



A SNAPSHOT OF THE

IMPLEMENTATION SITES

PROJECT



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INTRODUCTION

In 1992, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) embarked upon a major national initiative to improve court handling of child abuse and neglect cases. The first step in the process was to develop a blueprint for court improvement nationwide. The blueprint publication, *Resource Guidelines: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases (Resource Guidelines)* was developed over a three-year period of time by a multi-disciplinary committee composed of judicial leaders, court system professionals, and other experts. In August 1995, the *Resource Guidelines* publication was released nationwide. Some of the practice improvements recommended by the *Resource Guidelines* include:

- Substantive and thorough child abuse and neglect hearings
- One family-one judge case assignment and calendaring
- Individual time-certain calendaring
- Implementation of strict no-continuance policies
- Use of data to inform evidence-based practices
- Dissemination of copies of orders to all parties at the end of the hearing
- Frequent court review with enforcement of established timeframes
- Judicial leadership both on and off the bench to improve case processing and child welfare outcomes
- Strong and effective collaborative relationships and collaborative action among all aspects of the court and child welfare system

“ It is a great opportunity to hear from Mentor Model Court Lead Judges who have been successful in implementing change in their jurisdictions. Their insight into the type of leadership necessary to motivate stakeholders and inspire collaborative solutions is invaluable. By allowing the court team to participate in a training on the *Enhanced Resource Guidelines*, having them gain understanding of the legal requirements of the court, and allowing them to review data on positive outcomes, it will go a long way toward getting a commitment from other stakeholders to join the collaborative.

JUDGE CARLOS VILLALON, JR.

Child Protection Court of the Rio Grande Valley West
Edinburg, Texas

As a result, the Victims Act Model Court Project (Model Courts) was developed. Using the acclaimed best practices outlined in the *Resource Guidelines*, the Model Courts identified impediments to the timeliness of court events and delivery of services for children in care and their families, and then designed and implemented court and agency-based changes to address those barriers. The Model Courts took a critical look at their practices and instituted reforms where needed to improve court performance. These efforts were shared and replicated in other courts nationwide.

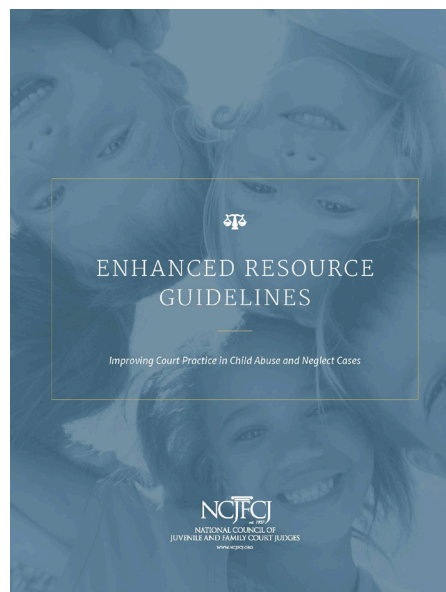
In recognition of the lessons learned from the Model Courts, emerging issues from the field and new demands placed on the judge as a result of changes in federal law, the NCJFCJ revised the original *Resource Guidelines* document and released an enhanced version in 2016. The *Enhanced Resource Guidelines: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases*¹ set forth the principles that should guide a judges work and provide tools to achieve the key principles of permanency planning. The *Enhanced Resource Guidelines* build upon the original *Resource Guidelines* and provide:

- Guidance for judges on how to make key decisions regarding safety, permanency, and well-being at every stage of the process
- Guidance for judges on how to develop effective findings based on assessment of the facts, data, the individual needs of the child and family, the law, and the best available research and science
- Guidance for judges on how to hold other professionals in the system accountable by asking questions which raise the expectations for practice for all those who come to court

The *Enhanced Resource Guidelines* illuminate:

- The role of the judge as a leader on the bench in cases and off the bench in systems improvement with court stakeholders, systems partners, and community
- How to obtain the information and data needed to make informed decisions and ensure hearings meaningfully contribute to case progress
- The procedural steps for each hearing to ensure procedural justice is achieved
- The key decisions that must be made to ensure the needs of the child and family are being met

In 2014, the NCJFCJ restructured the Model Courts project by designating the more than 80 participating jurisdictions to mentor status in an effort to bring on new jurisdictions willing to implement practices outlined in the *Enhanced Resource Guidelines*. Mentor Model Courts remain integrally involved in mentoring these new Implementation courts and serve as cross-site visit hosts to share and showcase their innovations and reforms, allow for teams to observe hearings, and meet with their system counterparts to exchange ideas and approaches related to systems reform initiatives.



ENHANCED RESOURCE GUIDELINES: Improving Court Practices in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases, available at www.NCJFCJ.org/ERG.



IMPLEMENTATION SITES

Through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) funding, the Implementation Sites Project is continually developing to provide specialized training and technical assistance and to help integrate best practices as outlined in the *Enhanced Resource Guidelines: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases*.

The Implementation Sites Project seeks to improve outcomes for children in care through guiding lead judges and collaborative team members in assessing current practices, gathering data, measuring performance, and participating in ongoing training opportunities.

A request for applications was sent out to courts nationwide which resulted in 20 applicants. After careful review, eight sites were selected to participate in the project. These newly recruited jurisdictions are dedicated to implementing the infrastructure pioneered by the Model Courts project which includes the development of a judicially-led collaborative seeking to implement systems change efforts to improve the child abuse and neglect case process and, ultimately, improve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children.

In order to ensure success in the Implementation Sites Project, a special level of dedication and commitment is required of the identified Implementation Sites. Expectations of Implementation Sites include:

- Strong, visible, and active judicial leadership
- Collaboration and communication with stakeholders
- Ongoing, frequent communication with the NCJFCJ
- Attendance at the All-Sites Conference and Lead Judges Meeting
- Coordination and participation in Court Improvement Project (CIP) initiatives
- Service to the NCJFCJ as faculty or in a mentoring role to other courts

Each designated site leads local system reform through the selection of short-term improvement goals based on the *Enhanced Resource Guidelines* practices, measures implementation of its goals, partners with statewide CIP efforts, and informs national dependency system improvements. Sites are expected to assess

their child abuse and neglect case processing, continually focus on barriers to timely permanency, develop and institute plans for court improvement, and work collaboratively to effect systems change.

The NCJFCJ designates a Site Manager to work with and advocate for each Implementation Site. Part of the Site Manager's function is to serve as a direct service provider, and work closely with individual Implementation Sites to develop, prioritize, and achieve court improvement goals and to help facilitate systems change efforts. The Site Manager assists the Implementation Sites' Lead Judges through regular telephone and email correspondence; technical assistance, including publications and other materials; and planning and conducting site visits, meetings, strategic planning, and trainings as appropriate. The NCJFCJ Site Managers possess a high level of education and experience, with post-graduate degrees and expertise in child welfare, law, tribal courts, and foster parent education.

