

CHILDREN IN THE HALLS OF JUSTICE

**A REPORT
ON
CHILD CARE
IN THE COURTS**



157142

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL POLICY

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ACQUISITIONS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public confidence in the court system and our ability to administer justice swiftly, fairly and firmly continues to erode. The general public feels alienated from the courts, is dissatisfied with their performance and believes that the judicial system does not mete out justice fairly or equitably... Without meaningful reform... the future of our court system is bleak. Given the low level of public confidence, the problems besetting the court system, and the crisis of urban violence in which we find ourselves, we must act now. Child care services in the courts is a good place to start... If we are successful in this endeavor, it will be a bold first step towards a justice system which will be more accessible, more affordable, more comprehensible and more user-friendly than the one we have today. It will demonstrate that the judicial system is flexible and responsive to the public's needs. It will represent the reestablishment of a link between the courts and the community in our mutual efforts to regain and maintain public trust and confidence.¹

Attorney General L. Scott Harshbarger
Commonwealth of Massachusetts

The presence of children has impeded the smooth administration of justice in many courts around the country. Children are present for many reasons. Their parents are getting divorced, arguing about custody and child support. Their mothers are seeking restraining orders to protect themselves from abusive spouses. Substance abuse is racking the integrity of the family, resulting in criminal charges and abusive or neglectful parenting. The court is deciding the fate of children in the custody of the state's child welfare system. Parents and children are victims of or witnesses to violent crime. Lacking the personal and financial resources that would allow them to arrange alternative care for their children, parents often have no choice but to bring these very young and vulnerable boys and girls to court.

Courts in 18 jurisdictions around the country have developed court-based, drop-in child care (CourtCare) programs to protect children while enabling adults to more efficiently transact the business of the court. The National CourtCare Demonstration Project is a three year effort to document and support efforts to establish court-based child care centers. Through the examination of existing programs and outreach to additional jurisdictions interested in developing court-based child care programs, the National CourtCare Demonstration Project hopes to encourage innovative alternatives for children who come to court.

The National CourtCare Demonstration Project has three goals:

- to develop guidelines for the establishment of court-based child care programs,
- to assist selected courts with program implementation, and
- to disseminate information about effective programs to the courts.

Training and technical assistance will be provided through a series of publications as well as through training sessions and ongoing technical assistance to a range of courts around the country.

This report is the first of several volumes that will provide direction for the evolving practice of child care in the courts. The bulk of this report focuses on the current status of children and child care in the courts. The sixth chapter, drawn from the experiences of existing programs, identifies guidelines for new programs to follow. It provides the framework around which training and technical assistance will be designed and offered.

THE EFFECT OF CHILDREN ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

The Project surveyed court administrators at every level to ask whether children interfered with the work occurring in the courts in their jurisdiction. Responses were received from 42 states; 39 responses were received from the office of the State's chief court administrator and 53 from court administrators with more limited jurisdiction. **The survey results clearly demonstrated that the presence of children does impede the transaction of court business.** Specifically:

- *The presence of children interferes with the daily operations of the courts.* Almost all court administrators at every level agreed that children interfered with the operation of the courts to some degree. One fourth (26%) of the respondents described the interference of children as a frequent or constant problem.
- *A significant percentage of courts are affected by the presence of children.* Over half the survey respondents believed that the

presence of children was having a negative impact on 50 percent or more of the courts in their jurisdictions.

- *The presence of children interferes with court employees' ability to perform their jobs efficiently.* A number of problems were cited in this area. More than half the administrators responding to the survey said that children adversely affected courtroom decorum, caused parties to miss or be tardy for court appearances, and required court employees to neglect other duties so they could supervise children.
- *Their presence in courtrooms subjects children to testimony that might be disturbing to them.* Forty percent of the administrators expressed concern that children were being subjected to potentially damaging testimony.

A related survey of personnel in four courts, two with child care centers and two similar courts without such programs, suggested that a child care program can improve court decorum, employee working conditions, and the well-being of children who come to court.

CHARACTERISTICS OF COURT-BASED CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

Through the survey of court administrators and other information gathering, we sought out every existing court-based child care program operating in the United States. Eighteen states have designed some type of program for children. The programs we found range from small unsupervised areas equipped with children's toys to formal child care centers in which paid staff supervise children. Many states, undoubtedly more than we located, have set aside at least an alcove in their adult waiting room where toys, games, children's books and other amusements occupy children while they wait with their parents. In a few cases, courts provide vouchers to parents that can be used at a child care center in the community. There are 18 formal child care programs in six states, so defined because they are managed by at least one paid staff person and the child care occurs in a separate room furnished for children. Much of this report is devoted to descriptions of every program we found, from the most informal to the most sophisticated.

There are examples of court-based child care in courts with jurisdiction over every type of legal matter. Several programs have been established in courts that adjudicate family matters like divorce, custody, child abuse and neglect, paternity, and visitation. There are almost as many programs in courts hearing adult criminal and civil cases. These programs represent the ingenuity of judges, attorneys, child welfare workers, Junior League members, senior citizen groups, early childhood educators, and more. In every case, the founders of the programs were inspired to initiate them because they were concerned about the well-being of children exposed to the troubling adult matters openly and graphically discussed in courtrooms. It seemed apparent to the program founders that a child care program would protect children from unseemly court business while it facilitated the smooth and decorous transaction of judicial proceedings.

Key features of the programs include:

- The capacity to serve as few as six children at a time and as many as 150; eight of the programs serve fewer than 10 children, 15 of the existing programs serve between 10 and 20 children and six serve 21 to 30 children. Only one has the capacity to serve 150 children simultaneously.
- Eligibility limited to children of certain ages. Half the existing programs require children to be at least two years old and toilet trained. At the other end of the age continuum, eligibility terminates between six and 19 years of age.
- Staffing by one or more paid employees who typically have some prior experience or educational training related to young children.
- Reliance on volunteers to fill out the program's staff roster; four programs are almost entirely run by volunteers and others rely almost exclusively on paid staff.
- Funding from a variety of sources; the majority receive the bulk of their funding from public sources (the court, county, or state or county child welfare agency) but many receive a significant percentage of their operating budget from private funders like women's bar associations.
- Exemption from some or all of the licensing regulations that govern child care programs; eight of the 22 programs are licensed but receive waivers for specific regulations that a drop-in program would have difficulty meeting.
- Program management by the court or a private, non-profit community agency; budgeting, staff supervision, and programmatic accountability for the child care component rest with a department of the court or a program operated by a community agency.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Based on the activities described above, the National CourtCare Demonstration Project has developed a set of recommendations for implementing good drop-in, court-based child care programs. Program design elements should include:

- clearly defined service eligibility and a clear rationale for targeting the specific groups who are eligible;
- core staffing by at least one paid employee who has some prior experience and educational training related to teaching young children;
- volunteers who receive pre-service and ongoing training and supervision from the paid staffer;
- stable funding, from a variety of sources;
- adherence to any applicable licensing regulations and ongoing self-assessment based on a recognized early childhood environmental rating scale;
- program management by the court or a private, non-profit community agency that includes the active involvement of an advisory group made up of court and community representatives; and
- active outreach to the families who use the program that links them to tangible aid (food, clothes, shelter), emotional support, and ongoing services.

The authors hope that the information provided in this report will prove useful to courts interested in establishing court-based child care programs. Over the project's three years, additional reports will elaborate on the broad recommendations offered here.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Roxbury District Court was the local court for the inner-city black community of Boston, a community which was rapidly becoming engulfed in a sea of drugs and drug-related violence in the midst of the high-flying Eighties. As the police struggled to cope with wave after wave of crime, for which they were largely unprepared, the courthouse, inevitably, became the stage for the public examination of the gritty details exposed in the wake of the enveloping tide—the murders, rapes, and mayhem of an endless stream of victims, the circumstances of each rendered from the witness stand with an authenticity both riveting and horrifying. As a judge assigned to hear evidence in such matters, I had become accustomed to scanning the courtroom in the midst of a particularly gruesome piece of testimony, only to discover, to my horror, a child (or several) seated in the courtroom, nestled into the corner of its mother’s arm, listening in rapt attention as a trembling, weeping victim described the excruciating details of a rape or a beating, or both.²

Judge Julian T. Houston
Massachusetts Superior Court

Children are increasingly present in courthouses. Their parents are getting divorced, arguing about custody and child support. Their mothers are seeking restraining orders to protect themselves from abusive spouses. Substance abuse is racking the integrity of the family, resulting in criminal charges and abusive or neglectful parenting. The court is deciding the fate of children in the custody of the state’s child welfare system. Parents and children are victims of or witnesses to violent crime. Lacking the personal and financial resources that would allow them to arrange alternative care for their children, parents often have no choice but to bring these very young and vulnerable boys and girls to court. The children behave as one might expect them to behave in stressful circumstances: they cry, shout, run, taunt, laugh, argue, complain, fidget, and throw things. From the perspective of the court, these behaviors, while understandable, wreak havoc on the order of the judicial process. From the children’s perspective, perhaps the most destructive behavior they engage in is simply listening. They hear their parents accused of vicious crimes; they hear their mothers describe the torture inflicted by vindictive fathers; they hear sobs from victims of rape still distraught from their traumatizing experiences.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) launched the National CourtCare Demonstration Project as a way of demonstrating the utility of court-based, drop-in child care and family support centers in the courts. The Project seeks to provide information to judges and court administrators so that they can evaluate the efficacy of court-based child care programs and, if needed, establish their own programs.

The Center for the Study of Social Policy has a long-standing history of assisting Federal, state, and local governments in improving human services for low-income and other disadvantaged populations. In all its work the Center seeks to promote systemic reform in human services through changes in the financing, administration, and delivery of services. Recently, CSSP has concentrated on families and children, leading national, state, and local efforts to improve child and family service systems around the country. The Center became interested in the National CourtCare Demonstration Project because it provided a potentially important forum to contribute to three related efforts:

- improving the administration of justice,
- shielding children from traumatizing experiences, and
- linking needy families with other support services.

What makes this project unique is that court-based child care brings together two very disparate professional systems—the judiciary and the social services system for children and families. Jointly they offer the promise of integrated services that can simultaneously benefit the courts and families.

Court-based child care programs isolate children from the adult business of criminal justice. Around the country, a range of models exist. Program capacity varies from six at the smallest to 30, with one very unusual program capable of caring for 150 children at a time. Some programs are operated entirely by volunteers while others rely on qualified early childhood professionals. They operate in family, juvenile, dependency, criminal, civil, municipal, and superior courthouses. They serve children as young as a few days old to 19 years of age. They are funded by the courts, the county, the public child welfare agency, and by a range of private philanthropic efforts. In the confines of a court-based child care center, there are toys and activities, and most importantly, there are adults who devote their attention to working with children. The types of support the center staff can offer begin with basics like a nourishing meal and continue through crisis intervention and referrals to family support services.

This report chronicles the Center's research about the extent to which the care and supervision of children in courthouses is an issue of national significance and how children's presence in court has been handled around the country. Chapter II describes the results of two surveys: a national survey of court administrators about the presence of children in courts and a targeted survey of court employees about the effect child care has on the administration of justice. Chapter III provides an overview of the range of program characteristics found among court-based child care centers. Chapter IV describes every established court-based drop-in child care center our research was able to uncover. Chapter V reports on extensive observations of well-established court-based child care programs in New York City and Los Angeles, California, providing information about the relationship between the centers and the courts they serve, their effect on the court environment and the administration of justice, and their potential effect on child and family well-being. Chapter VI draws on the previous material to make recommendations about the specific settings in which court-based child care would be most useful and concludes with program design elements for the development of innovative new models.

CHAPTER II

IMPROVING THE ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE:

TWO SURVEYS OF COURT PERSONNEL

To the extent that persons are prevented from using or responding to the court system, the quality of justice is compromised. When parents are forced to bring children into the courtroom, the dignity and efficiency of court proceedings may be reduced and unnecessary trauma may result to the child. When child victims of crime and witnesses come into contact with the accused, the integrity of the truth-finding process may be jeopardized. The availability of a children's waiting room removes an obstacle to full access to the courts and helps to assure that those persons responsible for the care of children have equal access to a gender neutral system of justice.³

Judge Alice A. Lytle
Sacramento Municipal Court, California

To gauge the concerns of court personnel about children in court, the Center for the Study of Social Policy conducted two surveys. The first survey was designed to ascertain whether the presence of children in the courts interfered with the operation of the courts and to verify the existence of every court-based, drop-in child care center in the United States. It was widely disseminated through the mail to court administrators at every level. The survey results are included in this chapter. The child care programs uncovered through the survey are described in Chapter IV of the report.

The second survey was delivered to court employees at four courts (two in California and two in New York) under cover letters from administrative personnel in the courts in question. Its purpose was to examine the effect a child care center would have on the operation of the courts.

SURVEY OF COURT ADMINISTRATORS

In August 1994, a written survey was mailed to the chief court administrators for all 50 states and the District of Columbia; 39 responded. To expand the circle of respondents, additional outreach was done. Between August and October, the survey was made available to conference participants at the Conference of Chief Justices/Council of State Court Administrators meeting in Wyoming, the annual American Bar Association conference in New Orleans, the second annual conference of the Mid-Atlantic Association for Court Management, the National Association of Women Judges annual meeting in Arizona, and the National Association of Counsel for Children 17th Annual Children's Law Conference in San Francisco. The survey appeared verbatim in the August edition of the *NACM Forum Conveniens*, the newsletter of the National Association of Court Management. Survey responses from this second distribution netted 53 additional surveys, broadening our exploration to include representatives of county, district, and local jurisdiction courts. NACM members provided the bulk of these responses.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The survey queried court administrators about the extent to which children were present in courthouses in their jurisdictions. Those indicating children were present were asked to rate the top five problems caused by children's presence.

FINDINGS

This chapter reports on the 92 survey responses received. Forty-four (44) states were represented by at least one response; 39 responses came from state court administrators, 28 from county/district court administrators, and 25 from individual courthouse administrators. Because the findings were consistent across all levels of court administration, only the aggregate data are presented here.

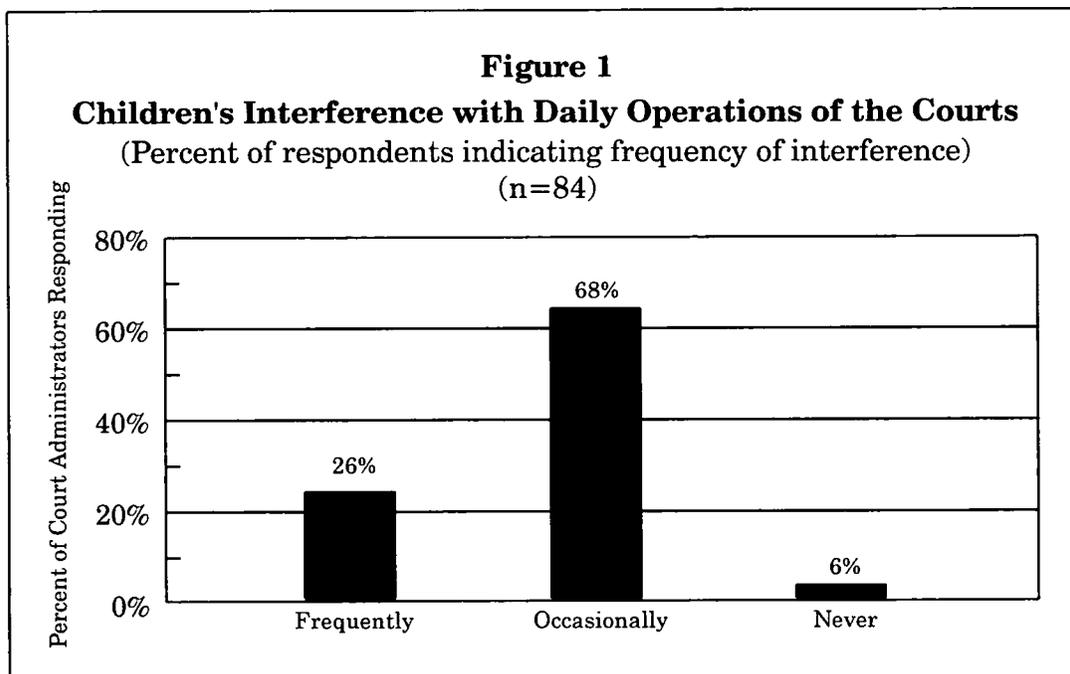
The results of this survey suggest that the unnecessary presence of children in courtrooms is a concern for many of the nation's judicial jurisdictions. Analysis of the data collected in this survey indicates that the presence of children interferes with court proceedings

and may also be damaging to children. The specific problems cited by court administrators across the country suggest that court-based child care programs could be a useful tool to improve the administration of justice, protect young children from court business and link vulnerable families with ongoing support services.

Analysis of the responses revealed several key findings:

- The presence of children interferes with the daily operations of the courts.

Respondents were asked to what degree the presence of children interfered with the daily operation of the courts; response choices were: never, occasionally, frequently, and constantly. Figure 1 displays the findings. Almost all court administrators at every level agreed that the presence of children interfered with court proceedings to some degree. Twenty six percent indicated that children regularly interfered with the daily operation of the courts. Only five survey respondents stated that children never interfered with court proceedings.



- A significant percentage of courts are affected by the presence of children.

The court administrators were asked to estimate the percentage of courts in their jurisdiction affected by the presence of children. Half of the respondents estimated that at least 50% of the courts in their jurisdiction were affected by the presence of children. One fourth of the survey respondents (23 of 92) indicated that 10 percent or fewer of their courts were affected by the presence of children.

- The presence of children interferes with the orderly transaction of court business.

Table 1 presents data on the problems most frequently caused by the presence of children in courts. The following problems were cited most frequently by court administrators:

- *The presence of children in court adversely affects courtroom decorum* by making it difficult for parties to hear what is being said and to concentrate on court business. Problems related to the decorum in the courtroom were the most frequently cited.
- *The presence of children causes parties to judicial proceedings to be late for or miss court appearances.* This area of concern highlights the effect children have on the court's ability to efficiently move through their daily calendar. These problems were cited by the majority of court administrators.
- *The presence of children requires court employees or other participants to neglect other duties so they can supervise children.* This problem was cited by 56% of administrators responding.

TABLE 1
PROBLEMS CAUSED BY THE PRESENCE OF CHILDREN IN COURTS

Most frequently cited problems	Total (N = 80)	
	Number	Percent
Makes it difficult to concentrate on court business	64	80
Makes it difficult to hear what is being said	56	70
Causes parties to judicial proceedings to be late for court appearances	46	58
Requires court employees or other participants to neglect other duties so they can supervise children	45	56
Causes people to miss court appearances	42	53
Causes delays in processing cases	36	45
Reduces the quality of witness participation in hearings	22	28

- The presence of children in the courts subjects them to testimony that might be disturbing to them. Forty-five (45) percent of the administrators expressed concern that children in court are subjected to potentially damaging testimony.

SURVEY OF COURT EMPLOYEES

It's good for everybody. We no longer have children running around the courtroom, which is very helpful to me. The child is not exposed to the courtroom, which can be very frightening, and parents are relieved of the responsibility of taking care of a child while going through a legal proceeding. It's an idea that was a long time coming, but it is finally here.⁴

Judge Howard Spitz
Yonkers Family Court, New York

In the first survey, court administrators gave some indication of the effect children have on the administration of justice. In order to learn about the effect child care has on the administration of justice, a more detailed survey was designed for use in a few representative courthouses. By surveying both court employees who worked in courthouses with a children's program and those who worked in courthouses without one, we learned that there was striking uniformity among all respondents about the value of child care to the courts.

