the public site can be launched. At this time, judges and court staff receive weekly reports showing case pending disposition and cases pending TPR decisions. The JFC Task Force is also using data from the courts and the child welfare system to monitor twenty different performance measures. Although there is currently no mechanism for data exchanges between the judicial and the child welfare systems, there is a goal to eventually have a system that will allow for ease of data sharing. Steps towards this goal have begun; for example, one of the challenges was a lack of a

common identifier for cases, so the child welfare agency now enters the court docket numbers into their system so that those numbers can be used as a common identifier in both data systems.

In all of the above efforts, clear leadership, at the top level, as well as the local level, from both the judiciary and the child welfare agency were critical in achieving change. Communication between the two agencies was also key, as well as the funding provided by the Court Improvement Program, which made most of these changes possible.

For further information, please contact:

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Interested parties may find the following items useful. Although some of them are not available in electronic form, they may be requested from the contacts indicated below.

Resource Title	Content	Source	Contact
"Getting from Here to There" Booklet	Youth's guide to the dependency process	Children's Action Alliance	http://www.azchildren.org/MyFiles/PDF/GuidetoDependency.pdf
"Fostering the Future: Strengthening Courts for Children in Foster Care" DVD & Booklet	Court recommendations from the Pew Commission	The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care	www.pewfostercare.org
"Project Reunification: A Family Guide for Success" Booklet & DVD	Dependency Guidebook for parents	Missouri 25 th Judicial Circuit	Linda.Wagoner@courts.mo.gov
"Implementation Guide" for the Children's Justice Initiative in Minnesota	Describes the implementation of court reform in all counties in Minnesota	Minnesota Supreme Court & Minnesota Dept. of Human Services	judy.nord@courts.state.mn.us
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Judge's Benchbook Judge Checklist Court Administration Checklist Guardian ad Litem Checklist 	Guidance for specified parties involved in dependency hearings	Minnesota Supreme Court & Minnesota Dept. of Human Services	http://www.mncourts.gov/?page=178 judy.nord@courts.state.mn.us
Judicial Bench Cards	Bench cards for engaging youth at different ages	American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law	Young Children Toddlers School Age Children Adolescents Older Youth
<u>In Press:</u> Research report on children's participation in review hearings. ¹²	Empirical research findings from Dr. Victoria Weisz, Ms. Sarah Beal, and Ms. Twila Wingrove	University of Nebraska-Lincoln	vweiszl@unl.edu

¹² The preliminary findings indicate: no evidence of harm to the children who attended their hearings; the child's age was not related to stress or other negative feelings; hearings with children in attendance were shorter than hearings without children; hearings with children were less substantive; encouragement and questions from the judge were related to greater comfort and more positive feelings in the children. A Power Point presentation is currently available.