Initial site visits were conducted within the first year of selection to assess current dependency court practice and adherence to the *Enhanced Resource Guidelines* best practices; meet with key stakeholders to develop relationships and understand their roles and responsibilities; meet with the current judicially-led team to develop a better understanding of the court process; and inform the court team and stakeholders about the Implementation Sites Project. Following these initial visits, ongoing work continues.

The NCJFCJ has set the *Key Principles of Permanency Planning*² as the core competencies for all Implementation Sites. The Sites are expected to use recommendations from site visit reports and seek assistance and guidance of their Site Manager. Additionally, the Sites are expected to prioritize individual site goals and develop strategies to achieve the practice improvement efforts based on the core competencies listed as follows:

KEEP FAMILIES TOGETHER

Families are the cornerstone of our society, and judges should avoid unnecessary separation of child and family if the child can remain safely in the home. When the state is forced to intervene on behalf of abused and neglected children and must decide whether to place children outside the home, it must take into account not only the children's safety, but also the emotional impact of separation. The best plan, if it can be safely implemented, is the least restrictive environment – the child's own home. Throughout its involvement, the state must strive to ensure that children are brought up in stable, permanent families. Each child and family deserves to be treated fairly and holistically, regardless of how and why they enter the court system. Judicial determinations to remove children from a parent should only be made based on legally sufficient evidence that a child cannot be safe at home.

ENSURE ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Judges must ensure that the courtroom is a place where all who appear are treated with respect, patience, dignity, courtesy, and as part of the problem-solving process. Juvenile courts must be child- and family-centered and presumptively open to the public. Children and parents must have the opportunity to be present in court and meaningfully participate in their case planning and in the court process. It is the responsibility of judges to see that all children and each parent are afforded their constitutional rights to due process.

“ To know that there is expert assistance and guidance to make the courts a driving force in providing for the best interests of our children and youth is worth the effort that we will make as a jurisdiction to accomplish this goal. Thank you, NCJFCJ.

JUDGE DORIS L. FRANSEIN

Juvenile Division of the District Court
Tulsa, Oklahoma

CULTIVATE CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Courts must be welcoming and respectful to people of all races, legal, ethnic, and socio-economic statuses, honoring family in all its forms. All members of the court system must recognize, respect, and seek to preserve the ethnic and cultural traditions, mores, and strengths of those who appear before the court. Judges must become aware of, and remediate to the extent possible, their own implicit biases that may adversely affect decision-making.

ENGAGE FAMILIES THROUGH ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ADR) TECHNIQUES

Judges should encourage and support the development of family-centered, culturally responsive forms of ADR to allow families to craft effective court-sanctioned solutions to the issues that brought them before the court. Courts should support the development and use of appropriate dispute resolution techniques including mediation, family group conferencing, differential response, and encourage all to utilize the form that will be most beneficial to the children and parents in a particular case.

ENSURE CHILD SAFETY, PERMANENCY, AND WELL-BEING OF EACH CHILD

Judges are responsible for ensuring the physical, mental, emotional, and reproductive health, and educational success of all children under the supervision of the court. If a parent is a victim of violence from the other parent/spouse/friend, the judge should sanction plans that keep that victim safe as the best way to keep a child safe. When return to a parent is inappropriate, placement with kin or a responsible person with a significant relationship with the child is the first priority. No child should exit foster care without a life-long connection to a caring and responsible adult.

A child's sense of time requires timely permanency decisions. Research supports that a child's development of trust and security can be severely damaged by prolonged uncertainty in not knowing or understanding if they will be removed from the home, or when and whether they will return home. The shorter the time a child spends in foster care, separated from his or her family, the less likely there will be prolonged damage to the child's development of trust and security.

ENSURE ADEQUATE AND APPROPRIATE FAMILY TIME

Consistent with child safety, relationships between and among children, parents, and siblings are vital to child well-being. Judges must ensure that quality family time is an integral part of every case plan. Family time should be liberal and presumed unsupervised unless there is a demonstrated safety risk to the child. Sibling family time apart from parental family time should be considered. Family time should not be used as a case compliance reward or consequence.

PROVIDE JUDICIAL OVERSIGHT

Juvenile and family court judges have a responsibility to provide individual case oversight as well as system oversight and leadership. The role of the juvenile and family court judge is unique, as it combines judicial, administrative, collaborative, and systemic advocacy roles. By taking on these roles, the juvenile and family court judge holds all stakeholders, including the court, responsible to ensure safe, timely permanency and well-being for children and families. Judges must provide fair, equal, effective, and timely justice for children and their families throughout the life of the case, continually measuring the progress toward permanency for children. The same judge should oversee all cases impacting the care, placement, and custody of a child. Judges should ensure that there is communication, collaboration, and cooperation among all courts handling cases involving any given family.

ENSURE COMPETENT AND ADEQUATE REPRESENTATION

Judges are responsible for ensuring that parties, including each parent, are vigorously represented by well-trained, culturally responsive, and adequately compensated attorneys who are committed to these key principles. Children should be parties to their cases. Children are entitled to representation by attorneys and Guardians *ad litem*, and judges must ensure the child’s wishes are presented to and considered by the court.

“ It is always valuable to take a moment to stop the daily process of handling these matters and think about what we are doing and how we are doing it. It also helps to see that your court is not alone and that all courts struggle with the same issues and challenges.

JUDGE WADE NARAMORE

Eighteenth East Judicial Circuit
Hot Springs, Arkansas

ADVANCE THE DEVELOPMENT OF ADEQUATE RESOURCES

Juvenile and family courts must be appropriately supported. Courts must maintain a sufficient number of specially trained and permanently assigned judicial officers, staff, attorneys, and Guardians *ad litem* to thoroughly and effectively conduct the business of the court. Judges should continually assess the availability and advocate for the development of effective and culturally responsive resources and services that families need.

DEMONSTRATE JUDICIAL LEADERSHIP AND FOSTER COLLABORATION

Judicial leadership is the cornerstone of the *Resource Guidelines*’ principles – both on the bench in individual cases and off the bench in the broader community. Committed, knowledgeable judicial leaders are crucial to the success of court improvement and child welfare system reform efforts. Without this vitally important cornerstone, best practice principles cannot be fully implanted and achieved. The leadership of the judiciary is a crucial and necessary component in implementing reforms that support the *Resource Guidelines*. Judges must engage the community in meaningful partnerships to promote the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and to improve system responses to our most vulnerable citizens. The juvenile court must model and promote collaboration, mutual respect, and accountability among all participants in the child welfare system and the community at large.