METHODOLOGY

The courts that participated in this survey included: Manhattan Civil, Criminal and Housing Court, and Brooklyn Civil and Housing Court in New York; and in California, the Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court in Los Angeles, and the Juvenile Division of San Francisco Superior Court. Two survey instruments were developed, one for courts with a child care program and a second for courts without one. Minor modifications were made to each survey so that it was directly applicable to the courthouse where it would be used. The surveys were disseminated to a cross-section of court employees by presiding judges and court administrators in each of the four courts.

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Court employees were asked to rate the effect a child care program would have on various aspects of administering justice. Some questions related to the effect being in court had on children and the ways in which the child care program would benefit the court, the children themselves, and their families.

FINDINGS

The findings of this survey corroborate the conclusions of the survey of court administrators. In total, 26 surveys were completed. Fully half of these came from San Francisco with the balance evenly divided between Los Angeles (six) and New York (seven^a). The 26 responses reflect the range of professional disciplines found in the court. Eight attorneys; two bench officers; two court officers; one probation officer; six administrators; four social workers; and three child care workers responded. The survey respondents have an average of almost eight years experience working in court-related positions, and more than six years average time in their current positions. Over half of them report that they have never worked in courthouses where child care was offered, but overwhelmingly they agreed that a child care program for the children of litigants would improve the functioning of the court. One attorney said, "Some sort of child care at the courthouse is an idea whose time has come. It would be of great benefit to every individual trying to deal with usually difficult court issues."

- The presence of a child care center improves the ability of court employees to perform their jobs efficiently.
 - *The presence of a child care center improves courtroom decorum.* Sixty-seven (67) percent of the survey respondents said that a child care center makes it easier for parties to hear what is being said and 78% believed it facilitates parties' ability to concentrate on court business.
 - *The presence of a child care center improves the likelihood that parties to judicial proceedings will participate fully in their scheduled court appearances.* Seventy eight (78) percent of the people answering this survey believed that parties to their cases were more likely to appear in court as scheduled and that the quality of witness participation would be better.
 - *The presence of a child care center improves the ability of court employees to perform their jobs.* Seventy one (71) percent of the survey population agreed with this statement.
- Children should not be present in courts where they are subjected to testimony that might be disturbing to them. Eighty (80) percent of the survey respondents believe children should be shielded from courtroom activity.

They recounted a number of inappropriate events children in courtrooms had been exposed to: "seeing their parents in prison garb and shackles," "parents rejecting them," and "arguments and physical altercations between parents." "Because there is no other place for them, they go into court with their parents. They must hear the court make orders for their parents to attend drug treatment, for example, or admonitions that if the parents don't complete requirements, the children may be adopted." "Frequently, children are exposed to hostile confrontations. Even if they are unable to understand the substance, they understand the anger." Eighty-four (84) percent of the survey respondents thought there were certain very limited instances in which older children should be present in court. Often cited were situations in which the children themselves were being charged with a crime, cases in which the child was a material witness, or in which their presence might have clinical value for them.

In sum, the two surveys discussed in this chapter^b offer documentation about the presence of children and the value of child care in the courts. The survey of court administrators suggests that the presence of children poses a problem in many courthouses around the U.S. The targeted survey of New York and California court personnel supports child care as at least a partial solution to that problem.

^a Five of the New York survey responses came from Manhattan Civil, Criminal and Housing Court where there is a child care center; two responses came from Brooklyn Civil and Housing Court where currently there is no child care center.

^b Similar survey instruments can be found in the companion volume, **Granting Children a Court Recess; A Program Operations Manual for Child Care in the Courts**, published by the Center for the Study of Social Policy (1995).

CHAPTER III

CHARACTERISTICS OF COURT-BASED CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

There is little disagreement that court is not a good place for young children, under almost any circumstances, and that steps should be taken to minimize the trauma of the experience when it cannot be avoided. Children are dramatically affected by family crises, even when the crisis doesn't directly involve them, and in a time of turmoil, parents and other family members are the least available to comfort and support their children. Offering care and support to these children and their families at a critical time may have long term preventive benefits for the children.⁵

Judy Langford Carter
Executive Director, Family Resource Coalition

As discussed in Chapter II, the presence of children in courthouses interferes with the daily operation of the courts and subjects children to testimony and circumstances that might be disturbing and/or dangerous to them. In response to these problems, courts from New York to Hawaii have mobilized to meet the needs of children in courts, children who are often extremely vulnerable due to divorce, poverty, drug addiction, family violence and other factors. Whether it's "Kiddie Bags" (bags of toys for children) in rural Kansas or a professionally staffed, fully-equipped child care center in Los Angeles, judges, court administrators, local bar associations and other concerned citizens are implementing creative strategies to improve the administration of justice and protect vulnerable children from potentially damaging situations.

Our survey uncovered over 40 initiatives designed to reduce the problems caused by the presence of children in courts and to address the needs of the children themselves. (These efforts are described in detail in Chapter IV of this report.) These initiatives are located in urban, suburban, and rural areas and can be found in courts conducting every type of legal business. Some jurisdictions operate staffed child care centers; others maintain unstaffed children's waiting rooms; and others simply provide toys and stuffed animals to occupy and comfort children while they are in court. Some programs are staffed and funded by the court, others through donations and volunteers. Some courts contract with private agencies to operate their children's programs. Several programs have implemented unique strategies to staff, fund and operate their programs. This chapter will look at the common, and uncommon, elements of the existing court-based programs for children.

STATEWIDE INITIATIVES

Although most court-based drop-in child care programs (and other more informal arrangements for children in courts) are offered at the discretion and initiative of the localities themselves, three states, California, Massachusetts and New York, are encouraging the implementation of court-based child care programs on a statewide basis. Each of these states has enacted legislation and, in two cases, appropriated state budget funds directed to the development of programs for children in courts.

In 1986, California enacted legislation encouraging the establishment of a nonthreatening environment for children in courts, and requiring counties building new courthouses (or substantially renovating existing courthouses) to include children's waiting rooms. Subsequently, the Judicial Council of California issued a memo strongly encouraging the provision of children's waiting rooms in courts throughout the state. Prior to the passage of the legislation in 1986, one court-based child care program existed in Sacramento County; since the legislation was passed, children's waiting rooms have been established in courthouses in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Diego, San Francisco and Ventura Counties. Fresno County opened its first children's waiting room in March 1995.

In 1988, the Massachusetts legislature passed a law guaranteeing funds for the renovation or construction of some of the state's courthouses. The legislation required jurisdictions using these funds to conduct an assessment of the child care needs of court employees and the members of the public using the courts. Child care centers had to be included in courthouses where the need was documented. While just two courts currently offer court-based child care programs, Roxbury District Court and the Hampden County Court, it is expected that 13 court-based child care programs will be operational in Massachusetts by the year 2000.

Initially charged with addressing the general problems of court-involved and poor children, the Chief Judge of New York created the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children in 1988. In 1992, the Commission turned its attention to child care in the courts. To build its Children's Centers, New York has been engaged in a multi-year strategy. The Commission conducted a needs assessment, secured start-up funding from the State legislature, and established statewide minimum requirements. New York is the

only state exercising this type of programmatic control. It also provides ongoing monitoring, training and technical assistance. Nine court-based child care programs under the auspice of the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children (in New York City, Albany, Buffalo, Rochester and Yonkers) receive funding from the Unified Court System. Five additional Children's Centers will open in 1995. In 1994, the Commission began to implement the second phase of its strategy, connecting families to essential services such as HeadStart.

Pennsylvania, Illinois and New Jersey may be next in line to legislate the creation of court-based child care programs throughout their states. Senator Greenleaf of Pennsylvania is currently drafting legislation that would encourage the development of child care centers in the courts throughout the state of Pennsylvania. Interest in court-based child care programs is widespread in Illinois, where the Illinois Bar Association has taken the issue on, and the Governor's Special Counsel for Child Welfare Services has publicly recognized the potential role of court-based child care. New Jersey's organization of chief judicial officers has asked that all courthouses have rooms that are specifically designated for children.

IMPETUS FOR COURT-BASED CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

It's very distracting. Children cry. They run around. Parents concentrate on the children instead of the case and everything takes longer. They go back and forth between Mommy and Daddy like it's a tug-of-war. Not to mention the mess they make. I've seen children bite court officers. I've seen children watch as parents hyperventilate or go into cardiac arrest.⁶

Judge Adrienne Hoffman Scancerelli
White Plains Family Court, NY

Most of the existing court-based children's programs grew out of one person's concern, commitment and vision. In many cases, judges, courthouse employees or local attorneys took special interest in the establishment of a safe place for children after seeing unsupervised children in the hallways and crying children in the courtrooms. Unfortunately, in some cases more tragic events inspired the creation of court-based child care programs.

- In San Diego County, California, a child advocate mobilized the court to create a safe place for children when a child who had been kidnapped was traumatized by seeing her kidnapper while waiting to testify against him in court.
- In Roxbury and Springfield, Massachusetts; Ventura and Sacramento Counties in California; and Erie and Westchester Counties in New York; concerned judges worked with court administrators to establish children's waiting rooms after having seen many children unsupervised or exposed to extremely disturbing testimony.
- In Fresno County, California, Judge Mario Olmos was committed to the development of a children's waiting room. When he was killed in an accident before his commitment could be realized, the project was taken on with fervor by the Fresno Women's Bar Association.
- In Riverside County, California, a legal secretary was appalled at the types of incidents children were witnessing in the corridors of Family Court and took it upon herself to approach judges and court administrators about finding a safe place for children to wait while their parents were in court. She started the program and it has since been taken over by the County Department of Education.
- In Logan County, Kansas (population 5,000), a court clerk got the idea to provide children with activities to pass the time after seeing despondent children waiting for their parents in the hallway of the courthouse.

The founders of the programs were inspired to initiate them because they were concerned about the well-being of children who were routinely exposed to troubling adult matters, openly and graphically discussed in courtrooms. It seemed apparent that a child care program would protect children from unseemly court business while facilitating the smooth and decorous transaction of judicial proceedings.

COURT-BASED CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS: WHAT COURTS ARE DOING TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM

The existing court-based programs for children range from the simple provision of toys to occupy and soothe children waiting in courthouses to sophisticated professionally staffed child care centers. With varying amounts of resources, space and funding, courts have implemented creative solutions to the problems caused by the presence of children in courts. Some of these efforts are discussed below.

IN THE ABSENCE OF CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOMS

In the absence of children's waiting rooms, courts in Logan County, Kansas and White River Junction, Vermont have devised ways to make children feel more comfortable while in court. The Logan County District Court Clerk hands out "Kiddie Bags" which contain puzzles, crayons, toys and a candy treat to children spending time in the courthouse. The White River Junction Family Court provides teddy bears to children under the age of thirteen.

Other courts without children's waiting rooms utilize the services of local child care agencies for the children in court. The Domestic Relations Department of the Superior Court of Maricopa County, Arizona has a contract with a local child care agency to supervise children while their parents are in court. Parents are given vouchers by the court which are accepted as payment by the child care provider. In Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, the District Attorney's office handles some child care problems on an ad-hoc basis; children are sent to a day care facility near the courthouse. Costs are paid by the District Attorney's office. The day care facilities used by these two courts do not serve the courts exclusively; thus court-involved children are mixed in with the providers' long-term day care population.

COURT-BASED DROP-IN CHILD CARE

The most common court-based program for children is a children's waiting room with volunteer and/or paid staff. These programs provide short-term, drop-in child care for court-involved children and families. Most programs provide supervision and care of children; staff do not generally provide counseling or case management to the children or their families. A chart on the following pages provides some information on the key features of the 18 programs with at least one paid staff person.

Types of Courts Served by Court-based Child Care Programs:

Court-based child care programs can be found in courts conducting every type of legal business. Several programs have been established in courts that adjudicate family matters such as divorce, custody, child abuse and neglect, paternity and visitation; but there are almost as many programs in courts hearing adult criminal and civil cases. Court-based child care programs are also located in superior, municipal, housing and city courts. The assumption that court-based child care programs are only needed in juvenile court, where delinquency cases are heard, or dependency court, where abuse and neglect cases are heard, is incorrect. Children are present in all courts since many families, especially poor families, have few child care options and must bring their children to court when they are required to appear.

Although many court-based child care programs serve any children whose families have business at the court, some programs restrict eligibility to a subset of children. For example, in Dane County, Wisconsin, the children's room is restricted to children whose parents are involved in divorce mediation or counseling. Programs must often create eligibility restrictions due to limited space and/or staff.

Physical Location of Court-based Child Care Programs:

The majority of children's waiting rooms are located directly in the courthouses they serve. A few, e.g. in New York and Massachusetts, are located in public buildings adjacent to the courthouse. To get to the children's room in most courthouses, one must pass through the main security entrance of the building. Most court-based child care programs have locked doors and parents are required to sign children in and out. Security is an extremely important consideration in a courthouse, particularly for abused and neglected children and children who are the subject of custody disputes. Some programs have signs leading to the children's room; others have chosen not to put up signs as a security measure.

Capacity of Court-based Child Care Programs:

The majority of court-based child care programs have the capacity to serve between 8 and 30 children. Room size is often the primary restriction on the number of children who can be served by the program at one time. Due to limited space in old courthouses, court-based child care programs are sometimes located in small spaces that previously functioned as storage rooms. Capacity may also be limited by the number of staff available to supervise the children.

Targeting children who are parties in child abuse and neglect cases, the Shelter Care program at the Edelman Children's Court in Los Angeles has, by far, the largest capacity of existing court-based child care programs; it can serve 150 children at one time. Additional children are served by the Edelman Children's Court's Free Arts for Abused Children program which provides volunteer-supervised art activities to children waiting in the regular waiting areas. (See Chapter V for a detailed description of the Edelman Children's Court.)

Court-based child care programs across the country are serving thousands of children each year. Since 1986, the four court-based child care programs in San Diego County, California have provided drop-in care for over 43,000 children. The District of Columbia's program serves about 1,200 children each year. The number of children using court-based child care programs is rising. In Chicago, monthly usage of the Rhoda Bresler Children's Room increased from only 12 children during the month of January 1993 to almost 400 children during the month of August, 1994. Similarly, utilization of the Lamoreaux Justice Center in Orange County, California doubled between 1993 and 1994.

Eligibility for Court-based Child Care:

Most court-based child care programs offer care at no cost to the children of litigants or children who are themselves court-involved. They generally do not provide child care for the children of jurors or court employees. Court-based child care programs may provide emergency child care, if necessary, to children of jurors or court employees, but it is not typically offered on a regular basis.

Some programs limit eligibility to children of certain ages, generally due to limited space or staff capacity. Half the existing programs require children to be at least two years old and toilet-trained. Programs requiring children to be toilet-trained will generally allow children in diapers to spend time in the room if they are supervised by a parent or other adult guardian. At the other end of the age continuum, eligibility for court-based child care programs terminates between six and nineteen years of age.

What Can Be Found in Court-based Child Care Programs:

Although many courts have had to locate their programs in small spaces that are less than ideal, innovative program organizers have made great efforts to make the rooms safe, pleasant and fun for children. In California, the walls of Ventura County's program are covered with paintings of playful animals rendered by an artistically inclined court employee; the Sacramento court-based child care program decorates its walls with drawings done by the children themselves. In Albany, New York, posters of Big Bird and Snoopy share wall space with the children's art work and painted balloons and letters of the alphabet.

Court-based child care programs usually contain toys, children's furniture, arts and crafts supplies and, often a television and VCR. Many programs regularly show children's movies such as Aladdin and Snow White.

A number of children's waiting rooms are equipped with children's bathrooms and diaper changing areas. Having a bathroom in the child care room was cited by many program directors as an absolute necessity. Some waiting rooms provide snacks to children; a few serve breakfast and lunch.

Operation of Court-based Child Care Programs:

Most of the formal court-based child care programs are staffed and operated by private non-profit child care agencies. Courts contract with these agencies to administer, staff and operate the programs on a daily basis.

- The two court-based child care programs in Massachusetts are run by Associated Day Care Service of Metropolitan Boston (ADCS) and Springfield Day Nursery (SDN) in Roxbury and Springfield, respectively. ADCS is one of the largest non-profit child care providers in Massachusetts. Springfield Day Nursery has provided child care to the city's working poor for a century.
- The court-based child care program in Rochester, New York is operated by Catholic Family Center, a private non-profit multi-service agency.
- There are five court-based child care programs operating in the boroughs of New York City. All five are operated by Victim Services, Inc., a private, non-profit agency which also offers a wide range of services to victims and witnesses.
- The YMCA/YWCAs operate court-based child care programs for courts in Albany and Buffalo, New York and in Fresno, California.

Some courts staff and operate court-based child care programs with their own personnel. Programs in Sacramento, San Diego, and Ventura Counties in California and in Philadelphia are all staffed and operated by the courts themselves.

Funding of Court-based Child Care Programs:

Funding for court-based child care programs comes from a variety of sources. The majority receive the bulk of their funding from public sources (the state, county, court or child welfare agency), but many receive a significant percentage of their operating budget from private funders. Local women's bar associations have contributed to many court-based child care programs. In some cases, programs got their start with private money and later began to receive government funds. Staff salaries comprise the bulk of costs associated with court-based child care programs.

- In Fresno, California, the Fresno Women's Bar Association solicited donations and established a trust fund for the children's waiting room. The organization has committed to continue its fund raising so the program can be maintained. In San Francisco, the San Francisco Women Lawyers' Alliance did all the fund raising for the program in its first three years. Two departments of the San Francisco government, the Mayor's Office of Community Development and the Mayor's Office for Children, Youth and Their Families, have recently taken over fiscal responsibility.
- The Rhoda Bresler Children's Room in Chicago is funded by Cook County and by a foundation that was created for the sole purpose of funding the court-based child care program. The Our Children in the Courts Foundation coordinates all contributions by private funders. Cook County donates the space, utilities, facility maintenance and the director's salary.
- The Children's Chambers in Orange County, California is funded through the Court's budget. The Court pays for a contract with a local non-profit agency to manage and staff the program. Donations from the Orange County Law Auxiliary and the Junior League provide additional funding to purchase equipment and toys for the program.