While the core competencies are at the forefront of the NCJFCJ’s site work, each of the Implementation Sites has unique strengths and challenges. These differences originate from varied backgrounds and goals. While participating in this project, the Implementation Sites have seen successes and continue to work on obstacles.

“ The opportunities and possibilities for positive change presented at the NCJFCJ’s All-Sites Conference were incredible. Our team is much more focused now on the necessary steps to implement best practices in our court for the benefit of our children and families.

JUDGE DAN MICHAEL

Juvenile Court of Memphis and Shelby County
Memphis, Tennessee



COURT PROFILES



EDINBURG,
TEXAS

HOT SPRINGS,
ARKANSAS

LITTLE ROCK,
ARKANSAS

MEMPHIS,
TENNESSEE

MONTGOMERY,
ALABAMA

PITTSBURGH,
PENNSYLVANIA

ST. PAUL,
MINNESOTA

TULSA,
OKLAHOMA

EDINBURG, TEXAS



BACKGROUND

The Edinburg, Texas, Implementation Site was selected under the leadership of Judge Carlos Villalon who is the sole judicial officer presiding over child protection/welfare cases in both Hidalgo and Starr counties. As part of their Implementation Sites Project application, Judge Villalon identified caseload reduction, strengthening collaborative alliances, and safely reducing the number of children in foster care as primary goals for the Child Protection Court of the Rio Grande Valley West.

Judge Villalon, court staff, and stakeholders are highly cognizant of the cultural needs and challenges faced by the families they serve. The majority of the court staff and stakeholders represent the population they serve. The majority of the attorneys, social workers, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), therapists, and guardians *ad litem* (GALs) are bilingual and are readily available to serve Spanish-speaking families. Stakeholders are extremely knowledgeable of the barriers related to serving non-documented families who find themselves in the child protection/welfare system and locating relatives to serve as resources and placement options for the children who need protection are prioritized.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND OUTCOMES

An initial site visit was conducted in November 2014. Subsequent visits were conducted to identify progress in meeting short and long term goals, assess court processes, and continue to develop relationships with stakeholders.

Initially, the court identified the use of block calendaring as the best way to organize its calendar; however, after experimentation, the court determined time-certain calendaring was more efficient and timely. With appropriate security firewalls, key stakeholders are allowed to access the 30-day docket online, and attorneys, social workers, and other stakeholders involved in child welfare cases can submit and receive their reports electronically, allowing for improved efficiency. Even with these improvements, some stakeholders requested that the docket be made available up to 60 days in advance to assist with scheduling and reducing court conflicts.

Judge Villalon is committed to using technology to improve outcomes in other ways as well. The Supreme Court of Texas Children's Commission provided the court with a Data Collection and Management System (DCMS) and training. Judge Villalon

LOCATION

Edinburg, Texas, in Hidalgo and Starr Counties

LEAD JUDGE

Judge Carlos Villalon, Jr.

TYPE OF COURT

Rural/Suburban

POPULATION³

849,843

NUMBER OF JUDICIAL OFFICERS

1

NUMBER OF HEARINGS PER YEAR

1,891

NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH DEPENDENCY CASES

1,089

WHEN ARE CHILDREN APPOINTED COUNSEL

Prior to initial hearing

WHEN ARE PARENTS APPOINTED COUNSEL

Prior to initial hearing

understands the importance of data and tracking outcome measures and both he and the Court Coordinator, Delilah Alvarez, have received extensive training on the DCMS. The DCMS has the capability to track the majority of permanency measure outcomes and workload measures including the number of open cases, placement, representation, timeliness of hearings, etc.

Since becoming an Implementation Site, Edinburg's conservatorship floating caseload decreased from 382 cases to 288 (total caseload decrease from 401 down to 303). Additionally, the number of children under the conservatorship of the Texas Department of Family and Child Protective Services (CPS) dropped from 861 to 658. This represents a 25% decrease in the floating caseload and the number of children currently under the custody of CPS. The percentage of reunifications and relative placements is approximately 75% and has not changed much over time. However, the number of children who are placed in the permanent care (PMC) of CPS without termination decreased substantially from 113 in the year prior to July 2014, to only 36 during the past 12 months. As a result, the numbers of children in PMC decreased substantially from 604 in early July 2014, to 269 as of March 28, 2016 – a 56% total decrease of children in PMC. In addition, the number of terminations has increased from 21 to 66 during the past 12 months. The increase in terminations can be attributed to better prosecutions, stricter adherence to statutory time frames, and the availability of contracted services for court reporters. As a result, more terminations are occurring on a timely basis and more children are becoming eligible for adoption.

SHORT AND LONG TERM GOALS

The court's goals focus on collaboration, training, and forming a drug court. These efforts are detailed below.

1. **Identify and invite key stakeholders who will meet on a monthly or bi-monthly basis in an effort to create a child welfare collaborative for the region.** The executive team is composed of 10 participants, but the team has identified other contacts essential in efforts for court reform. In addition, Judge Villalon has organized meetings with the local Child Placement Agencies, participated in a Foster Care consortium, presented and facilitated at the Annual Child Welfare Conference, and has made a number of public appearances advocating for the creation of a structured child welfare collaboration.
2. **Create a cross-training education subcommittee.** This subcommittee will develop a yearly training schedule on topics such as *Enhanced Resource Guidelines* best practices (including trauma-informed practices), psychotropic medications, and a review of existing and new federal and state child welfare laws. To date, the team has not created a subcommittee on training but has identified some training needs. This goal is to be addressed more thoroughly at future Court Team meetings.
3. **Creation of a Family Drug Court.** In early 2015, the court met with representatives of both CPS and Hidalgo County. Both parties agree that this court would benefit from a Family Drug Court component. In January 2016, Judge Villalon met with the Public Defender's Office which is interested in participating in the Family Drug Court and willing to assist with the application for grants and get the project moving.