KEY FEATURES OF COURT-BASED CHILD CARE PROGRAMS

KEY FEATURES	CALIFORNIA							DC	ILLINOIS	
	Los Angeles*	Orange*	Riverside*	Sacramento*	San Diego	San Francisco	Ventura	District Columbia	Chicago	Waukegan
Program Capacity/Site	150	29	16	10	12	8	8	23	15	9
Youngest/Oldest Child Served	4 - 18 Yrs	2.5 - 17 Yrs	4 - 18 Yrs	2.5 - 16 Yrs	0 - 18 Yrs	2 TT - 15 Yrs	2.5 TT - 14 Yrs	2 TT - 14 Yrs	2 TT - 12 Yrs	2 TT - 12 Yrs
Number of Sites	2	2	2	2	4	1	1	1	1	1
Average Monthly Utilization	1500	250	417	All Sites 160	All Sites 450	160	230	100	200	150
Are Services Offered to Parents?	Y	N	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y
Year Opened	1992	1990	1987	1985	1986	1991	1992	1974	1973	1994
Is the Program Licensed?	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	Y	N	N
# Paid Staff (Per Site)	29	2	2	1	All Sites 1	2	1	3	2	1
Staff Required Prior Experience/Training	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Entry Level Salaries Assistant/Director	29,500/ 38,500	15,000/ NA	14,954/ 20,710	NA/ 33,000	NA/ 26,000	12,500/ 19,000	NA/ 17,100	22,000/ 25,000	13,500/ 19,000	NA/ 12,000
Auspice of Program	PCWA	NP	Dpt of Ed	Court	Court	NP	Court	Court	NP	Public
Type of Funding	PP	PP	County	PP	PP	PP	PP	PP	PP	PP
**Type of Court	D	F/J	F	S/M	F, CI, etc	S, M	S, M	All	CI, CR, F	CI, CR, F
Number Residents in Geographic Area (Millions)	9	2.6	1.17	1.13	2.6	.741	.7	.6	5.2	.07

* Answers provided for larger site only

KEY FOR ABBREVIATIONS:

CI = Civil	D = Dependency	M = Municipal	PP = Public/Private
CR = Criminal	F = Family	NP = Non-Profit	S = Superior/Supreme
CY = City	J = Juvenile	PCWA = Public Child Welfare Agency	TT = Toilet Trained

KEY FEATURES	MASSACHUSETTS		NEW YORK CITY				
	Roxbury	Springfield, Hampden County	Brooklyn Criminal	Bronx Family	Manhattan Family	Manhattan Civil, Criminal Courts	Staten Island Family
Program Capacity	12	19	13	27	22	14	6
Youngest/Oldest Child Served	0 - 12 Yrs	0 - 9 Yrs	3 Yrs - 12 Yrs	3 Mos - 12 Yrs	3 Mos - 12 Yrs	3 Mos - 6 Yrs	3 Mos - 6 Yrs
Number of Sites	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Average Monthly Utilization	150	300	125	400	300	280	60
Are Services Offered to Parents?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Year Opened	1989	1992	1975	1985	1986	1994	1994
Is the Program Licensed?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
# Paid Staff (Per Site)	4	4	2	5	4	2	1
Staff Required Prior Experience/Training	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Entry Level Salaries (Assistant/Director)	13,500/ 28,000	14,600/ 25,000	17,000/ 23,000	16,000/ 28,500	17,500/ 22,500	19,000/ 23,000	17,000/ NA
Auspice of Program	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP	NP
Type of Funding	PP	PCWA	Public Mix	Public Mix	Public Mix	Public Mix	Public Mix
**Type of Court	M	CI,CR,F,J,H	CR	F	F	F,CI,CR,H	F
Number Residents in Geographic Area (Millions)	.059	.46	2.3	1.2	1.4	1.5	.4

KEY FOR ABBREVIATIONS:

CI = Civil
CR = Criminal
CY = City

D = Dependency
F = Family
J = Juvenile

M = Municipal
NP = Non-Profit
PCWA = Public Child Welfare Agency

PP = Public/Private
S = Superior/Supreme
TT = Toilet Trained

KEY FEATURES	NEW YORK STATE				PENN
	Albany, Albany County	Buffalo, Erie County	Rochester, Monroe County	Yonkers, Westchester Cnty	Philadelphia, Philadelphia Cnty
Program Capacity	15	14	9	6	30
Youngest/Oldest Child Served	8 Wks - 7 Yrs	6 Wks - 13 Yrs	6 Wks - 7 Yrs	6 Wks - 8 Yrs	0 - 18 Yrs
Number of Sites	1	1	1	1	2
Average Monthly Utilization	200	280	250	160	All Sites 300
Are Services Offered to Parents?	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Year Opened	1994	1994	1992	1994	1915
Is the Program Licensed?	N	N	N	N	N
# Paid Staff (Per Site)	2	2	1	1	2
Staff Required Prior Experience/Training	Y	Y	Y	Y	N
Entry Level Salaries (Assistant/Director)	10,000/ 14,000	9,300/ 12,500	NA/ 18,500	NA/ 25,000	20,000/ NA
Auspice of Program	NP	NP	NP	NP	Court
Type of Funding	PP	Court	PP	PP	PP
**Type of Court	F	F,CY,S	F	F	F
Number Residents in Geographic Area (Millions)	2.9	.97	.7	.9	1.6

KEY FOR ABBREVIATIONS:

CI = Civil
CR = Criminal
CY = City

D = Dependency
F = Family
J = Juvenile

M = Municipal
NP = Non-Profit
PCWA = Public Child Welfare Agency

PP = Public/Private
S = Superior/Supreme
TT = Toilet Trained

- The programs in Roxbury and Springfield, Massachusetts are funded by the state's Department of Social Services, the Trial Court, and through private donations.
- The program in Riverside, California began with a \$3,000 grant from the County Bar Association and a rocking chair and wooden train set built and donated by the presiding Family Law Court Judge. Two years later, the County Executive Office assumed responsibility for funding the program.
- The Accommodation Station for children in Las Vegas, Nevada will fund its program with a unique strategy. The children's room will be staffed with AmeriCorps workers. AmeriCorps is the new federal national service program, which enables young people to earn money for college in return for working in community service positions. Thus the federal government will essentially be paying the salaries of the program staff.
- The majority of New York's programs receive funding from grants awarded by the state's Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children. In 1993, the New York legislature appropriated start-up funding to support court-based child care programs. The Commission is responsible for issuing the money to jurisdictions.
- In San Diego County, California, general maintenance of the rooms, and the salary and benefits of the program coordinator are paid by the Superior Court of San Diego County. Equipment and supplies are donated by individuals, businesses and public-spirited groups. Monetary donations are placed in the Children's Waiting Room Trust Fund. Approximately \$5,000 is received by the Trust Fund each year. The four children's rooms are staffed entirely by volunteers.
- In Washington, DC, a private local organization called Friends of the Superior Court pays the salary of one of the staff members of the court-based child care program and supplies the budget for equipment and materials. The Court contributes the physical space and its maintenance as well as the salary of the director and assistant director.

Although court-based child care programs are financed by a variety of sources and structures, they share a common element: the commitment of their supporters to maintaining and increasing funding so they can continue to improve the administration of justice and protect vulnerable children.

Staffing of Court-based Child Care Programs:

Our survey uncovered 18 jurisdictions, with 30 program sites, where the children's waiting rooms were managed by paid staff. Most court-based child care programs are staffed by one or two paid employees who have some prior experience and educational training related to teaching and/or caring for young children. Paid staff may hold bachelor's degrees in social work, sociology, psychology, early childhood education, or other related degrees.

Some programs employ a program director/coordinator and a program assistant. The staff may develop program policies and procedures and are responsible for administering the program on a daily basis. They register families; supervise children; set up activities for children; and supervise and train volunteers. Annual full-time salaries for court-based child care program directors range from \$12,000 to \$35,000. Annual full-time salaries for other program staff range from \$9,000 to approximately \$19,000.

Most programs also utilize volunteers to fill out the staff roster. An important source of volunteers are senior citizens who tend to provide steady, reliable services to the programs. Another source of volunteers are college students and housewives. Court-based child care program directors report that volunteer recruitment and retention present ongoing challenges.

Some court-based child care programs rely almost entirely on volunteers. Such is the case in Ulster County, New York; and in San Diego where seventy volunteers staff the morning and afternoon shifts at the four court-based child care program sites. Volunteers are interviewed by the program coordinator and screened by the Marshal's office for criminal records. Volunteers are required to be certified in CPR.

Some children's waiting rooms without paid staff also utilize volunteers on a regular or occasional basis. In Rhode Island, children's waiting rooms are periodically staffed by senior citizen volunteers from the Red Cross Foster Grandparents program. In White River Junction, Vermont, the local senior citizens' center makes outfits for the teddy bears given out through the Bear-ly Legal program.

Licensure and Liability:

Fourteen of the 18 court-based child care programs are not licensed day care centers. The licensing agencies exclude these 14 court-based child care programs for slightly different reasons. Generally, those states' licensing laws do not require licenses if the children are in care for less than three hours or when parents remain on the premises and can be summoned if necessary.

Many of the court-based child care programs we surveyed indicated that they were not required to purchase additional liability insurance specifically for their court-based child care programs. Court-based child care programs are often covered by the same liability insurance that covers the rest of the courthouse, or by the liability insurance carried by the private human services agency managing the child care program.

Linkage with Other Services:

Although formal case management or counseling services are generally not provided by court-based child care programs, program staff sometimes informally offer families information on where to find needed services. The primary sponsors of services in the courts have been victim/witness programs. Typically operated in collaboration with the District Attorney's office, victim/witness programs provide counseling and material assistance to victims of crime and those who must testify in court. A national survey done in 1985⁷ by Roberts found that there were over 300 victim/witness service programs. The majority of the 84 programs in the sample provided clients with informational assistance (information about the court process, available services, help with compensation claims, public education about services, and advocacy with employers). Far fewer provided material and emotional support services such as home-based crisis intervention, repair of damaged property, emergency financial assistance, or services for families such as child care. When a family service such as child care was offered, it often consisted of an informal babysitting arrangement involving secretaries, receptionists, and volunteers. The court-based child care programs in New York City and Orange, California are operated by the local victim/witness agency.

Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) are a second important effort on behalf of children in the courts, operating in 47 states. CACs focus on children who have been sexually or severely physically abused, coordinating prosecution and mental health services for the victimized children and other family members. Public agencies involved in the care and protection of abused children collaborate to ensure effective prosecution of the perpetrator and comprehensive services to the victims. The newly initiated court-based child care program in Waukegan, Illinois is operated by the County's CAC.

Some families who use court-based child care programs will also be eligible for services from the court's victim/witness program or Children's Advocacy Center. Many will not. Families from both groups will need a variety of social and other services.

For example, staff of the children's waiting room in San Francisco offer parents leads on food, clothing, shelter, HeadStart, substance abuse treatment, parenting education and life skills development. In Roxbury, Massachusetts, the program director has developed good working relationships with many court departments, the police station, the local health centers, and a variety of social service providers. Program staff help families contact appropriate service providers when they appear in need or directly request assistance; they also refer families to the court clinic for more in-depth social and psychological services.

In New York State, the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children is implementing its plan to establish a special service connection component in each Commission-sponsored program. For example, through a joint venture with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services a HeadStart family worker has been outstationed at the Children's Centers in Albany and Staten Island.

SUMMARY

In sum, courts across the country are finding ways to address the problems created by the presence of children in courts. Formal court-based child care programs, unstaffed children's waiting rooms and toys and teddy bears for children are all helping to improve the administration of justice while protecting vulnerable children from testimony and situations which may be damaging to them. Although challenges exist in funding and implementing court-based child care programs, it is clear that the sponsors of existing programs believe the services provided are useful, perhaps essential, to the courts and to families.



CHAPTER IV

THE STATE OF THE ART:

DESCRIPTIONS OF CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS IN THE COURTS

For almost all children, going to court is a frightening experience which occurs at a time of family crisis already fraught with anxiety. Courthouse corridors and even courtrooms are full of children: they accompany adults who need to be there and have no other place to leave their children, or they are there because they themselves need to appear in court.

Courts should provide friendly environments, including trained staff, for children who are waiting to testify in court cases, child victims who are attending hearings and other court proceedings and children who have merely accompanied their parents to court because there was no one to look after them. Friendly environments and trained staff can provide a safe, nurturing alternative to the tension, conflict and verbal violence that often characterize courtrooms.⁸

American Bar Association
Presidential Working Group on the Unmet
Legal Needs of Children and Their Families

This chapter is devoted to descriptions of children's programs in the courts. Over 40 programs in 18 states were found in our research and are described here. The programs profiled on the following pages include every example we could find of a court-based child care program managed by at least one paid staff person. If there are others not included here, we invite readers to contact us with information so that additional programs can be included in future versions of this document.

In addition to the programs with paid staff, we include in this chapter short descriptions of some of the waiting rooms and other types of children's programs found in courthouses. A number of organizations, like the members of the National Organization of Victim/Witness Agencies and the Children's Advocacy Centers, have created unstaffed waiting rooms where children can wait with their parents while in court. The Young Lawyers Division of the American Bar Association^c is working around the country to set up children's waiting rooms in over 30 cities, from Miami Beach to the Yukon. Unstaffed programs are described only very briefly here, in one or two paragraphs. The programs with paid staff are described at greater length, generally one to three pages. A contact person is listed for each program so readers interested in more information can contact the relevant parties directly.

ARIZONA

MARICOPA COUNTY DOMESTIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENT CHILD CARE VOUCHERS **Phoenix, AZ**

Contact: Janet Cornell
Judicial Administrator
Superior Court in Maricopa County
201 W. Jefferson Street, 4th Floor
Phoenix, AZ 85003
(602) 506-3184

The Superior Court of Arizona in Maricopa County is a general jurisdiction court that adjudicates family, civil, and criminal matters. The Domestic Relations Department of the Superior Court of Maricopa County hears cases related to divorce and child custody. This Department has entered into a contract with a local child care agency to supervise children while their parents are in court. The services can only be used with approval from the presiding Domestic Relations judge after parties have demonstrated their inability to secure alternate arrangements. Parents are given vouchers (signed by the judge) which are accepted as payment by the child care provider (maximum 4 hours per visit).

^c The Access to Legal Services Committee of the Young Lawyers Division is responsible for the ABA's work in this area. To find out more about their efforts, contact James Forman at (612) 340-8922 or Rachelle DesVaux at (415) 391-4800.

This contract was prepaid by the court to the child care center for a certain number of child care hours. Due to lack of new funds, the court does not plan to continue to provide this service once the remaining vouchers have been used.

MARICOPA COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT SELF-SERVICE CENTER

Phoenix, AZ

Contact: Noreen Sharpe, Director
Self Service Center
201 W. Jefferson
Maricopa County Superior Court
Central Court Building, 4th Floor
Phoenix, AZ 85003
(602) 506-2913

Responding to the increasing number of litigants who represent themselves in court, the Superior Court of Arizona in Maricopa County will open a Self Service Center in 1995 for the purpose of assisting litigants to understand court processes and move through the court system more efficiently. This Center will include areas designated for children to play in next to adult work areas and will be located in the large room where litigants will receive court information and forms and linkages to professional and community services to help them with ancillary problems. Litigants will be responsible for supervising their children.

CALIFORNIA

The courts in California receive budget appropriations from the California Legislature and from the counties in which they operate. There are 179 trial courts in California:

- 121 courts of limited jurisdiction which hear minor civil and criminal matters; and
- 58 Superior Courts where all juvenile, dependency, and family; felony level criminal and substantial stakes civil cases are heard.

The Courts of Appeals are divided into six districts with 88 judges sitting in panels of three. Final jurisdiction rests with the state's seven justice Supreme Court.

Sacramento Municipal Court was the first California court to open a court-based, drop-in child care center. In 1985, under the leadership of Municipal Court Judge Alice Lytle, a small program named La Casita was established at the Sacramento Superior and Municipal Courthouse. She authored an extensive manual for La Casita which continues to serve as the handbook for the program in Sacramento and for the Kids' Corner, a newly initiated program in the Carol Miller Justice Center in suburban Sacramento.

In September 1986 Governor Duekmejian signed legislation to encourage the establishment of "a non-threatening environment for minors involved in the judicial system":

Each county is encouraged to provide a room, located within, or within a reasonable distance from, the courthouse, for the use of minors under the age of 16...If a county newly constructs, substantially remodels or refurbishes any courthouse or facility used as a courthouse on or after January 1, 1988, that courthouse or facility shall contain the room described in this subsection.

California Penal Code, Section 868.6, Section 1.(b)

Less than three months later, on December 6, 1986, the Judicial Council of California responded to recommendations of its Committee on Gender Bias by strongly encouraging the provision of children's waiting rooms in each court. Citing the amended Penal Code, the Council enclosed Judge Lytle's manual on how to establish a children's waiting room in its January 5, 1987 memo. Opposition was voiced by a judge who speculated that such a program "would quickly become a dumping ground for all the children of anyone in the community who could not or did not want to care for their own children."⁹ While his concern has been voiced in many discussions on this topic, his forecast has proven inaccurate.

After the passage of Chapter 976 of the Acts of 1986, several courthouses added children's waiting rooms to existing facilities or included them in the design of new buildings. Children's waiting rooms now exist in courthouses in Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco and Ventura Counties. A program recently opened in Fresno as well. None of the California programs hold licenses to operate child care programs, excluded from regulation because the parents are in the building.

Eight existing county programs are summarized in this chapter. Four of the descriptions (Orange, Riverside, Sacramento, and San Francisco) include information gained during visits to the programs by Center for the Study of Social Policy staff in September 1994. One of the Los Angeles programs, in the Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court, is described in great detail in Chapter V.

MARIO OLMOS CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOM

**Fresno County Superior and Municipal Courts
Fresno, CA**

Contact: Susan Anderson, County Clerk or
Richard Macedo, Associate County Clerk
Fresno County Superior and Municipal Courts
1100 Van Ness, Room 401
Fresno, CA 93721
(209) 488-3375

The Mario Olmos Children's Waiting Room is located in the complex which houses the Fresno County Superior and Municipal Courts. The courts hear criminal, family and civil matters. (The Juvenile Court, which hears juvenile delinquency and child abuse and neglect cases is not located in this complex.) The children's waiting room was initially envisioned in 1990 by Judge Mario Olmos who was killed in an accident before he could realize his idea. After his death, the Fresno Women's Bar Association took the initiative to establish a children's waiting room in his name.

The waiting room opened March 6, 1995. It provides care to the children of court-involved families. To use the waiting room, children must be toilet-trained or accompanied by an adult. The room is located on the main floor of the courthouse, near the security area and the elevators. The room includes a children's bathroom. It can serve approximately 20 children at one time. It contains toys, children's furniture and supplies for arts and crafts projects. A local company donates snacks for the children using the waiting room.

The court has contracted with the local YMCA to staff and operate the program. There will be one full-time paid employee supplemented by volunteers. The Fresno Women's Bar Association has solicited donations and established a trust fund for the waiting room to cover the first year of its operation, and is committed to continue fund raising so the program can be maintained.

EDMUND D. EDELMAN CHILDREN'S COURT

**Los Angeles County Superior Court
Los Angeles, CA**

Contact: Diana Bichler, Director
Juvenile Court Services
Department of Children and Family Services
201 Centre Plaza Drive, Suite 4
Monterey Park, CA 91754-2158
(213) 526-6700

The Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court, located in Los Angeles County, makes judicial decisions regarding dependency issues of child abuse, neglect, exploitation and adoptions. It is the first court in the country to focus solely on issues involving non-delinquent children and whenever possible, the preservation of the family unit. The court has been designed to be child sensitive.

Shelter Care, as part of the Department of Children and Family Services, is a child care program that provides diversionary and supportive activities for children awaiting their court hearing. The program serves an average of 70 children each day, ranging in age from 4-18 years. Goals of Shelter Care are to provide children a safe and nurturing place, a feeling of being cared for and supported by adults. The experience can be a strong step in the child's process of healing.

This program relies on professionally trained staff who work as a team. In addition, volunteers from the community and local colleges share their time, talents and skills in caring for the children.

It is the intention of the Department of Children and Family Services to provide an environment and program where children can begin to re-establish trusting relationships with caring adults. Through a carefully designed setting, program and management policy, the Shelter Care program can make a significant contribution to this healing process.

This program is described in greater detail in Chapter V.

VICTIM/WITNESS PROGRAM CHILD CARE CENTERS

Los Angeles County Criminal Courts

Contact: Herman Millholland, Program Director or
Bobbi Kimble, Assistant Program Director
Victim/Witness Program
Los Angeles County Criminal Courts Building
210 West Temple, Suite 12-514
Los Angeles, CA 90012
(213) 974-7499

The Victim/Witness Program of the District Attorney's Office maintains two children's waiting rooms for the children of victims and witnesses. The rooms are small (about 100 square feet) and can accommodate as many as five children at a time. They are outfitted as child care centers, but are only used on occasions when a child is present and the Victim/Witness Program can detail a staff person or college intern to care for the child. This restriction translates into care for 20 to 30 children each week. Recently, community volunteers refurbished the rooms.

One of the rooms is located on the seventh floor of the Criminal Courts Building; the second sits in the Sex Crimes Unit of the DA's Office in an adjacent building. The Sex Crimes Unit waiting room is used by children accompanying adult witnesses and victims as well as by children who have been the victims of sexual assault themselves. Supervision is handled by the children's parents, and in the case of the child victims, sometimes by the child's Victim Advocate.