HOT SPRINGS, ARKANSAS

BACKGROUND

The Hot Springs, Arkansas, Implementation Site was selected under the leadership of Judge Vicki Cook. After 22 years as the sole judicial officer presiding over the juvenile division of the 18th Judicial District Circuit Court, Judge Cook retired effective December 31, 2014. Judge Cook oversaw both the juvenile dependency docket and the juvenile justice docket in Garland County. Judge Wade Naramore was elected as the new Circuit Court judge and took over Judge Cook's responsibilities effective January 1, 2015. In Garland County, Judge Wade Naramore is the sole judicial officer responsible for dependency neglect, Family in Need of Services (FINS), and delinquency matters. Garland County noted in the initial application that their strengths are regular case staffings, court improvement team meetings, community resources that include therapeutic services, and an excellent working relationship with their child welfare agency.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND OUTCOMES

An initial site visit was conducted in late November 2014. As a result of findings from the initial site visit, the team determined a collaborative executive committee could be formed. Since formation of the executive committee, the relationships between dependent neglect stakeholders have greatly improved. The team discovered that small issues such as where to hold staffings or how neglect suspicions should be reported can easily be solved within minutes. The collaborative effort also provided entities with an opportunity to educate relevant parties about new laws and procedures, which has been one of the foremost accomplishments since becoming an Implementation Site. Additionally, the Court Improvement Team (CIT) meets quarterly to identify new ways to improve the court system for the children and families they serve. Previous projects include the creation of a Child Handbook for children entering the court system and the implementation of a standardized observation form for Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) to use during supervised visits.

Additionally, Garland County now utilizes a time-certain calendaring system as recommended by the *Enhanced Resource Guidelines*. This assists more than just the court staff in ensuring hearing efficiency. A majority of the children served by this court are appointed a CASA volunteer early in their case. The CASA volunteers in Garland County are an integral part of the court system, are



LOCATION

Hot Springs, Arkansas, in Garland County

LEAD JUDGE

Judge Wade Naramore

TYPE OF COURT

Rural/Suburban

POPULATION

97,477

NUMBER OF JUDICIAL OFFICERS

1

NUMBER OF HEARINGS PER YEAR

2,149

NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH DEPENDENCY CASES

151

WHEN ARE CHILDREN APPOINTED COUNSEL

Initial hearing

WHEN ARE PARENTS APPOINTED COUNSEL

Initial hearing

dedicated and involved in the children’s lives, and participate in the court proceedings on a consistent basis. The court requires children be present for each and every one of their court hearings unless otherwise ordered. Children of all ages, from infants to teenagers, were present in the court room during on-site visits. Minors in this court are assigned an attorney *ad litem* (AAL) and most children are represented by a CASA volunteer. The CASA is typically assigned just before the Probable Cause hearing and follows the case through to dismissal. The court relies on all these parties for representation and voices for children and, in turn, the parties rely on the court’s calendaring system to provide the best service possible.

SHORT AND LONG TERM GOALS

The court’s goals focus on creating handbooks, improving education outcomes, and collaborating to increase unsupervised visits for parents. These efforts are detailed below.

1. **The completion of two handbooks, one for children and a second for parents.** The purpose of these handbooks is to explain the dependency court process, identify key parties and their roles, define technical terms, and inform parties of possible outcomes.
2. **Collaboration with the CIP to grant CASAs the authority to serve as Educational Liaisons.** The Liaisons are responsible for monitoring the child’s educational needs. This includes, but is not limited to, making every effort to keep the child in his or her school of origin, ensuring an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is transferred and implemented when a child changes schools, and sharing educational information with the court.
3. **Creation of a plan that will allow parents and children to have more frequent, unsupervised visits.** At this time, dependent children are frequently placed in homes hours away from their home town. Therefore, transportation to and from visits often requires the child and social worker to be in the car for several hours. The court has already reached out to the CALL organization (a social services organization that partners with churches and the Arkansas Department of Children and Family Services) and the faith-based community to recruit additional foster homes within Garland County. Additionally, they plan to collaborate with the Department of Human Services (DHS) to develop a strategy to recruit and retain new foster homes.

LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS

BACKGROUND

The Little Rock, Arkansas, Implementation Site was selected under the leadership of Judge Joyce Williams Warren in the 10th Division, Pulaski County Circuit Court. The 10th Division Judicial Leadership Team has more than 100 members on its roster and its meetings serve as an open forum and training ground for the stakeholders. The 10th Division Team meets every other month with stakeholders from various agencies and community organizations to discuss upcoming issues and questions on policy and practice, and to collaborate on initiatives. Prior to becoming an Implementation Site, the team had accomplished the following: distributed a notebook to assist families proceeding through dependency court, created an assessment card for Department of Human Services (DHS) caseworkers and supervisors, and published a “Testimony Tips” reminder for DHS caseworkers and supervisors. Judge Warren identified goals for the Implementation Site project as improving the efficiency of court hearings, timely production of orders at every hearing, engaging all stakeholders on the court team, and involving schools on the court and Judicial Leadership teams.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND OUTCOMES

An initial site visit was conducted in October 2014 to observe Judge Warren’s juvenile dependency court proceedings, and introduced the Implementation Sites Project to the Judicial Leadership Team. A follow up visit was then conducted in late May 2015 to assess the practices of the 10th Division, with specific focus on case staffing meetings and case plans, and provide training on improving outcomes for children and families throughout the case process. Subsequent visits have been made to monitor progress.

The 10th Division stakeholders adhere to the *Enhanced Resource Guidelines* best practices in their dependency court proceedings to the direct benefit of the children and families in the community. Examples of the best practices observed include: the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) offers services to families after reunification with the child; the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) workers are present at every protective custody hearing and assigned to cases as often as possible; DHS funds a local Community Coordinator with the Zero to Three organization who utilizes frequent Family Team Meetings for dependency cases with infants and toddlers up to three years old on the dependency docket; and there is a child care room in the courthouse to



LOCATION

Little Rock, Arkansas, in Pulaski County

LEAD JUDGE

Judge Joyce Williams Warren

TYPE OF COURT

Urban/Suburban

POPULATION

393, 250

NUMBER OF JUDICIAL OFFICERS

3

NUMBER OF HEARINGS PER YEAR

2,400 (800 per judge)

NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH DEPENDENCY CASES

502

WHEN ARE CHILDREN APPOINTED COUNSEL

Initial hearing

WHEN ARE PARENTS APPOINTED COUNSEL

Initial hearing

accommodate the younger children.

Judge Warren has a dedicated team of legal professionals who practice in the 10th Division courtroom. The DCFS workers and the various service providers are not exclusively assigned to the 10th Division but rotate among the three judges on the juvenile court bench. The Pulaski County CASA program is well established, active, and adheres to the National CASA training standards.

SHORT AND LONG TERM GOALS

The court's goals focus on creating improved case plans, affidavits, and court reports. These efforts are detailed below.

1. **Improve case plans** to make them shorter, easier to understand, more detailed and concise by discussing the importance of improving case plans; continue to provide training, and provide opportunities for practical application of the trainings to ensure those trainings meet the needs of the workers.
2. **Improve the quality of the agency's affidavits** supporting the emergency dependency-neglect petitions and the court's reports to make them easier to read (with improved grammar), easier to understand, and more accurate and concise regarding the chronology of events and the facts alleged.
3. **Improve the quality and accuracy of data collection** for children who are under the court's jurisdiction regarding dependency-neglect cases and the children who have both dependency-neglect and delinquency cases.
4. **Keep discussing the importance of improving case plans**; continue to provide training; and provide opportunities for practical application of the trainings to ensure those trainings meet the needs of the workers.

MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE



BACKGROUND

The Memphis and Shelby County Juvenile Court in Memphis, Tennessee, was selected as an Implementation Site under the leadership of Judge Dan Michael who was elected as Judge of the Memphis and Shelby County Juvenile Court in August 2014. Prior to his election, he served as chief administrator for Judge Curtis Person. In addition to his new responsibilities as judge of the court, Judge Michael enthusiastically accepted the duties required of the Lead Judge of the Implementation Sites Project. Judge Michael and nine magistrates preside over all child welfare proceedings and juvenile justice cases for the court. The court also oversees cases related to child support, truancy, and educational neglect. The court does not preside over Termination of Parental Rights hearings at this time. In the Implementation Site Project application, the court identified reducing caseloads through *Enhanced Resource Guidelines* best practices implementation, strengthening collaborative alliances, and safely reducing the number of children in foster care as the primary goals for the Memphis and Shelby County Juvenile Court.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND OUTCOMES

An initial site visit was conducted in November 2014. Like many courts in the project, Judge Michael's first goal focused on the reorganization of his collaborative and committee structure. A number of committees were dissolved, while others were combined to form new ones. Ultimately, Judge Michael created an Executive Committee, which identified three primary goals for the court: 1) become a trauma-informed court, 2) provide parties with orders immediately following the conclusion of their hearing, and 3) implement time-certain calendaring. For each of the three goals, Judge Michael created a subcommittee and appointed a subcommittee leader.

In February 2016, NCJFCJ staff completed a trauma audit of the court. In addition, two trauma trainings were held; one for the magistrates, and a second for Executive and Trauma Subcommittee members. The last training was followed by two separate strategic planning sessions. From those strategic planning sessions, a number of goals were identified, and have since been accomplished.

LOCATION

Memphis, Tennessee, in Shelby County

LEAD JUDGE

Judge Dan Michael

TYPE OF COURT

Urban

POPULATION

934,603

NUMBER OF JUDICIAL OFFICERS

9

NUMBER OF HEARINGS PER YEAR

37,020 (14,610 children's cases/22,410 child support cases)

NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH DEPENDENCY CASES

2,697

WHEN ARE CHILDREN APPOINTED COUNSEL

Before initial hearing

WHEN ARE PARENTS APPOINTED COUNSEL

Before initial hearing/initial hearing

- **Community Outreach Nights:** In an effort to promote the court as a positive place, and not one that should be feared, quarterly meetings are held at local community centers and schools. During these meetings, information about court and community programs is shared, in addition to any positive changes or activities the court is participating in.
- **Parent Meeting Sessions:** Parents with children involved in the juvenile justice system are invited to the courthouse for a meeting where they are provided with information about the juvenile justice system, possible outcomes, and expectations. Parents are also given an opportunity to ask questions. These meetings are open to the public and not limited to those parents with children involved in the delinquency system. These sessions will soon be expanded to include parents with children in the child welfare system.

In addition to those accomplishments already discussed, the court partnered with the Department of Children's Services (DCS) to create a new policy and procedure related to the filing of private petitions. The high number of private petitions filed at the courthouse significantly impacted the court's already heavy dockets. With the creation of this new policy, the number of private petitions filed at the court, without DCS involvement, decreased dramatically. This change in procedure also allows for easier implementation of time-certain dockets.

Finally, to create a more family friendly and trauma-informed environment, the court made several changes to the courthouse itself.

- There is now a room dedicated to nursing mothers. This room includes a rocker and a refrigerator for storage purposes.
- A room solely for attorneys to use the computers for work purposes between hearings and/or have a private place to meet with clients.
- Child-friendly murals and colorful doors throughout the building. Murals were painted by local high school and university students.
- The addition of bulletproof windows on all first level windows for safety reasons and to allow more natural light.

SHORT AND LONG TERM GOALS

The court's goals focus on trauma training, calendaring, and implementing a new database for court documents. These efforts are detailed below.

1. **A large, multi-disciplinary training on trauma occurred in early Spring 2017.** This training was led by Dr. Altha Stewart of the University of Tennessee Health Science Center. It included every stakeholder who has any relation to the court – from janitors and clerks, to social workers and probation officers, to administration and magistrates. The goal of this training was to ensure all employees of the court are trauma-informed in an effort to address trauma through a Universal Precautionary Model.
2. **The court completed a time-certain calendaring pilot project with their child support dockets last year.** At this time, they are reorganizing and streamlining their dockets in hopes the majority of their delinquency and dependency dockets will be time-certain by Summer 2017.
3. **The court created new findings and order templates and is currently in the process of loading them into their database.** Training on this new system took place in March 2017 at which time courtrooms will have the ability to produce paper orders for all parties at the end of a hearing.

MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA



BACKGROUND

The Montgomery, Alabama, Implementation Site was initially selected under the leadership of Judge Anita L. Kelly. Serving with her are Judge Calvin Williams and Judge Robert Bailey. In addition, Referee Vicki Toles works part time overseeing front line matters and most initial dependency hearings. In January 2016, Judge Eugene Reese assumed the role of Lead Judge of the Implementation Sites Project. After Judge Reese's retirement in early 2017, Judge Calvin Williams became the Lead Judge of the Montgomery Family Court. The Montgomery Family Court primarily focuses on two different types of cases that involve minor children: (1) juvenile dependency – cases related to the abuse and/or neglect of a minor, and (2) juvenile delinquency – cases related to violations of criminal law by a minor. In addition, the judges of this court also oversee cases of divorce, child custody, and domestic relations.

In the Implementation Sites Project application, the Montgomery County Family Court identified decreasing their number of termination of parental rights hearings (TPRs), strengthening their court collaborative team, and improving their overall court practices as their desired outcomes.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND OUTCOMES

An initial site visit was conducted in January 2015. Prior to becoming an Implementation Site, the court did not have a collaborative group to discuss court related issues or outline plans for change. Within the first year of the project, an executive committee was formed and began meeting regularly. In addition, the four judicial officers started meeting monthly to share information and experiences, discuss court-related challenges, and problem-solve as a team.

In the eight months between the court's first and second site visit, the court was able to reduce its number of pending TPR cases significantly, particularly those pending for more than 12 months. This was accomplished by the judges reorganizing their calendars in order to allow time to complete findings.