CHILDREN'S CHAMBERS

Lamoreaux Justice Center Orange, CA

Contact: Barbara West
Assistant Director
Community Service Programs, Inc.
17200 Jamboree Road, Suite D
Irvine, CA 92714
(714)756-0677

I've had to send children of witnesses out into the hallway because they were making so much noise. It's not safe for the kids because we don't have anyone to watch them. And it's not fair to the parent because he or she can't concentrate on the testifying because they're worried about their children.¹⁰

Hon. Linda Miller
Orange County Municipal Court Judge

OVERVIEW

Court-based, drop-in child care is offered in two courthouses in Orange County: at North Orange County Municipal Court in the city of Fullerton and at Lamoreaux Justice Center in the city of Orange. In a large room at the Lamoreaux Justice Center, two child care providers can supervise as many as 29 children between the ages of two and a half and 17 years old as long as the children are toilet trained. The daily average is 15 children. Parents may leave their children at Children's Chambers while they transact their business anywhere in the Justice Center. Children's Chambers has become increasingly busy over the past few years. In the program's second year of operation, utilization jumped 29% over its use in year one. During the 1992-93 fiscal year, 2,290 children were served; in the 1993-94 fiscal year, 2,945 children spent time in Chambers.^d

THE COURT

Orange County is a diverse section of southern California. It covers 786 square miles and includes 2.6 million people. The people who come to court represent a cross section of the County's population. The Lamoreaux Justice Center handles juvenile criminal matters and family law cases that include divorce, child custody, mediation, restraining orders, civil injunction against harassment, probate, and child dependency cases. About five percent of the Children's Chambers child clients are there because their parents are involved in divorce or custody mediation. Families seen at the court are often experiencing problems in addition to the legal issues which their presence in court is attempting to resolve. Some are involved with gangs, substance abuse, and crime. Domestic violence is common. Homelessness afflicts some families. For many, the family law case is only one of many ways they are involved with the courts; criminal behavior brings them into contact with other branches of the judiciary.

^d This was one of four programs visited by Center for the Study of Social Policy staff in September 1994.

The Lamoreaux Justice Center also maintains a children's play room in the Victim/Witness Assistance Program Center located on the fourth floor. The play room contains a television, a table and chairs, toys, and games. A large internal window allows staff in the adjoining office to observe whatever goes on in the play room even if the door is closed. Supervision of any children who might use the room is shared by the staff working in the Victim/Witness center.

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

As early as 1987 there was movement among members of the Orange County judiciary to provide child care in the courts. Municipal Court Judge Linda Miller mobilized forces that led to the establishment of Children's Chambers at North Orange County Municipal Court. She and other judges complained that the presence of children created noisy disruptions and made it difficult for all involved to participate in hearings. The program opened under the auspices of the CSP, Inc. (Community Service Programs) Victim/Witness Program in December 1989. When the Lamoreux Justice Center was constructed in the early nineties, a Children's Chambers was included in the initial design.

FUNDING

The County holds a contract with CSP, Inc., a private non-profit agency, to manage and staff the Chambers at both sites. The funding is appropriated from the Court's operating budget. Donations from the Orange County Law Auxiliary and the Junior League provide additional funding that enables CSP, Inc. to purchase special equipment and toys for the programs. The current sources of funding are adequate, CSP staff report.

THE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

Children arrive in Chambers through a number of routes. Almost three-fourths are referred by the Marshal's Office. Each person entering the building passes through an electronic security system under the direction of the Orange County Marshal's Office. Due to this, the Deputy Marshal is often the official contact between the family and the court. Almost one-fourth of the children are referred from the CSP, Inc. Domestic Violence Assistance Center. Each court department has its own uniquely color-coded referral form which allows Chambers staff to identify the child's origin within the court.

Physical Design: The seven story courthouse, completed in 1992, is built around a central atrium. Children's Chambers is located on the second floor. There are no posted directions to Children's Chambers for the security of the children and staff. The door to the center is always locked; its glass window permits staff to know when someone is outside. Parents stand at a counter to complete necessary information forms; the counter divides the administrative area from the children's area. The child care section is a long room with a television at one end. The room also contains a rocking chair, a couch, a table and chairs, and a large book case displaying puzzles, books, and games that the children can reach. A brightly tiled children's bathroom adjoins the room; the adults' bathroom, also adjoining the center, doubles as a storage closet.

Program Content: At the table, the CSSP staff observed three girls, roughly 4, 5, and 10, using crayons in coloring books. A couch provided just the right spot for the youngest girl to nestle in a Disney character blanket and rest, her eyes fixed on the television set. The television is primarily used to show videos and is always on when the center is open and children are present. Although the center provides snacks, it closes for an hour during the court's lunch break. Parents are instructed to pick up their children even if their case has not reached its conclusion for the day. The parent can bring the child back to Children's Chambers after the lunch break.

While the center serves children from two and a half to 17 years of age, the biggest group are three and four year olds. They account for one third of the children who use the center. Six (6) percent of the children seen in the center are not toilet trained but remain in the care of the adult who brought them to the center. On average, children remain in the center about two hours but 20% spend an entire day there. Children are likely to return to the center for a second visit; almost half the visits made in 1993-1994 involved children who had attended the center on more than one day.

Staffing: The Lamoreaux Justice Center Children's Chambers is staffed by two full time child care workers. Children's Chambers child care providers have experience with child care and working with children. The full time salary for these positions ranges between \$15,900 and \$23,580 plus benefits.

Children's Chambers is not required to hold a license from the county's child care licensing agency because parents are in the building and easily accessible should their children experience a problem. It is a CSP, Inc. policy that child care providers are certified in CPR. Although not required, child care workers follow the state mandated guidelines for reporting suspected child abuse.

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS

Parents are welcome to spend time with their children in the center. The staff interact in a relaxed and friendly way with the parents as they arrive with their children and when they come to pick them up. There are a number of brochures available at no cost to parents about child abuse, spousal abuse, parenting, and victim/witness assistance.

FUTURE PLANS

CSP staff describe the biggest benefit of Children's Chambers as fewer children in the courtrooms and wandering the hallways. The children can play in a safe and secure area while court business is being conducted. There are fewer disruptions and all litigants can remain in the courtroom. Confrontations between divorcing parents have decreased since the children are no longer present to serve as pawns in arguments. The only program policy the staff would like to change is their flexibility to offer care to children who are not yet toilet trained or two and a half years old. However, admitting infants and young toddlers would require another staff person and more equipment. In addition, they hope to expand to other courthouses in the County of Orange when space is identified.

COURTS CARING FOR KIDS

**Riverside Family Law Court
Riverside, CA**

Contact: Harpal Thiara
Program Development Specialist
Children's Services Unit
Riverside County Office of Education
3939 13th Street
P. O. Box 868
Riverside, CA 92502-0868
(909) 369-6375

My first view of the courthouse was in 1987 before the children's room opened. As I entered the building and passed security, I saw a father rip a baby bottle out of his baby's mouth and throw it down the hallway where it hit a wall and shattered, spraying milk all over. He tore a pair of shoes off the baby. These were things that he had paid for and he didn't want his wife to have them.¹¹

Janice Kehoe
Founding Head Teacher, Courts Caring for Kids

OVERVIEW

With two staff, this one room program can serve as many as 16 children at one time. The children range in age from four to 18 years; occasionally infants as young as five days have been cared for in the center. Children are eligible to use the center if they are involved in divorce or custody mediation, and their presence is required so that they can talk to the mediator. Additionally, women who have sought refuge from an abusive spouse in a nearby battered women's shelter are able to leave their children in the center while pursuing restraining orders in court. Because it is so much in demand, the center has had to deny access to all other children whose presence in the courthouse is not required by the mediators. Utilization has steadily climbed since 1990 when just over 3,000 children were served. In 1993, almost 5,000 children spent some part of a day in the center.^e

THE COURT

Riverside County has a population of 1.17 million. Riverside Family Law Court is a very busy court serving a county of some 7,500 square miles spread out in a geographically diverse and far flung arc. Domestic violence and child abuse are on the rise in every socioeconomic stratum. The county includes pockets of great wealth and tremendous poverty. The parents who are involved in the disputes being heard in the Family Law Court reflect the racial (primarily white, African-American, and Spanish speaking) and socioeconomic demographics of the county. It is common to find both parents working outside the home. The families appear in the Family Law Court to litigate divorces, child support and custody. The centerpiece of many such matters is court-sponsored mediation. The staff of five full-time mediators attempt to assist parents in reaching settlements that are the least injurious to all parties. If the mediation process breaks down, the mediator, basing his or her findings on conversations with the parents and children, makes recommendations to the judge. The judges rely very heavily on the mediators' recommendations.

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

In 1987, Pat Budicin, a legal secretary employed by the court, appalled at the types of incidents children were witnessing in the corridors, approached various judges and other courthouse staff about finding some alternative for children who had to be in the building. With a \$3,000 grant from the County Bar Association, a private preschool began operating the program. Budicin's parents donated a television, and the association of legal secretaries bought a VCR. Presiding Family Law Court Judge Garst built a rocking horse and wooden train set the children enjoy to this day. While the center amassed the equipment and materials it needed to provide care for children, the stewardship of the private preschool program fell apart. In its second year, Budicin tried to run the program herself, but found it a daunting task. She successfully appealed to the county for relief.

^e This was one of four programs visited by Center for the Study of Social Policy staff in September, 1994.

FUNDING

The Department of Education took over the center's management in 1989 and the County Executive Office assumed responsibility for funding its operation. Although the management of the program has changed three times in its seven year life span, the two teachers hired in 1987 remained with the program throughout its initial seven years and offered it a continuity that has contributed to its importance among the court's services.

THE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

The Riverside Family Law Court is a two story building entered from a front walkway. A security check-in creates a clot of people and provides an opportunity to scan the narrow corridor where many people are seated along the far wall. To reach the children's room it is necessary to pass through this crowded hallway. The children's room staff restricts the occupants to no more than 16 children. Because the children are there to speak with a mediator, the youngest child is typically no younger than four years old, while the oldest child in the room may be close to 18 years of age. Parents sign their children in but are then expected to leave to attend to their court business.

Physical Design: The room contains a variety of puzzles, art materials, and an adult sized couch. The center of the room is taken up by two tables with chairs around them. From the tables and the couch a wall-mounted television is easily visible.

Program Content: When the room is full, it is difficult to set up organized activities. Children are able to see a variety of activities and have permission to bring out games, books, puzzles, coloring books, and other drawing supplies as they wish. The television is used to show movies, and is on only during the morning snack. The children receive treats at holidays like Halloween and Christmas. Occasionally special visitors like a clown will visit the center. The center closes for lunch from noon to 1:15 P.M. but staff offer snacks to the children during the morning and afternoon sessions.

The staff spend much of their time in informal conversation with children. They often find the children far more relaxed and forthcoming in these conversations than do the mediators during their interviews with the children. The children's room staff often share information with the mediators that they have gleaned during classroom chats. The insights offered by the center's staff assist the mediators in their conversations with parents and in their recommendations to judges. In one case, a child with significant special needs had not been evaluated for services because his mother would not admit that he had any problems. He received court-ordered services because the center's staff was able to describe the child's condition very clearly to the mediator.

Staffing: The staff includes a full time lead teacher who holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education, and a part time assistant teacher who has completed four courses in early childhood education. The salaries for the two staff positions are paid by the County and start at the rate of \$20,710 and \$14,954 respectively. Their salary scale is equivalent to other child development teaching employees of the Education Department.

The county does not require licensing of the program because parents are on the premises. The Department of Education monitors program performance through the Title XXII licensing regulations and Exemplary Program standards.

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS

The custodial parent signs his or her children into and out of the center. The center has in the past devoted some wall space to a parent information board. Parents' primary interaction, however, is with the mediators. During mediation they are given the opportunity to describe the family's situation. This can lead to recommendations for further services, or in some cases, to required participation in psychiatric evaluations and other activities. The mediators provide parents with a list of local resources for parenting classes, counseling, drug rehabilitation, and other programs.

FUTURE PLANS

The center's greatest service to families, according to a staff member, is "having a place for children to go and not be in the midst of everything." The staff look forward to the doubling of their physical space which is scheduled to occur very soon and will involve a temporary re-location of the program while the wall separating the center from an adjacent office is torn down. They would like to be able to offer care to all the children who appear in the courthouse. Staffing and funding remain ongoing concerns. Their long term goal is to provide continuing services, and to connect families to other related services when that is appropriate.

LA CASITA CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOM

**Sacramento Superior and Municipal Court
Sacramento, CA**

Contact: Irene Montes
Senior Court Process Clerk
La Casita
Sacramento Superior and Municipal Court
720 9th Street, Room 211
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 440-6019

OVERVIEW

La Casita is the oldest court-based, drop-in child care program in California. With one paid staff and volunteers, the room can accommodate no more than ten children at a time. Any toilet trained child between the ages of two and a half and sixteen years of age accompanying a parent or guardian to court is eligible to use the Waiting Room. Together with its sister program, the Kids' Corner at the Carol Miller Justice Center, the Waiting Room served 1,910 children in 1994.^f

THE COURT

Spread out over 966 square miles, Sacramento County contains the state capitol, the city of Sacramento. The County is the home of 1.13 million people; 35% of that total reside in the city of Sacramento. The Superior and Municipal Court has jurisdiction over the entire county in civil and criminal matters. People find themselves in the courthouse to deal with criminal prosecutions and civil cases; they can also bring their children to the Waiting Room if they are involved in family law cases or domestic violence proceedings. While the people who appear in court include a cross section of the widely diverse socioeconomic and ethnic subgroupings who reside in the County, the majority are poor, and African-American or Hispanic.

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

In December 1985, the efforts of several Sacramento Municipal and Superior Court judges and other court personnel, led by the Hon. Alice A. Lytle and the Hon. Rudolph Loncke who were then Municipal Court Judges, culminated in the first California children's waiting room in the courts. Shortly before La Casita opened its doors for the first time, Judge Lytle wrote an article for a local newspaper, in which she described the reason she believed a children's waiting room was needed. "As a judge, I have had to conduct trials with children seated in a parent's lap or crawling across the floor. Bailiffs and court clerks have frequently been pressed into babysitting duties. Needless to say such activities do little to add to the dignity of the proceedings."¹² Support for the program was widespread among members of the bar, district attorneys, parents, and community leaders. The Sheriff's office gave up its Ready Room in order to provide the physical space needed to house La Casita. Both Judge Lytle and Judge Loncke maintain an interest in the program. Judge Lytle is the supervising judge for the program. Judge Loncke makes a visit to the Children's Waiting Room a few times each month to spend time with the children.

FUNDING

The program is one of three departments in the Court's Special Services division. Funding for the salaries of the full-time coordinators, present in each of the county's two programs, and for food and equipment, comes from the court budget; 60% comes from county revenue and 40% is appropriated by the state's administrative office for the courts. Supplies are donated by the deputies, court employees, and the public.

THE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

The Superior and Municipal Court was built in 1965. It is a six story building in which 43 courtrooms function on a daily basis. The Children's Waiting Room is on the second floor. Signs direct the public to the second floor and down the hallway past the stairs and elevators. It serves children who accompany criminal defendants or litigants in family law cases.

Physical Design: The room is 300 square feet in size, with a window running the length of the wall opposite the door. A dutch door permits the staff to leave the top half open while protecting small children from the danger of wandering away. Just inside the door, a desk provides work space for the Senior Court Process Clerk who manages the program and a place for parents to sign in. On the wall behind the desk is a full size refrigerator where the juices and other perishable snack items are stored. While La Casita closes for lunch, children receive a snack in the morning and in the afternoon. Mounted in the corner above the desk is a television and VCR. There is a dramatic play corner that includes a play stove and refrigerator. The center of the room is devoted to a table and chairs.

^f This was one of four programs visited by Center for the Study of Social Policy staff in September 1994.

Program Content: The Children's Room Manual states, "our experience has been that children ignore the TV; however its presence is useful because it will entertain the volunteers when no children are in the room... Toys and coloring books are the most popular items with the children....No toys of violence are allowed in the room. Many of these children have had enough violence in their lives."¹³ Children's drawings, most of them free hand renderings, are displayed on the walls. A selection of children's videos sits on a shelf near the television; the Senior Court Process Clerk talked about her plans to solicit new donations from local video stores in the near future. While the children are in La Casita the staff work with them, engaging them in games or art projects. Parents are welcome to join in if they are interested in participating.

Staffing: The children's waiting rooms fall under the jurisdiction of the Special Services Department. Both the Sacramento programs boast full time coordinators, with the title Senior Court Process Clerk. They are the primary staffers for the waiting rooms, supervising the children's activities and the volunteers who make up the balance of the program's staff. The job description for the Children's Room Coordinator does not specify any educational requirements or previous experience in the care or education of children. The entry level salary is \$33,000, equivalent to other Court Supervisor positions. Volunteers are drawn from a number of sources. Police officers are invited to join the children in La Casita while they await their appearance in court to give testimony. The court refers participants in its Alternative Sentencing program to La Casita. While there are several verdicts that would bar offenders from work in the Children's Waiting Room, many of La Casita's volunteers avoid other more onerous punishments by a stint at La Casita.

Before the program opened Judge Lytle explored the question of licensure with the Office of the County Counsel. After some research, it was ascertained that there was nothing in the applicable statutory provisions or the licensing regulations to determine the requirement for a program like La Casita. The Community Care Licensing unit of the state's Department of Social Services was able to clarify La Casita's position vis à vis licensing however. A Sacramento representative of the Community Care Licensing Division provided the County Counsel with an internal memorandum that exempted drop-in programs where parents were "on the premises" and "readily available to their children."¹⁴

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS

Within the courthouse, two programs offer services. WEAVE assists battered women with legal paperwork and establishing themselves in a new home. Family Court Services employs mediators to help divorcing parents work out custody arrangements. Judges have access to a pamphlet that lists homeless shelters, food pantries, pro bono attorneys, and other services for indigent people. Within the confines of La Casita, the parents are welcomed by staff during the times when they are dropping off or picking up their children. They are also welcome to use the room in order to care for very young children whose lack of toilet training would otherwise prohibit their entrance.

FUTURE PLANS

La Casita runs smoothly, according to the program's Senior Court Process Clerk. A new courthouse is planned for some time in the future, and she would like the new children's waiting room to include its own bathroom for the children.

SAN DIEGO COUNTY COURTHOUSE CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOM PROGRAM

San Diego, CA

Contact: Julie Myres, Children's Waiting Room Program Coordinator
County Courthouse
220 West Broadway
San Diego, CA 92101
(619) 531-3489

South Bay Regional Center
500 3rd Avenue, 1st Floor
Chula Vista, CA 92101
(619) 691-4801

Sites:
Family Court
1501-55 Sixth Avenue, Second Floor
San Diego, CA 92101
(619) 557-2078

County Courthouse
220 W. Broadway #2806
San Diego, CA 92101
(619) 531-4037

Vista Regional Center Annex
235 S. Melrose Avenue
Vista, CA 92072
(619) 940-4725

OVERVIEW

The Superior Court of San Diego operates four supervised children's waiting rooms for court-involved children or children whose parents are court-involved. Each waiting room utilizes two volunteers to supervise as many as 12 children under the age of 18 years. The children's waiting rooms are free of charge to court-involved children and families. They do not serve court employees or jurors. Since 1986, the four children's waiting rooms in San Diego County have provided drop-in care for over 43,000 children and their families.

THE COURT

San Diego County covers 4,269 square miles and has a population of over 2.6 million people. Over sixty percent of the population is white; almost a quarter is Hispanic; about nine percent is Asian; and six percent is black. The County is relatively wealthy; its median household income is \$35,200.