The court also instituted a no-continuance policy and procedure to reduce the number of cases and dockets requiring rescheduling. As a result, dockets had more flexibility, and the time to disposition and between hearings was reduced.

LOCATION

Montgomery, Alabama, in Montgomery County

LEAD JUDGE

Judge Calvin Williams

TYPE OF COURT

Urban/Suburban

POPULATION

226,349

NUMBER OF JUDICIAL OFFICERS

3 judges and 1 referee

NUMBER OF HEARINGS PER YEAR

Undetermined

NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH DEPENDENCY CASES

499

WHEN ARE CHILDREN APPOINTED COUNSEL

Before initial hearing

WHEN ARE PARENTS APPOINTED COUNSEL

Initial hearing

In March 2016, the court was one of the first Implementation Sites to host a multi-disciplinary *Enhanced Resource Guidelines* training. Former Model Court Lead Judge, Judge Stephen Rubin (Ret.), served as faculty. A total of 58 stakeholders, including judicial officers, social workers and supervisors, parent attorneys, child attorneys, and other court staff, were present. They learned about the history of the *Enhanced Resource Guidelines*, applicable federal laws, and key child well-being topics, and they reviewed all of the bench cards for key hearings.

Lastly, the court judicial officers and Intake Unit partnered with the Department of Human Resources (DHR) to create a formal, written pick-up order form, policy, and protocol. Prior to the development of this protocol, requests for orders to remove children were often significantly delayed or denied due to inconsistencies in the information the on-call judicial officer required. The protocol improved the responses to these requests.

SHORT AND LONG TERM GOALS

The court's goals focus on creating a formal protocol for orders and findings, examining current and possible calendaring practices, and assessing practices to reduce the length of time to reunification/permanency. These efforts are detailed below.

1. **To create a formal protocol** related to the verbiage and timely distribution of orders and findings. This may include the development of form orders.
2. **To examine current calendaring practices** and create a new system that will allow judicial officers to manage their own calendars. This will also allow judicial officers to schedule the next hearing date prior to the completion of the current hearing.
3. **To assess current court practices** in order to develop a plan to reduce the length of time to reunification/permanency.
4. **To create a Dual Status Youth docket** utilizing scheduling practices developed in the previously mentioned calendaring goal.

PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA



BACKGROUND

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in Allegheny County, was selected as an Implementation Site under the leadership of Family Division Administrative Judge Kim Berkeley Clark. Judge Clark was appointed and subsequently elected to the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas in 1999. Before taking the bench, she served as an assistant and deputy district attorney in Allegheny County for almost 16 years. Judge Clark is fully committed to the court acting as a “laboratory for change” and looks forward to an ongoing assessment of the court’s performance as well as sharing results with other Implementation Sites. The Family Division operates as a unified family court where one judge is assigned to hear all matters concerning one family.

The court and its partners have successfully collaborated for more than 10 years to embrace the recommended practices outlined in the NCJFCJ’s *Enhanced Resource Guidelines and Adoption and Permanency Guidelines*.

The court and its partners have also effectively worked together for more than 10 years to improve the conduct of hearings, efficiently manage court calendars, lower judicial and attorney caseloads, share data and provide enhanced training. As a result of this experience, the court and its partners are ready to conduct the self-assessments and program evaluations necessary to participate in the intensive systems improvement process offered by the Implementation Sites Project. This proven collaboration between the court and its partners will continue as it is valued and supported by both Administrative Judge Kim Berkeley Clark and the court’s partners who actively participate in the Pennsylvania Supreme Court Children’s Roundtable Initiative.

The court realizes that a high percentage of parents and children involved in dependency matters have experienced serious trauma throughout their lifetime. The resounding effects of trauma can challenge a person’s capacity for positive change and pose significant barriers for accessing services, which directly impacts a family’s ability to achieve timely reunification.

The court seeks to understand better the impact of trauma on both the families it serves as well as court personnel, to develop trauma-informed responses, and to cultivate strategies for implementing trauma-informed policies.

LOCATION

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in Allegheny County

LEAD JUDGE

Judge Kim Berkeley Clark

TYPE OF COURT

Urban

POPULATION

1,225,365

NUMBER OF JUDICIAL OFFICERS

16 judges and 3 judicial officers

NUMBER OF HEARINGS PER YEAR

In 2015, judges issued 3,926 orders and hearing officers issued 4,791 recommendations in dependency and adoption matters.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH DEPENDENCY CASES

2,636

WHEN ARE CHILDREN APPOINTED COUNSEL

Before initial hearing

WHEN ARE PARENTS APPOINTED COUNSEL

Initial hearing

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND OUTCOMES

An initial site visit was conducted in October 2014. Pittsburgh hosted two NCJFCJ site visits along with a variety of trainings. The court is actively working to accomplish recommendations contained in the trauma audit as a result of NCJFCJ site visits. This effort includes the use of a time-specific calendar structure by some judges. Dr. Shawn Marsh conducted a training for both court staff and stakeholders concerning implicit bias. This training was well received and started a new dialogue in the jurisdiction. Many of the Pittsburgh judges have also received Motivation Interviewing (MI) training and are utilizing MI on the bench.

In August 2016, Pittsburgh introduced a Therapy Dog Program and a Standard Operating Procedure for the use of therapy dogs in the courthouse was developed. Some of the developed procedure includes: volunteer handlers must be associate members in good standing of Therapy Dogs International (TDI); volunteer handlers must complete training on court specific policies and procedures; volunteer handlers must sign a confidentiality agreement and comply with TDI Rules as enumerated in the Therapy Dog International Associate Member's Guide; and volunteer handlers must be covered by TDI's volunteer insurance policy. The program currently features five approved Handler-Dog Teams who visit Judge Kimberley Berkeley Clark and Judge Kathryn Hens-Greco's courtrooms.

The court also modified an Introduction to Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE) training developed by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services to train court personnel on the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning youth and their families.

SHORT AND LONG TERM GOALS

The court's goals focus on establishing an alternative dispute resolution program for dependency and improving court signage. These efforts are detailed below.

1. **Establish an alternative dispute resolution program for dependency.** Court staff, stakeholders, and NCJFCJ staff are meeting to develop a pilot program. The court began to develop the focus of the program, discuss who will be involved in the process, determine where the ADR program will take place, and reached out to NCJFCJ for information on ADR programs in other jurisdictions.
2. **Improve signage throughout the courthouse** as determined by recommendations from the previously completed trauma audit. The court is currently identifying funding sources to address this goal.