The waiting rooms are located in courthouses which hear civil, criminal and family matters. The majority of the children using the waiting rooms are there due to their parents' involvement in family court (divorce, custody, visitation, etc.). The socioeconomic characteristics of the children who appear at the courthouses mirrors the characteristics of the county at large.

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

San Diego County's first children's waiting room, in the Downtown Court, was established in 1986 after a 6-year-old girl was traumatized by seeing her kidnapper while waiting to testify against him in court. This incident inspired child advocate Karen Adams to mobilize community activists, court personnel and elected officials. They formed a steering committee to study the problem of having children in courthouses. The first children's waiting room located in the County Courthouse, grew out of the work of this committee. The second program, at the Family Court, was established in 1987; the third, at the Vista courthouse, in 1989; and the fourth, at South Bay courthouse, in 1992. The program is administered by its only paid employee, the program coordinator, who recruits and trains volunteer staff, and represents the program in fund raising and public relations.

FUNDING

General maintenance of the rooms, and the salary and benefits of the program coordinator, are paid by the Superior Court. The equipment and supplies found in the rooms are donated by individuals, businesses and public spirited groups. The legal community is especially supportive. Monetary donations to the children's waiting rooms are placed in a trust fund that was established for that purpose. Approximately \$5,000 is donated to the Children's Waiting Room Trust Fund each year. According to the program coordinator, this amount is sufficient to cover the cost of the supplies needed for the children's waiting rooms.

THE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

There are real grown-up things happening in court and there is no need for them to know about any of it. They're taken out of the process. The waiting room is a kinder, gentler place for them to be. What we are providing is almost like an island in the middle of the madness, the confusion in a courthouse.¹⁵

Julie Myres
Children's Waiting Room Program Coordinator

The waiting rooms are all located in the courthouses themselves. Parents learn about the waiting rooms through signs posted in the courthouses; court marshals also inform parents that the rooms are available for temporary child care. The Children's Waiting Rooms are open from 8:30 A.M. to 4:30 P.M., closing for an hour's lunch break in the middle of the day.

Physical Design: The waiting rooms range in size from 144 to 280 square feet. No more than 12 children are allowed in any of the rooms at one time. Children must be under 18 years of age. Parents are required to sign in when they drop off their children, indicating where they will be in the courthouse and who will be retrieving their children. The waiting rooms contain toys, books, games, children's furniture, televisions, and VCRs.

Children are encouraged to use the toys and games that interest them, to draw at the table, or to listen to stories read by older children and volunteers. The televisions are used about half the time the centers are open to show movies like Walt Disney's *Snow White*. Each room also contains a computer which has educational soft ware and video games for use by the children.

Although children do not need to be toilet trained to receive care in the waiting rooms, parents must return periodically to check on children who are not toilet trained or who need to be fed, because the staff does not change diapers or feed children. The rooms do not have a children's bathroom or diaper changing area so their parents must escort them to the public facilities elsewhere in the courthouses.

Staffing: The four children's waiting rooms are managed by one program coordinator. The program coordinator has an extensive background in volunteer management. The entry level salary for the full-time position is \$26,000. The rooms themselves are staffed by volunteers. Each room is staffed with two volunteers during each shift (morning and afternoon). Currently there are approximately 70 volunteers for all four waiting rooms, the majority of whom are senior citizens. The program is always seeking new volunteers with an emphasis on those who have some expertise in the care of young children. Recruitment and retention is an ongoing challenge. Volunteers are interviewed by the program coordinator and are screened by the Marshal's office for criminal records. Volunteers are required to be certified in CPR and training is provided. As of June, 1994, volunteers had donated over 33,000 hours to the children of San Diego County.

Because the parents remain on the premises, the waiting rooms do not require licensure.

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS

The waiting rooms provide care and supervision, but do not offer counseling or referral services. The rooms are occasionally used for supervised visitation between children and non-custodial parents during the hours the waiting rooms are staffed and at alternate times outside normal court hours.

FUTURE PLANS

The four children's waiting rooms are highly utilized. Children are protected from harm and the courts work much more efficiently. The Program will expand as new construction and renovation of courthouses in San Diego County occurs.

THE CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOM

**San Francisco Hall of Justice
San Francisco, CA**

Contact: Shirley Melnicoe
Executive Director
Northern California Service League
28 Boardman Place
San Francisco, CA 94103
(415) 863-2323

OVERVIEW

A full-time program coordinator and a part time assistant supervise as many as eight children, ranging in age from two to 15 years. All children who accompany their parents or other adult guardians to court are welcome. The only entrance restriction is that children supervised by the waiting room staff must be toilet trained. Parents are welcome to use the room for diaper changing and may remain in the room with their children if there is space. Families come to the Hall of Justice for criminal cases, and the children who appear in the waiting room have accompanied adults who are defendants, victims, and witnesses. In 1994, 1,935 children were served by the program.⁸

THE COURT

San Francisco is a city and county of great diversity, encompassing 46.4 square miles and including 741,300 people. San Francisco Municipal and Superior Courts are housed in the Hall of Justice. They are the criminal courts for the city and county of San Francisco. While there is great socioeconomic and racial diversity in the city and county, the families involved with the court are predominantly quite poor (75% of the families using the waiting room receive public assistance) and African-American or Hispanic. The cases found in the courts' dockets range from minor criminal infractions, to domestic violence, and the most heinous violent crimes. One of the county's jails sits on the top two floors of the building and houses 860 prisoners.

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

In 1987, Gay Danforth, a leader of the San Francisco Women Lawyers' Alliance, began lobbying for a children's waiting room in the Hall of Justice. She believed that children should not witness the events taking place in criminal court. Not only was the experience troubling to the children, their presence created additional noise which made it difficult for the courts to concentrate on their work. Shortly after Danforth began her efforts, Municipal Court Judge Lillian Sing recommended she involve the Northern California Service League (NCSL) in her efforts. The League, Judge Sing pointed out, already provided a number of services to court-involved adults.

NCSL had been founded in 1948 to assist jail inmates, ex-offenders, and their families in finding employment and rehabilitative services. NCSL's executive director enthusiastically committed the League to the effort. Her only stipulation was that the San Francisco Women Lawyers' Alliance would take responsibility for the funding of the program for its first three years of operation.

Finding space in the courthouse proved the most difficult task. The Hall of Justice space identified for the waiting room belonged to the San Francisco Police Department and San Francisco Probation. Winning over the Police Chief proved to be the decisive moment in the long waged battle to get the program going. The Police Department gave them a room on the first floor of the courthouse overlooking an enclosed courtyard. While the floor-to-ceiling windows were a nice feature for the children's waiting room they had been something of a liability for Probation which had used the room for urine testing. On February 11, 1991, four years after Gay Danforth began her efforts to set up such a room, the Children's Waiting Room opened for business.

FUNDING

The first year's funding was successfully raised entirely through private contributions. After the first year, funding was found in two

⁸ This was one of four programs visited by Center for the Study of Social Policy staff in September 1994.

separate departments of the San Francisco budget: the Mayor's Office of Community Development and the Mayor's Office for Children, Youth and Their Families.

THE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

The majority of the children, present because their parents are involved in a legal matter, typically spend between 30 and 90 minutes in the room. Over 80% of the children seen in the waiting room are younger than six years. Under Fire Department restriction, only eight children can be in the waiting room at a time. Occasionally children are turned away because of lack of space.

Physical Design: The Waiting Room is not in the mainstream of the building's busy corridors. To reach it, families must pass the security check-in at the front door, and follow signs around to the rear of the building's first floor. A corner of the room is set up to facilitate dramatic play. There is a centrally located table where children can draw, play games, do puzzles, or watch videos. In one corner of the room a diaper changing table is set up.

Program Content: While in the room, children are welcome to use any of the materials they see. Staff supervise some structured activities which give the children a chance to make something they can take home. Staff play with the children. Although the program closes for an hour's lunch break from noon to 1:00 P.M., children are served snacks during their visits to the waiting room. The program's coordinator has a button making machine and uses stickers and the words "I visited the Children's Waiting Room" to create an array of buttons which she displays for the children so they can choose one to take with them at the end of their visits.

When asked if the children have other pressing problems or issues, the coordinator said, "some of the kids are hungry. Some are here in their pajamas. They don't seem to know what's going on. It's hard for them to come in here and hard for them to be left by their parents. We play with them, make things. Kids don't want to leave when their parents come to get them because the time here is often short and they're just getting involved."¹⁶

Staffing: The staff include a full time coordinator who holds a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, and a part time assistant teacher who has completed the basic 6 units required for early childhood assistant teachers under California's licensing regulations. The starting salary for the center coordinator is \$19,000. The assistant is paid on an hourly basis at \$6.00 per hour. The Hall of Justice Waiting Room is not licensed because parents are on the premises.

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS

Parents are welcome in the center. Any parent who comes to the courthouse can bring their infant to the center to use the diaper changing facilities and may remain in the center with their children while waiting for their case to be heard. Because NCSL has links to the many court departments, the city's Department of Social Services, and the public school system, waiting room staff can assist parents in a number of ways. Staff offer parents leads on food, clothing, shelter, HeadStart, substance abuse treatment, parenting education, and life skills development. NCSL sponsors parenting classes for incarcerated fathers and contact baby visits so that the men and women housed in the building's jail can maintain a positive relationship with their young children.

FUTURE PLANS

After three and a half years of operation the center has had a big impact on litigants' timely appearance in court. NCSL's Executive Director said, "No shows are no longer an issue. Court time is really saved. Down time of attorneys and judges is minimized." She and the Room's Coordinator wish the center could be moved to a larger space that included a private bathroom; taking the children down the hall to use the toilet is not the ideal arrangement. In addition, they hope to move the funding of the program from the city's budget to the court's budget.

VENTURA COUNTY SUPERIOR AND MUNICIPAL COURTS CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOM

Ventura, CA

Contact: Florence Prushan
Assistant Executive Officer
Ventura County Superior and Municipal Courts
800 South Victoria Avenue, PO Box 6489
Ventura, CA 93006-6489
(805)654-2965

OVERVIEW

The Ventura County Superior and Municipal Courts have a supervised waiting room for children whose parents are conducting business with the courts. The Children's Waiting Room can serve as many as eight children at a time with its one paid staff member and volunteers. Children must be two and a half years old and toilet trained to be admitted to the program; the oldest children allowed to use

the room are 14. Since 1992, the children's room has provided drop-in child care for over 5,500 children and their families. According to court officers, it is busiest before Christmas and before summer, when custody and visitation disputes become most heated.

THE COURT

Located adjacent to Los Angeles County, Ventura County is comprised of suburban and rural areas. Approximately 700,000 people live in Ventura County; 66% are white; 26% are Hispanic; five percent are Asian and two percent are African-American. The majority of the population is middle class, but there is a sizeable population of poor migrant farm workers.

The Ventura County Superior and Municipal Courts hear cases regarding civil, criminal and family matters. The waiting room primarily serves families who are in court due to divorce, custody, or visitation matters. The children's waiting room is available to families free of charge. The families utilizing the Children's Waiting Room reflect the income and racial characteristics of the county as a whole.

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

The Ventura County Children's Waiting Room was created in 1992 after Superior Court Judge Joe D. Hadden saw the children's waiting room at Riverside County Family Court and decided that Ventura County needed one too. Judge Hadden felt that, in the Ventura County courthouse, there was no safe place for children to wait while their parents took care of court business. Children were either left unsupervised in the hall where alleged and convicted criminals and other strangers were walking by, or they were in the courtroom being exposed to potentially disturbing situations and testimony. Judge Hadden worked with Sheila Gonzalez and Florence Prushan, executive officer and assistant executive officer of the Court, to create a children's waiting room which would provide a safe place for children, give parents peace of mind and improve the administration of justice.

Due to the limited amount of unused space in the courthouse, it was very difficult to find a room that could be used for children. Ms. Prushan finally acquired a courthouse master key and began walking around the building opening doors in search of a space that would be suitable for a children's waiting room. She finally found an old storage room that could be converted into a children's waiting room. The room was cleaned, painted and carpeted with county funds. An artistic court employee decorated the walls with paintings of playful animals.

FUNDING

The court administration actively solicited donations and volunteers for the children's waiting room. They received donations and support from numerous community and philanthropic organizations and professional associations as well as from court employees and the county library. "Everyone volunteered...We have everything we need and more," she says. "The room is more than well used." She adds, "We've had very positive feedback. Children have a wonderful time....Parents and judges are pleased." The children's waiting room opened its doors in 1992. The Court pays the salary of the one staff person and provides the room and maintenance support. Equipment and supplies are purchased with private donations.¹⁷

THE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

The children's waiting room is located on the main floor of the courthouse. Parents are strongly encouraged to use it. There are signs indicating the location of the children's waiting room; brochures about the waiting room are available throughout the courthouse; and bailiffs regularly announce to litigants that the room is available for drop-in child care.

A maximum of eight children are allowed in the waiting room at one time. Children must be at least two and a half years old and toilet trained. Parents must sign in when they drop off their children, indicating where they will be in the courthouse and who will be retrieving their children. The waiting room is not a licensed day care provider, thus parents remain on the premises while their children are in the waiting room. The room is covered by the same liability insurance that covers the rest of the courthouse. On average, children stay in the waiting room for about 2 hours.

Physical Design: The children's waiting room is approximately 300 square feet in size. It contains donated children's toys, books, games, furniture, and a television set equipped with a VCR. There is a doll house, a play kitchen and arts and crafts materials. There is also a small refrigerator.

Program content: Children are served juice and crackers donated by the court cafeteria. There is no bathroom or diaper changing area in the children's waiting room; children are accompanied by staff to the bathroom down the hall. The television is on occasionally and is used to show videotaped movies; *Aladdin* is a favorite with the children. Staff are encouraged to participate actively with the children, playing with and talking to them, as opposed to sitting them down in front of the television.

Staffing: The children's waiting room has one full-time paid staff person. The 40 hour Community Service Worker carries with it a base salary of \$8.21 per hour. The staff person has taken many education courses. Staffing is expanded through the use of volunteers,

many of whom are senior citizens. Staff are required to fill out application forms, to get trained in CPR and to complete an orientation to the program. All volunteer and paid staff are fingerprinted and checked through the Department of Justice and the state's department of motor vehicles. Volunteer recruitment is a never ending component of program management.

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS

Beyond checking children in and out of the waiting room, staff have limited interaction with parents. They are encouraged to avoid getting into detailed conversations with parents (or children) about the cases in which they are involved. Staff are instructed to be supportive of parents in a very general manner, but not to engage in counseling.

FUTURE PLANS

The children's waiting room is highly utilized. It gives court-involved parents a feeling of security during times which can be quite stressful. The children's waiting room also helps the administration of justice and is much appreciated by judges, attorneys and court personnel. Currently, there are no plans to expand the program or to make any other changes in size, services or staffing, as no funds are appropriated for such activities.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

CHILD CARE CENTER FOR THE SUPERIOR COURT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA Washington, D.C.

Contact: Sara Lucas, Director
Child Care Center for the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, Room 1225
500 Indiana Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 879-1759

OVERVIEW

With a staff that includes two full time teaching/administrative staff, and five part-time assistants, the Superior Court Child Care Center can accommodate as many as 23 children at a time. Children accompanying jurors, witnesses, criminal defendants, or civil litigants may use the center if they are over two years of age and toilet trained. While the majority of children using the center range from three to six years, adolescents up to 14 years are welcome. Occasionally, and with approval from supervisors, employees may bring their children to the center. The program serves about 1,200 children each year.

THE COURT

By 10 o'clock most mornings, the football field-long hallway of the John Marshall level of D.C. Superior Court is teeming. Women with infants and toddlers fill the plastic chairs that line both sides of the side corridor. Teenagers of all sizes mingle in the center amid scores of lawyers, social workers, probation officers, police officers and prosecutors, as well as a few people using the hallway for its original purpose, a passageway.... The courtrooms clustered along the Marshall level are devoted to some of society's most volatile legal matters: divorces, paternity and support suits, civil protection orders, child abuse and neglect cases, landlord-tenant disputes, small-claims petitions and criminal offenses involving juveniles. Many of the proceedings are closed to the public, so almost everyone is relegated to the hall... The tension is palpable. Witnesses are often just a few feet away from the youths they are there to testify against. Children whine and cry uncontrollably. Tempers flare. Young men dressed in black or wearing distinctive T-shirts gather in tight groups. A glance is taken as an insult. An accidental shove may provoke a fight. At times the hallway is filled shoulder-to-shoulder with people.¹⁸

The Superior Court of the District of Columbia serves the city of Washington, D.C., a densely metropolitan area that include some 607,000 people.¹⁹ The public who find themselves in court reflect the city's population as a whole which is predominantly African-American. One in three of the District's children live in poverty, compared to the national average of one in five.²⁰ Superior Court is comparable to a state court in terms of jurisdiction, handling legal matters occurring within the District's borders. Civil matters include marriage, divorce, child custody, and small claims. The Court adjudicates child abuse and neglect cases, which in some cases gives the court custody of the children. The Court convenes Grand Juries which can sit for 25 working days. Serious civil cases and criminal offenses are heard before juries as well.

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

Early in the 1960s a movement developed in several parts of the country to encourage the provision of volunteer support to the courts. The District's organization, the Friends of the Juvenile Court, was established in 1964 by the wife of then Supreme Court

Justice Arthur Goldberg. After a decade of assistance to the Juvenile Court, the Friends founded the Child Care Center so that young children accompanying witnesses, jurors, and older siblings appearing before the court, would have a place to wait where they did not impede the functioning of the court.

FUNDING

The initial partnership between the Friends of the Juvenile Court and the court itself has maintained itself over time. Now renamed the Friends of the Superior Court, the volunteer organization pays the salary of one staff member and supplies the budget for equipment and materials. The Court contributes the physical space and its maintenance as well as the salary of the Center's director and assistant director. The Center is part of the Special Operations Division of the Court and supervision of the Center's staff emanates from the director of that division.

THE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

The five story courthouse can be entered through one of three sets of large doors that face Indiana Avenue. Immediately within the doors a series of security gates allows the guards to search briefcases and purses while members of the public pass through metal detectors. To the left after the security desks is a large hallway with several doors on either side. Fliers for the Center are posted in various locations around the building; security personnel refer families to the Center as well. About halfway down the hall on the right, a sign indicates the entrance to the Child Care Center.

Physical design: The unlocked door leads people into a waiting area where there are brochures describing the Center, general information related to children, and no cost programs serving District families. A large glass window permits a good view of the child care area. A staff member, usually the director whose desk is at one end of the waiting area, greets families in the waiting area. After completing a registration form that identifies the child, the guardian's court business, and a check list detailing eight explicit rules of the center, the child and parent enter the child care area.

The child care area includes a large rectangular space, a children's bathroom, and a small reading room used most often by older children. The large rectangular area holds paint easels, two tables at which arts and crafts activities take place, and a dramatic play area. Almost half the room is devoted to the dramatic play equipment. In addition to the kitchen furnishings, the area includes a playhouse just the right size for two or three preschool age children. On low shelves running beneath the reception area window, puzzles, blocks and games are displayed so that children can see them.

Program content: Children are always welcome to explore the center's various activity areas on their own. The staff encourage all the children to create at least one art work so that they have something to take away with them. In a typical art activity the child pastes down pre-cut letters spelling his or her name, under close adult supervision. When children are interested in an art activity, like painting, they are permitted to continue their creative efforts as long as they wish, providing other children are not waiting for a turn.

The Center is open from 8:30 to 5:00 Monday through Friday. Children may remain in the center for as little as half an hour, or all day every day for weeks at a time if their parents are impaneled on a Grand Jury. The average length of stay is four to five hours. Because the Center does not provide any food, parents are required to retrieve their children during the lunch recess so that the children can eat. Children are welcome to eat their meals at the Center. If a child is not picked up by the parent, staff of the center often end up treating the child to lunch. The children who spend time in the Center comprise roughly half of all the children who find themselves in the building.

Staffing: The director holds a Bachelor's degree in psychology; the assistant director has an Associate's degree in Early Childhood Education. The four senior assistants, provided under contract with the National Council of Senior Citizens, take part in training sponsored by the National Council before beginning their jobs at the center. The salary range for the director and her assistant are established by the Court and start at \$25,000 and \$22,000 respectively. The program holds a license issued by the District's Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs.

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS

Staff are welcoming to parents and other guardians when they bring their children to the center and when they return to pick them up. Parents are invited to participate in activities in the center but few do so due to time constraints. Staff make referrals for additional services based on conversation with parents and/or observations of children's behavior. Parents are encouraged to take advantage of the written materials available to them in the reception area. The director and assistant director will discuss children's problems with parents who express an interest. In December 1994, Center staff were able to provide some very tangible assistance to some of the neediest families using the Center. As a result of an overwhelming response to a news note in the *Washingtonian*²¹ magazine, many children received hats, scarves, mittens, or gloves.

FUTURE PLANS

In the future the Court hopes to relocate the Center to a bigger site in the courthouse that would include windows to the outside.

HAWAII

CRIMINAL COURT CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOM

Honolulu, HI

Contact: Nathaniel H.C. Kim	Judy Lind
Chief Court Administrator	Director
First Circuit Court	Children's Advocacy Center
777 Punchbowl Street	3019 Pali Highway
Honolulu, HI 96813-5093	Honolulu, HI 96817-1418
(808) 539-4330	(808) 548-4319

The Criminal Court of the First Circuit Court in Hawaii has designated a room which is used for children who are victims of sexual assault. It is a large room located in a secure area; it can accommodate approximately 10 children at one time. The room is carpeted and contains donated children's toys and furniture. The room is sometimes used by staff from the Children's Advocacy Center when working with court-involved children and families.

ILLINOIS

Courthouses and court rooms can be incredibly intimidating places for children, especially when their future is at issue. Children, even very young ones, understand that serious subjects are discussed in court. Parents, if present, are often tense and preoccupied. As a result, children in court are often frightened, and in many cases have little to take their minds off the grave proceedings at hand. Observers who have taken the time to really notice how children spend their time in court have seen them playing on dirty floors and in trash cans for lack of anything else to do. They have also observed children creating disturbances after long hours of waiting for their cases to come up, and in some cases have seen exasperated parents discipline harshly, which only worsens matters.²²

Ann Burke, Esq.
Special Counsel to the Governor for
Child Welfare Services, Illinois

Illinois's 820 trial court judges are assigned to the state's 22 circuits where they have exclusive jurisdiction over civil and criminal matters, including juvenile cases. Jury trials occur in Circuit Court. Appeals are handled by the 55 Appellate Court judges. The 22 circuits feed into five Appellate Court districts. The Illinois Supreme Court is the appeals court of last resort, receiving cases from both the Circuit and Appellate Courts. There are seven Supreme Court justices who sit en banc.²³

While there were only two children's waiting rooms operating in the Illinois courts at the time this report was written, the Illinois Bar Association has made the establishment of such programs a priority.²⁴ Interest is growing in several courts in the state. In a recent speech, the Governor's Special Counsel for Child Welfare Services, Ann Burke, said, "the need for children's play rooms in courthouses is a pressing matter. More and more children are entering our court system every year. DCFS (Department of Children and Family Services) currently has over 45,000 children in its care. These children, and many others, visit Illinois courthouses, some of them repeatedly, and it is incumbent upon us to do what we can do to make the experience as painless as possible. Children are our most under-represented constituency, and here is an excellent opportunity to make our courthouses a bit less intimidating for them."²⁵

RHODA BRESLER CHILDREN'S ROOM

Richard J. Daley Center
Chicago, IL

Contact: Deborah N. Bialczak, Executive Director
Our Children in the Courts Foundation
1001 Richard J. Daley Center, Room 1305
Chicago, IL 60602
(312) 443-5005

OVERVIEW

The Rhoda Bresler Children's Room has become increasingly popular with families appearing in the many courts housed in the Richard J. Daley Center. During the month of January 1993, only 12 children spent time in the Children's Room, which had been planned for as many as 15 children at one time. With more aggressive outreach and a new energetic director, the monthly totals steadily

climbed, to 77 in January 1994, reaching 396 for the month of August 1994. Although parents of infants and young toddlers are welcome to use the Room while they await their court hearing, they must take with them any children who are not toilet trained when they leave the Children's Room. Older children, two to 12 years of age, can remain in the care of the center's two paid staffers while their parent or other adult guardian attends to the business that brought them to the Daley Center.

THE COURT

The courts serve Cook County's most populous jurisdiction, Chicago. Comprising some 5.2 million people, Chicago's residents make up over half of Cook County's population. There are 722,704 children under age 18 in the city of Chicago, 34% of whom live in poverty. White children of northern European descent comprise 38% of the children in the city; 39% are African-American, and 20% are Latino.²⁶ With the exception of Juvenile Court and Domestic Relations, all of Chicago's courts are situated in the Daley Center. Civil, Law, Probate, Municipal, Chancery, and Guardianship Courts hold hearings in the Daley Center. Although access to the Children's Room is limited to families using the Daley Center courts, Domestic Relations is housed in an adjacent building, and has made a special arrangement that enables divorcing parents participating in its *Focus on Children* parenting program to use the center. The families who use the Children's Room reflect the socioeconomic, racial, and cultural characteristics of Chicago with one exception: utilization statistics for the program show that Hispanic families only represent about ten percent of the Center's families.²⁷

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

In 1973, Rhoda Bresler, heir to the Bresler ice cream company, believing that children needed some safe place to wait while they were at the courthouse, conceived the children's waiting room. The court provided space for the new program. Mrs. Bresler ran the program single handedly for many years; she decorated it, hired its staff, and supported it financially. As she began to consider retirement, a task force was formed by members of the Chicago Women's Bar, and the Chicago and Illinois Bar Associations to plan for the future and establish a mechanism for the program's continued existence.

FUNDING

Mrs. Bresler underwrote a non profit funding organization, Our Children in the Courts Foundation. In 1993, the Foundation hired its first full time director. The director manages the center, conducts fund raising activities, and acts as the Children's Room liaison to other court departments. The program's total budget averages around \$40,000 but varies depending on the amount of grants and donations received by the Foundation. Cook County donates the space, utilities, facility maintenance, and the director's salary. The balance is contributed by private funders, coordinated by the Foundation's director.

THE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

"Many of these kids are in very stressful situations.... Sometimes these kids just don't know how to cope... Especially younger children, if they sense their parents are distraught, they tend to show the same emotions," said [the director of Our Children in the Courts Foundation]... "The last thing these kids need is to hear more horror stories from the home front."... After a long morning in divorce court [one parent who came to the Children's Room to pick up her three daughters, said] "There were things I didn't want them to hear about their father. I didn't want them to sit in the courtroom and listen to a lot of things. When you're a child, a lot of things stick with you. And, they're very attached to their father."²⁸

Physical design: The Children's Room is located on an upper floor of the 30 floor building. The exact location is not publicized for security reasons. The Court Clerks, Deputy Sheriffs and Executive Director personally inform parents and guardians of the location. According to the director, "We use this procedure to protect children from any potential harm of the 'wrong people' knowing where they are while their parents are away."²⁹ Families enter the building on the first floor, pass the scrutiny of security guards and metal detectors, and proceed to the court where their hearing will take place. A court official provides them with written verification that they have official business with the court. The written authorization was implemented to prevent adults from using the court's child care if engaged in personal activities unrelated to their court appearance. The authorization is required before a child can be left at the Children's Room. Once off the elevator, children and their parents walk to the end of the corridor to a small room with a picture window overlooking northern Chicago. As part of the registration process, children and parents are outfitted with matching name tags to ensure that the person who dropped off the children is the same person who picks them up. Parents complete a short intake form that includes identifying information for the parent and child, the parent's location while in court, and their attorney's name.

It's a room that smells of crayons, with a terrific view of north Chicago. There are plenty of Power Rangers, a lot of Barney stuff and free lemonade... this Loop drop-off center for children lets the kids play in supervised safety, doing dinosaur puzzles while their parents undo their marriages.³⁰

Program content: The program opens at 9:00 A.M. and closes for an hour's lunch break at noon, re-opening from 1:00 until 4:00 P.M. Toys are geared to children at various ages and ability levels. The Children's Room offers dolls, board games, card games, arts and crafts materials, books, stuffed animals, toy cars and trucks, an organ, and action figures. The television and VCR are used occasionally for children's videos but this is not encouraged. Rather children are steered toward interactive play with each other and the staff.

Staffing: The staff includes the Foundation's executive director and a child care attendant. The director is a certified kindergarten teacher with an arts background. She is also a practicing artist, and hopes to utilize her expertise to establish an art therapy program to help any children who may be experiencing difficulties related to their particular situations. The salaries start at \$6.50 per hour for the child care attendant, and \$19,000 for the executive director.

The program is not licensed as a child care center because the presence of parents in the courthouse exempts such programs. The Foundation is aware of the performance standards for child care centers and does its best to meet them as well as space and financial limitations will allow.

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS

Staff are kind and welcoming to parents. Although the staff will only supervise children two and older, parents are invited to remain in the Children's Room with their infants, to use the building's only diaper changing facilities which are located in the Children's Room, and to enjoy the respite from the court corridors the Children's Room offers.

FUTURE PLANS

The Children's Room is serving as a model for courts in Du Page and Lake Counties. Additionally, the director of Our Children in the Courts Foundation is very involved in establishing a similar program in the Cook County courthouse located in Markham where construction was scheduled to begin in early 1995. The director hopes to expand their services throughout the county, assisting any court where such a facility might be needed.

DOMESTIC RELATIONS DIVISION CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOM

**Circuit Court of Cook County
Chicago, IL**

Contact: Sharon Shapiro, Director
Expedited Child Support Program
32 West Randolph, Room 1400
Chicago, IL 60601
(312) 609-8796

The Domestic Relations Division of the Circuit Court of Cook County, hears divorce, parentage, child support and child custody and visitation cases. The Court serves urban and suburban areas. It has one staffed and one unstaffed children's waiting room with donated toys and furniture. Both rooms are highly utilized; approximately 20-30 children per day use the waiting rooms.

DUPAGE COUNTY CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOM

**18th Judicial Circuit Court
Wheaton, IL**

Contact: Robert Fiscella, Court Administrator 18th Judicial Circuit Court 505 N. County Farm Road Wheaton, IL 60187 (708) 682-7325	Brenda Carroll DuPage Association of Women Lawyers 126 South County Farm Road Wheaton, IL 60187 (708) 653-6212
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The 18th Judicial Circuit Court in Wheaton plans to open a children's waiting room in April, 1995. The Court is a general jurisdiction court that hears civil, criminal and family matters. The county will fund the remodeling of the room. The DuPage Association of Women Lawyers has established a not for profit corporation which will staff, run, and fund the waiting room. The Association hopes to employ an executive director and a child-care attendant but that is dependent on available funding.

KIDS' KORNER WAITING ROOM

**Lake County Courthouse
Waukegan, IL**

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OVERVIEW

Kids' Korner opened in October 1994, initially staffed by a volunteer coordinator to serve as many as nine children who accompany parents to Lake County Court. Children must be toilet trained in order to be able to stay at Kids' Korner. Children as old as 12 year olds are welcome. No more than two children from a family may use the center at any one time. In its first two months of operation, almost 300 children were served. During the first six weeks after the center opened, staff canvassed the courthouse hallways, informing parents about Kids' Korner. Since then, canvassing has not been needed; families have learned about the program from security staff at the building's entrance, from other parents who have been to court, and from judges and bailiffs in individual courtrooms.

THE COURT

Lake County is in the northwest corner of Illinois, bordering Wisconsin on the north and Lake Michigan on the east. An economically diverse county, it includes the state's richest community (Lake Forest) and its poorest (North Chicago). Because of its strategic location between Chicago and Milwaukee, Lake County is one of the two fastest growing counties in the state. It is an ethnically diverse region, with Spanish speaking immigrants the biggest minority group. The families using Kids' Korner reflect the socioeconomic and racial characteristics of Lake County.

The Lake County Court is situated in Waukegan, the county's biggest city with 70,000 residents. It transacts a wide range of civil and criminal matters affecting the 559,000 residents³¹ of the county. As in many other regions of the country, domestic violence has increased dramatically in recent years, resulting in a boom in restraining orders and criminal prosecutions of abusive partners. The only types of legal business not transacted in the County Courthouse are juvenile delinquency and child protection cases which are handled at the juvenile court complex nearby.

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

Children were frequently brought to the courthouse for one of two purposes, either to be called as witnesses in court cases, or to accompany their parents who themselves had business before the court. During court hours, children often could be found in both the hallways and court rooms. Whether in the hallways where they were often unattended and frequently seen playing near the railings which overlook the floor below, or in the courtroom where their presence created a distraction to the business at hand, their safety and well being were at risk. They were adversely impacted by court proceedings affecting their own family. They were exposed to inappropriate behavior by other adults attending court for criminal, traffic, or divorce matters, or they were subject to unnecessary stress while they waited their own turn to testify.³²

Kids' Korner has many sponsors, some involved in the criminal justice system and some whose professional work centers on the provision of child welfare and human services. In 1992, a multi-disciplinary committee on substance abuse focused its attention on the effects substance abuse has on young children. During sessions devoted to defining the many ways children in such situations might come up against public institutions, the committee began to talk about the presence of children in court, especially in domestic violence cases where substance abuse so often plays an integral part. Taking their concern for the children's safety to Lake County's judiciary, they found an advocate in Judge Jane Waller. A steering committee was formed, with representatives from the Court, the State's Attorney's office, the Sheriff's office, two Lake County lawyers' groups, the Child Care Coalition of Lake County, the YWCA of Northeastern Illinois, and a domestic violence self-help project. They began meeting in August 1993 to develop a plan for establishing Kids' Korner.

FUNDING

Judge Waller convinced her colleagues on the bench of the wisdom of the Kids' Korner concept. She also inspired a lawyers' organization to provide funding for the program's first year. The Court Services Department did not want the responsibility of supervising the center because they did not believe they possessed the necessary expertise to adequately oversee its operation. The court's Children's Advocacy Center (CAC), already committed to assisting severely abused children, stepped in to manage the program. A public health nurse offered to oversee the start up of Kids' Korner. She supervised the purchase of equipment, wrote a training manual for volunteer staffers, and began the process of enlisting volunteers. While it was always the intention of the Korner's advisory group and CAC to hire a paid staff person, the position was not filled until early 1995.

THE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

Physical design: Kids' Korner is readily accessible to its clients since it is located on the first floor of the Lake County Courthouse. It is a small rectangular room on an interior corridor of the courthouse. A mural painted on every wall and the ceiling compensates for the absence of a window. A local artist donated his time to paint scenes of animals, trees, and the sky which give the room and the bathrooms a sense of spaciousness and wonder. Two children's bathrooms are included in the center. Parents remain with their children until they have completed a registration process that includes the completion of a brief intake form and the application of matching identification bracelets for parent and child. The child's size table and chairs, play kitchen, dolls, blocks, and other children's toys have all been donated by attorneys' groups and other concerned citizens.

Program content: Each shift is staffed by two volunteers who engage the children in drawing and coloring, supervise play in the

dramatic play area, or read to children. The average age of the children is between two and a half and six years of age; although children as old as 12 years old are welcome in Kids' Korner, boys ten and older have typically preferred to wait in the halls with their parents. The children who do spend time in the center like it so much that they do not want to leave when their parents arrive to retrieve them.

Staffing: The one paid staff position, Director of Kids' Korner, works 25 hours weekly. In addition, two volunteers work in the center during each morning and afternoon shift. Paid through a contractual agreement that does not include fringe benefits, the director's position salary range is \$12,000 to \$15,000 annually. As resumes were reviewed, some background in child care and in volunteer recruitment were important skills. The center is not licensed as a child care agency.

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS

Parents are welcome to spend time with their children in the center. If the parent remains at Kids' Korner, very young children who have not yet been toilet trained may also play in the center. The service provided in Kids' Korner is completely centered on providing children with a safe, enjoyable place to wait while their parents transact their legal business. Lawyers are not permitted to interview child witnesses there. Volunteers are trained to limit their interaction with parents to topics that do not involve the legal business that brought parents to court. The volunteer handbook specifically states, "Volunteers are not to give advice to parents who have business before the courts. For example, an agitated parent might say, 'I wish I had a lawyer.' The volunteer is not to say, 'yes, you should have a lawyer.'"³³ Frequently parents will mention the outcome of their court appearance when they arrive to pick up their children. The volunteers are trained to make a noncommittal response, guiding the exiting parent to the door to prevent further discussion.

FUTURE PLANS

With the program's director on board, the first order of business is the completion of the volunteer roster. Currently only 16 of the program's 20 volunteer slots are filled. Once stable staffing is achieved, the director will review the program's policies and procedures to evaluate the need for changes. A wall display is planned for the hallway outside Kids' Korner that will contain information for parents about services that might prove useful to them. While the first year's funding is secure, additional fund raising will take place under the direction of a subcommittee of the program's advisory committee. Eventually a second Kids' Korner will be opened at the Juvenile Court.

KANSAS

LOGAN COUNTY DISTRICT COURT KIDDIE BAGS

Oakley, KS

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The Logan County District Court is located in Oakley, Kansas. It serves a rural area with a population of approximately 5,000 people. The Court hears cases regarding family, criminal and civil matters. In an effort to make the time children spend in court more pleasant, the Court Clerk has begun distributing "Kiddie Bags" to children in the courthouse. They are colored paper gift bags that contain puzzles, crayons, one or two toys, and a candy treat. Bags are geared for both younger and older children. The Logan County District Court Clerk reported, "Our bags have been getting a good response, both from the recipients and their parents. We feel it has made the experience of being in court a little less traumatic and helps to build good relations with court visitors. We hope this suggestion will be helpful to other small courts that are unable to provide child care, due to lack of staff and space."³⁴

MARYLAND

PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT CHILDREN'S CORNER

Upper Marlboro, MD

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Among other types of cases, the Prince George's County Circuit Court hears divorce, child support, child custody, juvenile delinquency and child abuse and neglect cases. The Court serves an urban and suburban area. Since 1989, the Court has had a children's corner in the waiting room in the area of the court house where most family related cases are heard. The children's corner is an alcove that is separate from the rest of the waiting room, but open to it. There is no staff and no budget. It contains donated toys and children's furniture. It is highly utilized by court-involved children and their parents.

The State's Attorney's office, through its Victim/Witness program, also has a waiting room for children who are victims or witnesses in criminal trials. This room contains donated toys and books. Children are supervised by their parents or other adults.

MASSACHUSETTS

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The Massachusetts judiciary is organized into three levels. All judges at every level are appointed by the governor. The Administrative Office of the Trial Court oversees the seven trial court departments. Some 320 judges preside in those seven departments. Fourteen justices make up the intermediate level Appeals Court. The court of last resort is the Supreme Judicial Court. Its seven justices are headed by the Chief Justice who holds ultimate authority over the judiciary.

In 1988 the Massachusetts Legislature passed a law that would guarantee funds for the renovation or construction of some of the courthouses owned by the state. At the time, Massachusetts was fully embarked on a campaign to expand the supply of excellent child care to families at every income level. The campaign, the fruition of campaign promises made by then Governor Michael Dukakis, embraced every arm of the government and almost every agency of the executive branch. The judiciary was not exempt. The courthouse renovation legislation included the stipulation that any courthouse built or renovated with its funds would have to conduct a needs assessment to determine the child care needs of court employees and the members of the public who used the courts. Through this process eight courts were identified: three in Boston, and the remainder in smaller cities. The courts included three district (municipal) courts, and five in courthouses that included combinations of juvenile, housing, superior, district, and probate and family court departments.