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA



BACKGROUND

The Second Judicial District Court was selected as an Implementation Site under the leadership of Judge Mark Ireland. In 2010, Judge Ireland was elected to the Second Judicial District Court and was the presiding judge over the child protection division and the Children's Justice Initiative (CJI), which is a collaborative between the Minnesota Judicial Branch and the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS). Judge Diamond assumed the responsibility of Lead Judge in January 2016 which also includes oversight of the CJI team. The purpose of the CJI is for these two state entities to work closely with the local juvenile courts, social services agencies, county attorneys, public defenders, guardians *ad litem* (GALs), court administrators, tribes, and other key stakeholders. The CJI team meets once a month and holds half-day meetings every quarter. The CJI Steering committee is a forum in which there is extensive discussion on data regarding children's well-being, the number of Emergency Protective Custody (EPC) hearings with specific regard to Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and non-ICWA cases, and percentages of children in out of home placement and the length of time spent in out of home placement since any permanency disposition was made. In addition, the group reviews any challenges with scheduling and ensures that ample time is given to each hearing in both contested and uncontested matters and special issues as they relate to the ICWA workgroup and training.

In the Implementation Site Project application, St. Paul identified (1) improving *Enhanced Resource Guidelines* best practices implementation, (2) decreasing re-entry numbers, and (3) decreasing racial disparities, especially for Native American children as the primary goals for the Second Judicial District Court.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND OUTCOMES

An initial site visit was conducted in December 2014. The court implemented changes prior to submitting an application to the NCJFCJ Implementation Sites Project. Judge Ireland and the CJI team have partnered for Foundations 48, which is an initiative to augment the first 48 hours of a child protection case. One example of a Foundation 48 improvement is the creation of the EPC meeting. The EPC meeting allows parents to meet all the stakeholders involved in the child welfare proceedings, including the program social worker should the case be formally

LOCATION

St. Paul, Minnesota, in Ramsey County

LEAD JUDGE

Judge Patrick Diamond

TYPE OF COURT

Urban

POPULATION

540,649

NUMBER OF JUDICIAL OFFICERS

4 judges and 4 referees

NUMBER OF HEARINGS PER YEAR

Undetermined

NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH DEPENDENCY CASES

1,013

WHEN ARE CHILDREN APPOINTED COUNSEL

Initial hearing

WHEN ARE PARENTS APPOINTED COUNSEL

Initial hearing

adjudicated. In the past, parents would not meet the program social worker until 30 days later, which stakeholders agreed needed to be improved. The EPC meeting allows the parents to identify family members who may be resources and to discuss visitation.

The CJI team is a collaborative led by Judge Diamond and it represents a broad range of stakeholders committed to improving the court process and practices. The CJI team meets on a regular basis to identify systemic issues, establish goals, create a strategic plan to achieve those goals, and monitor progress toward the accomplishment of said goals. The success of this collaborative is based on mutual trust and ideas gathered from different stakeholder perspectives to assist the court in developing solutions to improve court practice.

In addition, the court has designed and is implementing a discharge planning process for all children in placement. The court also completed an ICWA assessment in February 2016 to determine the strengths and needs of the ICWA process. General recommendations included making ICWA findings at every hearing. Finally, there is a new court calendaring system designed to improve social worker attendance at hearings to ensure that social workers are not spending every day in court.

SHORT AND LONG TERM GOALS

The court's goals focus on improving ICWA compliance, ironing out issues with a new calendaring plan, increasing parent visitation opportunities, and finding placement options for children in detention. These efforts are detailed below.

1. **Significantly improve ICWA compliance and practice.** The court will use the assessment to determine how it can improve process. Current goals include ensuring that ICWA findings, including active effort findings, are made at every hearing.
2. **Through collaboration, continue to work through issues with the new calendaring plan.** While the court is excited about the new calendaring system, there are bound to be difficulties making sure that all parties are on board. The plan was developed to ensure that case workers are assigned to court only on specific days.
3. **Increase family time opportunities.** The court will continue to work with the CJI team to come up with ideas on improving visitation between children and parents.
4. **Identify children in detention who are in child protection and find placement options with the child protection system.** Again, the CJI team will allow the court to improve outcomes for children by finding a wider array of placement options.

TULSA, OKLAHOMA

BACKGROUND

The Tulsa, Oklahoma, Implementation Site was selected under the leadership of Judge Doris L. Fransein. Judge Fransein has been the Chief Judge of the Juvenile Division in District 14 since 2005. The juvenile division focuses on two different types of cases that involve minor children: (1) juvenile deprived – cases related to the abuse and/or neglect of a minor and (2) juvenile delinquency – cases related to violations of criminal law by a minor. The mission statement of the Tulsa County Juvenile Bureau and Court is to collaboratively promote and administer prevention, justice and effective treatment in a fair, timely and appropriate manner with dignity and respect for the needs of the children, youth and families and for the safety of the community. Juvenile Deprived matters are confidential and, therefore, proceedings are not open to the public.

The juvenile division serves all of Tulsa County. In 2015, Tulsa County was estimated to have more than 639,000 residents.⁴ Approximately 25% of the population was made up of persons 18 years of age or younger.⁵ According to data provided by the Department of Human Services (DHS), more than 14,000 reports of child abuse and neglect were received by Tulsa County DHS in 2016. Of those 14,000 referrals, more than 6,000 were investigated, nearly 1,500 of which resulted in substantiated findings of abuse or neglect; 81% categorized as neglect, 11% categorized as abuse, and 8% categorized as both abuse and neglect.⁶

In the Implementation Site Project application, Judge Fransein identified executing the *Enhanced Resource Guidelines* best practices and implementing data collection techniques as primary outcomes for the Tulsa County District Court. Judge Fransein works extensively with the Tulsa County Child Protection Coalition. This organization is made up of members from key court stakeholders including directors from Child Protective Services (CPS), County and District attorneys, Parent and Child Representation, Indian Child Welfare representatives, and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA). Collaboratively, the Tulsa County Child Protection Coalition works to improve the child dependency process for all involved.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND OUTCOMES

During the initial site visit conducted in November 2014, NCJFCJ staff conducted interviews with Judge Fransein, court staff, and many of the stakeholder groups. It was during these interviews



LOCATION

Tulsa, Oklahoma, in Tulsa County

LEAD JUDGE

Judge Doris L. Fransein

TYPE OF COURT

Urban

POPULATION

642,940

NUMBER OF JUDICIAL OFFICERS

3

NUMBER OF HEARINGS PER YEAR

Undetermined

NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH DEPENDENCY CASES

861

WHEN ARE CHILDREN APPOINTED COUNSEL

Pre-adjudication

WHEN ARE PARENTS APPOINTED COUNSEL

Pre-adjudication

that NCJFCJ staff gained a better understanding of the strengths and challenges of the Tulsa dependency court system.