As the court facilities staff at the Administrative Office of the Trial Court (AOTC) considered the notion of overseeing a series of child care centers, they realized that expert assistance was needed to prevent the space set aside for child care in the courthouses from becoming an underutilized area. As one person put it, they wanted the child care centers to provide more than a place to store the office Christmas tree. After one unsuccessful appeal, the State Justice Institute funded a small project at AOTC, the Massachusetts Trial Court Child Care Project, to produce a handbook and convene a one day training conference for the courts in question.

The resulting handbook, **CourtCare; Policy Guidelines and an Operating Plan for Child Care in the Courts**, published in November 1992, was well received. The first printing of 1,000 copies was consumed within a year, requested by courts in 24 states. In September 1993, the project director's position, grant funded during the first 18 months of its existence, was converted to a salaried position within AOTC. The AOTC's Child Care Coordinator is responsible for overseeing the start up of new court-based child care programs, and for representing the Trial Court's management interests in the operational programs. By the year 2000, it is the expectation of the Trial Court that 13 court-based child care programs will be serving over 25,000 child visitors annually at an operating cost approaching \$3 million. A full-time administrator and support staff person will provide the coordination and supervision a network of that size requires.

Funding for the operation of the current court-based child care programs is provided by the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Trial Court. Both operational programs are managed by private, non-profit child care agencies under contract to DSS. For the first time in fiscal year 1995, the Trial Court budget appropriation included a child care line item of \$350,000. The funding has been used for construction costs not covered by the courthouse construction bond issue, administrative costs, and operating costs for the newly constructed court-based child care center in the West Roxbury District Court. It is expected that, in the future, operating funds appropriated by the state legislature for newly constructed centers will continue to be placed in a separate Trial Court child care line item. It is also likely that the operating funds for the existing Roxbury and Springfield programs will eventually be included in the child care line item of the Trial Court budget. Collaborative contract management involving the AOTC's Child Care Coordinator and the Department of Social Services or its cabinet-level parent agency, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, will be important in operating high quality, fiscally responsible court-based child care programs.

ROXBURY DISTRICT COURT CHILD CARE CENTER

**Associated Day Care Services of Metropolitan Boston
Boston, MA**

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OVERVIEW

The Roxbury District Court Child Care Center (RDC/4) provides care to as many as 12 children at a time. Children are eligible to use the program from birth through 12 years of age. Any child within the age range who has accompanied an adult to the court for any reason is eligible to use the center. Three full-time staff, a half-time social worker, and two part-time foster grandparents care for the children. Each year RDC/4 serves approximately 1,500 children. In 1994, the program served more than 1,900 children.

THE COURT

Roxbury District Court has jurisdiction for several of the poorest neighborhoods in inner city Boston. Among Boston's neighborhoods, it has the highest proportion of African-American and Hispanic residents. Fenway Park, where the Red Sox play, also falls within its jurisdiction.

The Court, like all district courts in Massachusetts, handles small civil claims, domestic violence restraining orders, arraignments for all kinds of criminal cases and trials for misdemeanors and less serious felonies. It is a small courthouse, with only six courtrooms. The courthouse has just been renovated to allow it to accommodate jury trials for the first time in its history.

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

The Honorable Julian Houston became an Associate Justice at Roxbury District Court in 1979. He was convinced early on that the presence of children in his courtroom was damaging to them, but he didn't know exactly how to best alleviate the situation. In 1984, he was reading the New York Times and found an account of the court-based, drop-in child care programs operated by New York City's Victim Services, Inc. Realizing that this was the solution to the problems he faced in his courtroom, he organized a group representing various professions with some relation to the courts and children. Together they went to New York to visit two of the three centers Victim Services was operating at the time.

FUNDING

From this initial experience with court-based child care, Judge Houston went on to convince the Commissioner of the state's Department of Social Services (DSS) that this would be a worthwhile expenditure of the Department's funds. With the operating funds secured, he found an experienced child care agency, Associated Day Care Services of Metropolitan Boston (ADCS), to run the program. ADCS took responsibility for developing an architectural plan and a fundraising campaign. It took four years to raise the building funds, to secure space, and to complete the construction. In May 1989 the years of planning and fund raising culminated in the opening of the first Massachusetts court-based, drop-in child care center at the Roxbury District Courthouse.

ADCS is one of the largest non profit child care providers in Massachusetts, with ten child care programs serving more than 650 children. It continues to operate RDC/4 with a mix of DSS, United Way, and private funding. In 1992 the Department of Social Services signed its second five year funding contract with ADCS for RDC/4. After lengthy negotiations, the trustees of the local library, where the center is located, gave the center a 5-year lease with an annual rent of \$1; a second 5-year lease was signed in 1994. The first justice of Roxbury District Court includes the center's director in his weekly meeting of department heads, ensuring close and collegial collaboration.

THE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

The center is available, space permitting, to any child who accompanies an adult to court. Children as young as a few days old are welcome in the center; the oldest children are 12 years of age. Statistically, the most typical child is a three year old African-American boy. On average, children spend about two hours on any given occasion but the majority of the children in the center at any one time have been there at least once before. The center provides care for the vast majority (85%) of the children who come to Roxbury District Court.³⁵

The center is located in the Roxbury branch of the Boston Public Library which is adjacent to the courthouse. Adults who bring children to court learn about the center in one of several ways. Signs advertising the center are posted in several display cases and on the door of each courtroom. All court officers and every court department refer parents who are waiting with children, to the center. The

center's director visits the courthouse to talk with parents about the center and to encourage them to use it. However they decide to use it, parents leave the courthouse and walk across a small plaza to the library entrance that leads directly to the child care center. The center does not have a security check point, although the door to the center's reception area remains locked at all times. Once admitted, the parent or guardian is greeted by a staff member before being escorted past another locked door that separates the reception area from the child care area.

Physical design: The child care space is divided into two primary areas: a small area where the staff can care for as many as three infants younger than 15 months, and the bulk of the space where children 15 months to 12 years old stay. The infant area includes a rocking chair, two cribs, and a soft-sided play space where the babies can play with any of a number of suitable toys. A series of two-sided cupboards, almost floor to ceiling, divide the infant area from the rest of the children's space. Set on one of the shelves is a radio, tuned to a classical music station, providing a sound backdrop that helps to maintain the sense of order and calm that is prevalent in the center.

In the larger area, a table and chairs allow children and adults to sit down to snacks and simple meals together. One of the center's most innovative design features is its water table. Water tables are a common feature of early childhood programs because they soothe agitated children and provide many learning opportunities. RDC/4's water table, unlike most found in child care centers, is a large stainless steel sink with its own faucet and plumbing. The center's architect modified a design used by medical supply companies and intended originally for autopsy laboratories. The stainless steel construction and self-contained plumbing facilitate the repeated and thorough cleaning required in a setting where the population is constantly changing.

An art area with an easel and table is used for painting, drawing, and pasting projects. Open storage shelving, three feet in height, contains puzzles, blocks, miniature animals, and other building toys for use on the floor or at a table. The shelving acts as a room divider, separating the more sedentary activities from the soft climbing structure, and the dramatic play area complete with kitchen furnishings, an ironing board, doll crib, and dress up clothes.

Program content: The staff learn a lot about the children as they watch them playing in the dramatic play area and with the doll house that sits on top of a table at the edge of the dramatic play area. In each area children are given free reign to explore their interpretations of the adult world. As they play, they send out signals that indicate the quality of their lives, instructing the staff about the need for helping interventions. The center does not have a television set. Children are welcome to explore any area that attracts them; staff accompany them and participate in activities or observe as two or more children play together. Food is offered at any time during the day as children arrive. Everyone sits down to eat together at lunch time.

Staffing: Their staffing reflects the staff/child ratios spelled out in the state's child care regulations. They are licensed to care for as many as three infants at a time and must be able to devote a teacher exclusively to infants when they are in the center. There are two full-time teachers whose work is supplemented by one or two foster grandparents. The lead teacher holds her Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education. The other teacher is working on an Associate's Degree in Early Childhood Education. The center's director is working on a Master's Degree in Human Services Management. The Master's level social worker works with the full-time staff two days each week. The program staff in all ADCS programs are unionized and salaries reflect the agency-wide pay scale which sets entry level wages at \$28,000 for program directors. Teachers are paid at an hourly rate starting at \$9.25 for lead teachers, and \$6.50 for other teachers. Licensed by the Massachusetts Office for Children, the center holds two licenses, one that allows them to care for children under the age of six and a second license that addresses the care of children six to twelve. The center was the first drop-in child care program to receive professional accreditation from the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs.

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS

A big part of what we do here is really social service. We make referrals for parents all the time. People say, "I want to go back to work but I don't know how to get care for my kids." That's number one. And people are always asking us questions about toilet training, discipline, and eating habits. I think one good thing about this program is how staff members act as role models for parents when they come in. They can see how we do things, how we interact with children and with them. A lot of parents are hungry for someone to talk to. Once they see this is a nice place, they open up. We get to develop some nice relationships.³⁶

Nia Alimayu

In all their interactions with the families the center serves, the staff seek to encourage parents to feel welcome in the center, and to foster a sense of competence in their parenting roles.

Parents are always welcomed by staff members. The center uses a one page registration form that documents the family's name, address, location while in the courthouse, emergency contact information, and basic health information about the children. Before parents can leave to attend to their business in court, the director or lead teacher completes the form by asking the adult to respond to the questions. They do not ask the parents to complete the form themselves for two reasons; first, the ten minutes involved in the interaction gives the staff time to set a tone of friendliness and warmth with the parents. Secondly, illiteracy is a significant problem, and one that will immediately embarrass the parents if they are forced to admit it to staff.

When parents return from the courthouse, they are invited to stay and join their children in whatever activity is ongoing, whether

that is lunch or making soap bubbles at the water table. At this point, the staff will raise any concerns that surfaced while the child was in the center. Some parents are completely unreceptive to the staff, and in such cases, interaction is limited to what the parent seems able to tolerate. Complimentary comments about the children (how smart, what a beautiful drawing the child made) may be the extent of the staff's attempts to communicate.

If the staff has serious concerns about the child's well being, or if the parent seems open to further discussion, the director, social worker, or lead teacher will enter into a private conversation that elicits the parent's concerns about their children. The result may well be assistance making an appointment for a developmental screening, a referral to a shelter for battered women, or concrete suggestions about discipline. Over the five years of her directorship, the program's director has developed good working relationships with the many court departments, the community's police station, the local health care centers, and a variety of other service providers. Her knowledge of the services available in the community aids her in her conversations with parents, facilitating the referrals she makes on a regular basis.

FUTURE PLANS

The center's director has been working with administrative staff at Associated Day Care's central office to develop another court-based child care program at Middlesex County Courthouse in Cambridge. The new program will serve the state's largest county and three separate courts (Cambridge District Court, and the county-wide Superior, and Probate and Family Courts). At double the size of RDC/4 the Middlesex County Court program will call on Associated's demonstrated expertise in providing court-based, drop-in child care in a setting very different from the small limited jurisdiction court served by RDC/4.

SPRINGFIELD DAY NURSERY

**The Children's Center for the Hampden County Courts
Springfield, MA**

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OVERVIEW

The Children's Center for the Hampden County Courts is licensed to serve as many as 19 children at a time with its paid staff of four plus two volunteers. Any child under ten years of age who accompanies a defendant, witness, or litigant may attend the center while the adult guardians are taking care of their court business. It is not uncommon for parents to arrive at the center as early as 9:30 A.M. to find it full to capacity, with a waiting list. On an average, 300 children visit the center over the course of a month. In its first twelve months of operation, 2,344 children passed through the center; the second year saw more than double that number (5,894).³⁷

THE COURT

Hampden County is a largely rural county with 463,000 inhabitants living in its borders. Springfield, where the court sits, is the largest city in Hampden County and includes 34% of the County's total population. The ethnic background of the County's residents is primarily northern European (75%) but 17.5% are Hispanic and African-American. The county's median family income is \$31,100 with poverty affecting 11% of the families.³⁸

The Hampden County Courthouse complex includes two large buildings housing five courts. Springfield District Court handles arraignments and less complex legal cases for the city of Springfield. Housing, Juvenile, Superior, and Probate and Family Courts serve the entire county. As a result, a wide array of cases involving families are heard. Many cases involve juries. The Center's clients do not reflect the county's demographics, coming disproportionately from poor and Hispanic families living in Springfield.

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

Honorable Nancy Dusek-Gomez, a district court judge, and staff at Springfield Day Nursery (SDN), the private non-profit child care agency that operates the program, were the chief advocates for the court's child care center. Judge Dusek-Gomez found the regular presence of young children in her courtroom disturbing on two accounts: they interfered with her ability to try cases and children were unnecessarily being exposed to inappropriate adult behavior. SDN, with its track record of providing child care services to the city's working poor for over one hundred years, believed that a court-based child care program fit very well within the agency's overall mission. For several months preceding its establishment, Judge Dusek-Gomez and SDN's executive director met regularly to discuss their respective efforts to fund and house such a program. Program start up was accomplished inexpensively. Materials needed for the renovations, and the first year's rent, were provided by the Community Foundation in the amount of \$20,000. Inmates from the Western Massachusetts Alcohol Correctional Center and volunteers provided the labor necessary to complete the renovations.³⁹ With

assertive advocacy from SDN's director, and the support of the Massachusetts Trial Court Child Care Project, the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS) was persuaded to provide the operating funds that enabled SDN to open the Children's Center for the Hampden County Courts. In its first year, the start-up grant from DSS was enlarged to cover 100% of the program's operating expenses. SDN continues to operate the program under contract to DSS.

THE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

Families learn about the center from SDN posters and signs in the courthouses, court personnel, judges assigned to specific courtrooms, and SDN staff. Children from birth through age 10 are welcome in the center. While the majority of the children who use the center are three and four year olds, there are children from infancy through 10 years of age in the center every day. Typically, children spend three to five hours in the center on any given day. Children coming from Juvenile, Superior or Probate and Family Court are more likely to spend the entire day in the center. Children coming from District Court usually stay approximately two to four hours.

The center cares for the majority of the children who come to the court complex. The families who utilize the center are referred from District, Superior, Housing, Juvenile and Probate and Family Courts. Jurors are routinely notified of the Center's service; it is available to them on an emergency basis or if they get selected for a case that will take more than one day. Jurors are expected to make child care arrangements prior to their first "duty" day. Because it is unusual for jury duty to extend beyond one day, jurors' children make up a very small percentage of the monthly enrollment.

Physical design: The center is located on the ground floor of a commercial building located directly across the street from the Courthouse. The center is easily recognized with its colorful SDN sign and beautifully decorated large plate glass windows. Most activities take place in the core of the center which is divided into age appropriate learning centers. There are also rooms and observation windows surrounding the core that are used for infants and toddlers, a reception area, an office for the director, a large kitchen complete with washer and dryer, and a very spacious bathroom. All of the space is handicapped accessible.

The two rooms set aside for infants and toddlers account for roughly one third of the center's total space. The infant room contains three regular cribs, one evacuation crib and a fold away crib to be used as needed; three high chairs, two baby swings, two bouncy chairs, a small cassette player and baby dresser for sheets, blankets and bibs. An adjacent room is set up as an infant/toddler gross motor area. The two teachers in this area can care for as many as seven babies. The remaining two thirds of the space is utilized by preschool and school age children. A teacher and assistant teacher are assigned to this group. Low dividers separate this large room into six learning areas. These areas are set up to offer science, art, dramatic play, block building, table games/manipulatives, and gross motor exercise.

Program content: The center is open from 8:15 to 4:15 daily, providing breakfast, hot lunches and two snacks to children who arrive early and stay the entire day. Activities are geared to the ages of the individual children. Toddlers might be engaged in water play or finger painting while younger babies are cuddled and cared for with the help of the program's two foster grandparents. The staff working with older children encourage independence by setting up activities the children can do without a teacher's assistance. Many teacher-directed activities are also offered daily. Staff take every opportunity to provide each child with some one-on-one time. Children who arrive early and stay through lunch are encouraged to rest quietly for a short time after lunch. Classical or relaxation music plays during rest times and the teachers rock or stroke the backs of children who are insecure or unhappy. Sometimes, older children will watch a children's movie on the VCR. Children never spend more than an hour or hour and a half watching a movie. The staff does not use the TV in the morning at all.

As children are discharged, staff encourage parents whose cases have been continued to reserve space for their next visit since the center fills up relatively quickly each morning. Often the center will have a full compliment of nineteen children in the morning, discharge them right after lunch, and gain a whole new group when the courts re-convene at 2:00 pm.

Staffing: The center has a full time director who works in the classroom as needed, interacts with the court departments, handles all family registrations, and refers parents to additional services when necessary. Occasionally, court personnel who have been especially helpful to the Center are invited to the Center for an appreciation luncheon.

The staff at all SDN programs are union members, belonging to District 65-UAW, the union most closely identified with child care in Massachusetts. As a result, wages are established through the collective bargaining process and cover every SDN teaching employee. Teachers' starting salaries range from \$14,600 to \$18,000 with lead teachers earning the most and aides earning the least. Program directors' salaries fall between \$25,000 to \$35,000 annually. Teaching staff qualifications meet the minimums established by the state's child care licensing agency in all cases. If teachers do not currently hold an Associate's or Bachelor's degree, they are strongly encouraged to continue their education with assistance from SDN's tuition reimbursement policy. Program directors are expected to hold a minimum of a Bachelor's degree and are strongly encouraged to pursue a Master's degree; the courthouse center director is working on her Master's degree in social work. Like its counterpart at Roxbury District Court, the SDN courthouse child care center is licensed by the Massachusetts Office for Children. The licensing regulations include a waiver process that exempts the court-based programs from regulations requiring outdoor play space and current medical records for each child. The Center has begun the process of seeking professional accreditation from the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs.

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS

When arriving at the Center, parents may be under tremendous stress. They may be illiterate or unable to speak or read English. The director tries to assist each parent through the intake process, gathering the information that will facilitate an enjoyable visit for the children. Parents are informed about the center's open door policy and are encouraged to visit or take their child out for lunch if it will not disrupt the child's stay. Parents are given a detailed progress report at discharge letting them know what the child did during his or her stay, and any special information regarding illness or troubling behavior.

As a mandated reporter, the center's director has found it necessary to report suspicions of child abuse or neglect to DSS in a handful of instances. Among the first 6,000 children served, only 16 complaints have been filed.⁴⁰ Typically she calls a contact person at DSS to discuss possible cases of child abuse prior to deciding whether to file a report. During such conversations she discusses service referrals she plans to suggest to parents.

Child care is the most common social service referral provided to parents. The director has also referred parents to DSS, Parents Anonymous, battered women's shelters, Legal Aid, the Domestic Violence Unit of the police department, and for services like mental health counseling, fuel assistance, and government food subsidies. The center maintains a parent information corner with free pamphlets about breast and bottle feeding, parenting, medical information, early intervention, shelters, and a number of other services.

FUTURE PLANS

In an effort to expand the scope of services offered through the center, SDN has begun to explore additional ways the center could be utilized. Recently they began collaborating with the Springfield YWCA to utilize the center in the evening for supervised, court-ordered visitation between non-custodial parents and their children.

SDN is continually exploring private funding options to enhance their budget. The Young Lawyers Association has adopted the center as a fund-raising project and has done a benefit for it each summer for the past two years. With their help, SDN was able to purchase much needed equipment.