Since the court's selection as an Implementation Site in July 2014, the court has accomplished a number of goals under the leadership of Judge Fransein and with the support of her collaborative (Tulsa County Child Protection Coalition). These include:

- In January 2015, the court started the Zero To Three Safe Babies Court
- Revised court orders to reflect the *Enhanced Resource Guidelines*⁶
- Created a court database to review active case file information
- Altered multi-disciplinary team meetings to reflect *Enhanced Resource Guidelines* topics
- Developed a website containing information on local resources for children and families

In January 2016, the court was the first Implementation Site to host a multi-disciplinary *Enhanced Resource Guidelines*' Training. Former Model Court Lead Judge, Judge Stephen Rubin (Ret.), served as faculty. Participants learned about the history of the *Enhanced Resource Guidelines*, applicable federal laws, key child well-being topics, and reviewed all of the bench cards for key hearings.

In April 2016, the court started a mediation program. Any case that appears to be heading toward termination of parental rights is referred to mediation. As of September 2016, 45 mediations have been conducted. Of those, 65% were resolved, 22% went to trial, and 13% were continued to another date. The mediation program has become so successful that they have had difficulty finding the time to schedule all of them. The court is currently examining ways to allow more time for mediations.

In June 2016, NCJFCJ staff completed a trauma audit at the court. As a result of suggestions from the audit, Dr. Elena Newman from the University of Tulsa Institute of Trauma, Adversity, and Injustice (TITAN) held a multi-disciplinary training on trauma and vicarious trauma based on information and recommendations made in the trauma audit report.

SHORT AND LONG TERM GOALS

The court's goals center around providing parent attorneys, treating secondary trauma, decreasing removal and out of home care rates, data collection improvements, and courtroom enhancements. These efforts are detailed below.

- 1. Examining ways to provide parents with attorneys at the initial hearing.**
- 2. Treating and minimizing secondary trauma experienced by stakeholders.**
- 3. Incorporating the American Bar Association's Child Safety Guidelines into child welfare practices and hearings to reduce the number of children removed and decrease the time children are in out of home care.**
- 4. Collection of more thorough data, broken down by docket, to inform and identify future goals and measure progress.**
- 5. Creating a family and child-friendly courtroom environment.** This will be achieved by the removal of all nonessential parties and personnel from the courtroom during hearings. The court is also exploring the addition of age appropriate decor, books, and toys.



ALL-SITES CONFERENCE

The inaugural Implementation Sites All-Sites Conference and Lead Judges Meeting was held on March 18-20, 2015, on the University of Nevada, Reno campus. The Conference brought together the Implementation Sites collaborative teams from across the country for intensive training on the *Enhanced Resource Guidelines*, judicial leadership, and promising practice models for dependency courts pioneered by the NCJFCJ Mentor Model Courts.

The NCJFCJ welcomed three distinguished judicial faculty members to facilitate the All Sites Conference: Judge Stephen Rubin (Ret.) from Arizona, Mentor Model Court Lead Judge Darlene Byrne from Texas, and Judge Deborah Schumacher (Ret.) from Nevada. Each of these judicial faculty members has been a Model Court Lead Judge through the NCJFCJ's Model Court Project, representing a combined 35 years of experience in court systems reform.

In addition, the Lead Judges Meeting was held on March 18 and focused on the NCJFCJ's Judicial Leadership Curriculum. A panel of Mentor Model Court Lead Judges provided perspective in leading systems reform efforts and shared their experiences in working with court team collaborations.

The Implementation Sites Lead Judges Meeting and All-Sites Conference was a resounding success as it brought together the sites to learn about systems reform efforts and promising practices and allowed time for each team to create a tailored action plan to assist them in improving their system to serve better the children and families in their local jurisdictions.

A year later, in 2016, the second All-Sites meeting was conducted with Lead Judges from the Implementation Sites along with Project ONE sites, and tribal model courts. The curriculum, which focused on strengthening families, was facilitated by Judge Constance Cohen (Ret.). The Lead Judges discussed the challenges jurisdictions and judges face when strengthening families, engaging parents and children in the courtroom, the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), strengthening mixed-status families, and supporting older youth.

Lead Judges participated in open space sessions to allow for an open dialogue about implementing various initiatives in their respective jurisdictions, as well as to share their challenges and successes with their colleagues. Additionally, the Lead Judges participated in a self-care activity and discussion to remind themselves to be mindful of their own well-being and to utilize self-awareness strategies for overcoming stress and burnout. The meeting concluded with a goal planning and town hall discussion session. Here, Lead Judges had the opportunity to share their thoughts and lessons learned, as well as to design goals to implement upon their return to their jurisdictions.

LOOKING FORWARD

In early 2017, additional Implementation Sites were added to the project. The new sites include: Douglasville, GA; Saginaw, MI; St. Joseph, MI; Scranton, PA; Tumwater, WA; and the Central Council of Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska.



CONCLUSION

The Implementation Sites Project is part of a larger group of NCJFCJ projects that includes Mentor Model Courts, Project ONE Courts, and Tribal Model Courts. A particular focus of Implementation Sites is on building infrastructure for effective systems reform efforts, and providing assistance with the development of outcome measures and evaluation plans to determine the effectiveness of their reform efforts.

All of the selected Implementation Sites continue to work toward meeting goals they have established for themselves and goals identified during site visits. These courts face unique challenges in the jurisdictions they serve but continue to strive to meet defined goals to improve the outcomes for children and families.

The NCJFCJ looks forward to continuing to support these innovative and courageous judges who have committed to evaluating the results of their efforts and are setting the bar for systems across the country.

ENDNOTES

¹ National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. (2016). *Enhanced Resource Guidelines: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases*. Reno, NV.

² *Key Principles for Permanency Planning*, Technical Assistance Brief, (July 2011), National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Reno, NV.

³ Data and demographics for all sites collected in 2016.

⁴ U.S. Census (2013). *State and county quick facts*. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045216/40143,00>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Oklahoma Department of Human Services. (2016). Child abuse and neglect statistics – State fiscal year 2016. Retrieved from: http://www.okdhs.org/OKDHS%20Report%20Library/S16047_ChildAbuseandNeglectStatistics2015-June2016_cwsopoa_1129016.pdf.

⁶ The Oklahoma Supreme Court has since approved and required order of a different format be used state-wide.

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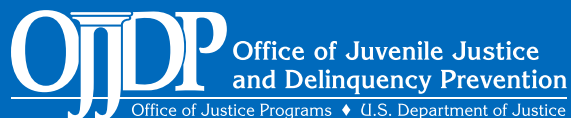
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