Currently SDN is studying the need for expansion. In the last six months of 1994, they denied care to 188 children. As the community becomes more aware of the center's presence, enrollment will continue to climb. Increasing the center's capacity from 19 to 26 children would reduce the need to turn away families but would require increased funding. DSS has been approached about the need but has not yet committed to any funding increase.

MICHIGAN

61ST DISTRICT COURT CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOM

Grand Rapids, MI

Contact: Janis Willis
Deputy Court Administrator
61st District Court
Room 261
Hall Of Justice
333 Monroe NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49503
(616) 456-3278

The 61st District Court, located in Grand Rapids, Michigan, hears cases regarding criminal, civil and child maltreatment matters. The Court is planning to open a children's waiting room to provide occasional, drop-in care when the court moves into a new building in 1996. The children's waiting room will serve court-involved children and children of jurors, victims and defendants. Child care attendants will provide full-time staffing. The room will contain a children's bathroom and a diaper changing area. The room and its staff will be funded by the court; its services will be free to the families using it. The Court also plans to establish a separate fee-for-service day care center for children of court employees.

MINNESOTA

STATE OF MINNESOTA JUROR CHILD CARE REIMBURSEMENT

Contact: Janet Marshall
Director, Research and Planning
Minnesota Supreme Court
25 Constitution Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55155
(612) 297-7579

The state of Minnesota reimburses child care costs jurors incur if the juror does not normally incur day care costs.

RAMSEY COUNTY FAMILY COURT CHILDREN'S CORNER St. Paul, MN

Contact: Mike Moriarity
Acting Special Courts Administrator
Ramsey County District Court
Second Judicial District
50 W. Kellogg Blvd. #710
St. Paul, MN 55102
(612) 266-2809

The Family Division of the Ramsey County District Court is located in St. Paul, Minnesota, and hears divorce, paternity, child support, child custody and domestic abuse cases. The main waiting room for Family Court litigants includes a children's corner that is approximately 144 square feet in size. The children's corner contains donated toys and books and children's furniture that was built by inmates of the local correctional facility. Children remain under the supervision of the adults who brought them to court. There are diaper changing areas in a nearby rest room. The Young Lawyer's section of the Ramsey Bar Association is working with the Court to upgrade the Family Court waiting area, and create one in the main Courthouse where criminal and civil cases are heard. The Bar Association hopes to staff these waiting rooms so adults would have the option of leaving them in the waiting room while attending court.

NEVADA

ACCOMMODATION STATION Family Division of the Eighth Judicial District Las Vegas, NV

Contact: Christina Chandler
Family Court Administrator
Family Courts and Services Center
3464 E. Bonanza
Las Vegas, NV 89101
(702) 455-4623

The Family Division of the Eighth Judicial District in Las Vegas, Nevada hears divorce, child custody, child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency cases. Currently, the District is constructing a new family court facility which will be open by 1996. The new facility will contain an "Accommodation Station," a drop-off child care center for children who come to the courthouse as witnesses or in the company of adults who have business at the court. The center will be equipped to serve approximately 20 to 25 children at one time. The Accommodation Station will contain a children's bathroom and diaper-changing area.

This child care center will be located adjacent to the offices of the Court Appointed Special Advocates. The center will contain donated toys, children's furniture and coloring books that explain the court system. The center will be staffed by AmeriCorps or Vista workers. (AmeriCorps is a new federal national service program which enables young people to earn money for college in return for working in community service positions.) Staff will provide supervision and service referrals for court-involved children and families. The center and its services will be offered at no cost to court-involved children and families.

Anticipating that the Accommodation Center will not be large enough to serve all court-involved families with child care needs, the Family Division is considering offering vouchers for parents to use at independent child care facilities.

NEW JERSEY

Contact: For New Jersey
Janis Alloway
State Coordinator of Volunteer Services
Administrative Office of the Courts
Hughes Justice Complex
CN 983
Trenton, NJ 08625
(609) 984-4227

For Employee Child Care at State Justice Complex
Karen Assenheimer
Justice Juniors
Employee Child Care
Hughes Justice Complex
Trenton, NJ 08625
(609) 984-9561

New Jersey's Judiciary has asked that all courthouses have rooms that are specifically designated for children. Currently New Jersey's court-based child care programs are limited to a child care center for employees of the state justice complex and a children's waiting room in the family court of the Sussex County Superior Court.

SUSSEX COUNTY FAMILY COURT CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOM

Newton, NJ

Contact: Donna Belott
Family Division Team Leader
Sussex County Superior Court
43-47 High Street
Newton, NJ 07860
(201) 579-0610

The Sussex County Family Court hears divorce, child maltreatment, juvenile delinquency, child custody, termination of parental rights, adoption, visitation, non-support enforcement and domestic violence cases. The children's waiting area in Sussex County is a small room located in the Court Complex. It was originally designated for use on Thursdays and Fridays by domestic violence litigants, but has since been expanded for use by any child in the courthouse, Monday through Friday. The Court requires that children be supervised by their parents or other responsible adults when in the children's waiting area. The room is also used for the supervised visitation program. The room is not staffed and has no funding of its own. The room contains toys and children's furniture donated by the local bar association and other individuals and organizations. The Family Division Team Leader of the Sussex County Superior Court hopes to expand the children's waiting room by establishing a volunteer program to staff it. Court administrators are currently trying to solve training issues regarding the proposed volunteers.

Four other counties, Ocean, Essex, Hudson and Passaic, are currently in the process of planning children's waiting rooms. These rooms would be similar to the Sussex County room, having no budget or paid staff of their own.

NEW YORK

Contact: Sheryl Dicker
Executive Director
Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children
c/o Pace Law School
78 North Broadway
White Plains, NY 10603
(914) 422-4425

The New York court system is organized in four levels with over 1,100 judgeships, and over 2,200 town and village justices authorized across the entire state (1993). Judges are elected to serve on certain courts (e.g., the Supreme Courts and the Surrogates Courts) and appointed to serve on others (e.g., the Court of Appeals). In smaller counties, judges may sit in two or three of the county-level courts simultaneously so that the number of judgeships is larger than the sitting members of New York's judiciary. Limited jurisdiction courts include family, civil, criminal, district, city, and town and village justice courts. The Family Courts handle child abuse and neglect, juvenile delinquency, paternity, child support, and domestic violence where the couple is married and/or has children. General jurisdiction courts, the Supreme and County Courts, handle major civil and criminal felony cases; Supreme Court has exclusive jurisdiction over marriage dissolution proceedings. Intermediate appeals are handled by the Appellate Divisions of the Supreme Court. In two of the State's four judicial departments, Appellate Terms have been established to hear criminal and civil cases initially. The court of last resort is the Court of Appeals, consisting of a Chief Judge and six Associate Judges. Vacancies are filled by appointment of the Governor, with the consent of the State Senate.

New York has launched a statewide program of Children's Centers. Additional information about this effort is included in Chapter Five. All but one of the programs portrayed here belong to the system of nine Children's Centers overseen by the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children. The Ulster County Family Court Nursery is an independent program managed by the Chief Clerk of the Ulster County Family Court and staffed entirely with volunteers. The six descriptions of New York programs are presented alphabetically by County.

YWCA CHILDREN'S CENTER AT FAMILY COURT

Albany County Family Court
Albany, NY

Contact: Xiomara Contreras, Coordinator
YWCA Children's Center at Family Court
602 Broadway
Albany, NY 12207
(518) 427-3590

OVERVIEW

Litigants involved in Family Court proceedings are invited to leave their eight week to seven year old children in the care of the YWCA Children's Center while they take care of the business that brought them to court. The Center has two paid staff members. While the program can serve as many as 15 children at one time, typically they see about nine children a day, with monthly visits totaling approximately 156 on average.

THE COURT

Albany County is 150 miles north of New York City, less than 30 miles west of Massachusetts and Vermont. The city of Albany, the state capital, is the only large city in the County. There are 292,793 inhabitants in Albany County, 100,031⁴¹ of whom live in the city of Albany. Although the population as a whole includes generous samples of every socioeconomic stratum, the families who utilize the Children's Center are almost entirely poor and a majority rely on public assistance. In the County as a whole, whites of northern European descent predominate but the county includes Hispanics (1.8%), and African-Americans (8.5 %).⁴² The families using the Children's Center are racially and ethnically diverse including families from every race and culture found in the County. The Family Court handles matters involving child abuse and neglect, custody, visitation, child support, juvenile delinquency, as well as cases of domestic violence where the couple is married and/or have children living with them.

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

Judges in the Family Court had long known that the presence of children was problematic, but until the advent of the Children's Center did not have many alternatives. Some community organizing took place to try and address the problem. However, the interest of the Chief Judge of the State of New York, Judith S. Kaye, and the issuance of a Request for Proposals by the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children further galvanized the effort and brought it to life.

FUNDING

With grants from the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children and the New York State Bar Association the Albany County YWCA Children's Center opened its doors in June 1994.

THE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

The Albany County Family Court is located in its own three story courthouse. The Children's Center is located on the building's ground floor. While members of the public entering through the main doors on the first floor pass a security checkpoint with a metal detector, the Children's Center is reached from the outside of the building. Court officers and other employees of the court direct parents down the hill and around to the side of the building. Security cameras are positioned above the outside entrance to the center and inside its door. Once inside the courthouse, a descent of a few steps takes you to the Center's entrance. A registration desk is set up there where parents complete the intake form developed by the Commission and are banded with identification bracelets that guarantee only they retrieve the children they bring to the Center. Staff admit families to the child care area which is kept locked.

Physical design: The walls of the room are painted white with a pattern of multi-colored lines, balloons, and letters adding cheer to the room. Children's art work is liberally displayed beside posters of favorites like Big Bird and Snoopy. The room includes an infant care area equipped with a changing table, crib, play pen, and assorted toys. There are two areas reserved for adult use: a small kitchen area with microwave oven, sink and apartment sized refrigerator, and an office separated by a glass wall from the children's areas. The rest of the room is devoted to the care of older children, and boasts a play house, bean bag chairs, two colorful rugs displaying letters and numbers, and two tables with chairs drawn around them.

Program content: The children's activities are inspired by the wide array of toys, dolls, stuffed animals, puzzles, books, blocks, and arts and crafts materials that are available to them. In the one to two hour stay that is typical of the Center, children do not usually find time to experiment with everything that attracts their attention.

Staffing: The two paid staff include the program's Coordinator and a Program Assistant. Both of them hold bachelor's degrees (in social work and psychology), and are trained in early childhood education. The Coordinator has had many more than the three years experience working with children that the job required. The entry level salary for the 30 hour Coordinator's position is \$14,000; the Program Assistant's entry level salary is \$10,000. College interns supplement the paid staff; five students worked in the Center during the fall of 1994.

The Children's Center is not required to hold a license as a child care center in Albany County.

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS

When parents arrive at the Center with their children, the staff welcome them, taking them through the registration process courteously. The program's Coordinator spends a lot of time talking with parents. Because appearing in court is a stressful experience, many parents are upset when they come to the Children's Center. Some are angry at the result of their hearing, some are angry at the system. Occasionally, a parent inappropriately takes out their frustrations on their children. The Coordinator reminds parents in such instances that they are directing their feelings against the wrong party. She makes many referrals for counseling, and to many other services as they are needed. Tangible assistance, like gloves or a hat, is provided when possible.

FUTURE PLANS

In a joint venture spearheaded by the Commission, HeadStart will outstation a Family Worker who will work full time in the Children's Center to link families with HeadStart, early childhood programs and other vital services. The Family Worker will maintain contact with families after their visit to the Children's Center to follow up and ensure that service connections are made. Negotiations are also under way with the foster grandparent program for regular inclusion of a senior volunteer.

YWCA CHILDREN'S CENTER

Erie County Courthouse
Buffalo, NY

Contact: Susan Gaska, Executive Director
YWCA of Western New York
190 Franklin Street
Buffalo, NY 14202
(716) 852-6120

OVERVIEW

The YWCA Children's Center serves children who accompany parents to Erie County Family Court, Buffalo City Court, and the Eighth District Supreme Court. The Center's two paid staff, assisted by volunteer foster grandparents, care for children ranging in age from six weeks through 13 years of age. Serving as many as 14 children at a time, the average monthly utilization hovers around 280 children.

THE COURT

Erie County, in western most New York, borders Ontario Canada and Lake Erie. Erie County's 968,532 residents fall into every income category. The city of Buffalo, where the court is located, is predominantly low income: half its 528,123 citizens live at or below the federal poverty level. The median family income in the rest of the County is around \$30,000. While the County as a whole is predominantly populated by whites of northern European descent (more than 85% in the County as a whole) the balance shifts in Buffalo where whites only account for 45% of the city's residents. Nineteen percent of Buffalo's residents are African-American.⁴³

With jurisdiction for the entire County, and legal matters affecting families at every socioeconomic level, Family Court reflects the County's demographics. Family Court in Erie County, like Family Court elsewhere in New York State, handles child abuse and neglect, juvenile delinquency, custody, visitation, child support, and domestic violence in cases where the parties are married and/or have children. City Court serves Buffalo, handling arraignments for a range of legal infractions, as well as minor criminal and civil matters. Its litigants are almost exclusively low income and members of the minority groups that make up 55% of Buffalo's total population.

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

Family Court Judges Sharon Townsend and Marjorie Mix, convinced that both children and the court would benefit from a child care center, began actively exploring the idea in 1992. Family Court did not include any waiting room, so children and adults waited in the hallway for their cases to be called. According to the YWCA's Executive Director, "it was a nightmare."⁴⁴ The judges invited a number

of their colleagues in various departments of the court as well as representatives from the Department of Social Services' Bureau of Child Care, the YWCA of Western New York, and other community groups, to form a committee to explore the notion. They were excited when, shortly after they began their work, Judith Kaye was appointed Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals because they knew she was an advocate of child care in the courts. Judge Kaye visited Buffalo and encouraged their work. Among other activities, committee members consulted with the staff of the Brooklyn Criminal Court Children's Center and the Monroe County Family Court Children's Corner. Like both centers consulted, the Erie County committee elected to contract with a private non-profit agency, the YWCA of Western New York, to operate the court's children's center. Providing other types of child care in 49 sites around Erie and surrounding counties, the YWCA was an obvious choice.

FUNDING

When the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children issued its request for funding proposals, Erie County was ready to submit a proposal. Although unable to take advantage of the capital improvements funds,^h they received an operational grant. This funding was the critical piece for establishing the Center. Erie County underwrote the construction costs; private fund raising enabled the program to purchase equipment and supplies. The YWCA Children's Center opened its doors in April 1994. The Y manages the program, successfully covering the program's operating expenses with the grant from the Permanent Commission. The space and its maintenance are an ongoing donation the county makes to the program.

THE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

The Erie County Courthouse is a seven story building that houses county and legislative offices as well as the Family Court. The Buffalo City Court and the Eighth District Supreme Court are located across the street. Although the Family Court is on the third floor of the Erie County Courthouse, the Children's Center is on the first floor. Everyone entering the building passes through a metal detector. Just beyond the security check point is the YWCA Children's Center. The other tenant of the first floor is a child care center serving employees of the city of Buffalo and Erie County.

The entrance to the YWCA Children's Center is kept locked. Parents must bring a form from the Court verifying their need to be in court. After they complete the registration process, filling out the intake form required by the Permanent Commission, parents leave to attend to their legal business. The courts conduct public business during a morning session from 9:00 to 12:00 and an afternoon session from 2:00 to 4:00. The Children's Center is open during those five hours. Parents must return during the lunch recess to take their children. It is fairly unusual for a child to attend the Center during both sessions; the typical stay is about two hours.

Physical design: The large (944 square feet) L-shaped room gets natural light from a series of ceiling high windows. The room includes an area devoted to the care of infants where cribs and exercise mats provide the youngest children with a safe place to explore a variety of toys. The space assigned to the older children includes a large area for gross motor exploration. About one quarter of the space is devoted to bathrooms, a diaper changing station with running water, and a small staff kitchen. The staff prepare simple snacks for the children in the morning and afternoon.

Program content: Infants are encouraged to explore a variety of toys under the supervision of staff and foster grandparents. Older children can choose sedentary or active pursuits. Table activities include puzzles, games, arts and crafts, and blocks that are stored in open shelving so the children can see and request various materials. Since it serves children as old as 13 years of age, the games and toys are diverse enough to provide challenging experiences for children at varying developmental stages.

Staffing: To date, the staffing, due to the presence of foster grandparents, has been generous enough to permit adult/child ratios of one adult to every two children. The two paid staff, who work full-time, include a Site Director and a Child Care Aide. The Site Director position requires a Bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education; the entry level salary is \$12,480. The Aide is required to have an Associate's degree in Early Childhood Education; the starting salary is \$9,360 annually which reflects an hourly rate of \$4.50. The work of the paid staff is supplemented by the regular participation of foster grandparents.

Discussion with staff at the County's child care licensing agency, the DSS Bureau of Child Care, takes place on a regular basis since the Bureau took part in the Center's start up committee and continues to participate in the ongoing oversight committee. Because it is drop-in care and children are never present for more than three hours, it is exempt from licensure.

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS

Although the Center's staff is discouraged from engaging in conversations with parents that might take on the character of a counseling session, they do assist the parents with referrals to follow up services. When parents return to pick up their children the Center's staff will ask them if there are other services they might need. If the parents decline, the staff does not insist. If parents express an interest in HeadStart, pediatric medical care, a battered women's shelter, or any of a range of other services, the Site Director will provide the needed points of contact, sometimes even calling to help set up appointments. The Center staff have good working relationships with their counterparts in the various court departments; they request assistance from one another to best meet the service needs of particular parents.

^h New York Court Facilities Act required courthouses to meet certain structural qualifications in order to be eligible for renovation project funding. Erie County Courthouse did not meet those qualifications.

FUTURE PLANS

While program utilization has slightly exceeded the estimates made by its founders, the Family Court supplies the Children's Center with the bulk of its clients. In the coming year, the Center's oversight committee and staff plan to increase their outreach to the City Court.

Primarily the future plans are to continue to provide the current service. The Y's Executive Director said, "at the outset we agreed that we would not serve jurors, police, or court staff. The Center has a very pure purpose, a very simple focus. It is absolutely meeting the need for which it was designed."⁴⁵

VICTIM SERVICES, INC. CHILDREN'S CENTERS NEW YORK CITY

Contact: Lucy Friedman
Executive Director
Victim Services, Inc.
2 Lafayette Street, 3rd Floor
New York, NY 10007
(212) 577-7700

There are five Children's Centers operating in the boroughs of New York City: in the Family Courts of the Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island, in Criminal Court in Brooklyn, and in the Manhattan Civil, Criminal, and Housing Courts. The programs are operated under contract with the Office of Court Administration, by Victim Services, Inc., a private non-profit agency which also offers a wide range of services to victims and witnesses. The oldest program, the Brooklyn Criminal Court Children's Center, opened in 1975. While each of the five programs has certain unique characteristics, the lengthy description of the Manhattan Civil, Criminal, and Housing Courts Children's Center, found in Chapter Five of this report, will provide an example of the work being done in all New York City Children's Centers.

MONROE COUNTY FAMILY COURT CHILDREN'S CORNER Rochester, NY

Contact: Rita Augustine Associate Executive Director Catholic Family Center 25 Franklin Street, 7th Floor Rochester, NY 14604 (716) 262-7101	Laura Lehner Coordinator Monroe County Family Court Children's Corner Hall of Justice 99 Exchange Street Rochester, NY 14604
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OVERVIEW

The Monroe County Family Court Children's Corner can care for as many as nine children at a time. The program's one staff member provides care to children from six weeks through age seven. Between 50 and 75 children spend time at the center each week; monthly utilization hovers around 280. Almost 3,000 children were cared for in the Children's Corner in 1994.

THE COURT

Situated in western New York, nearly one third of Monroe County's 993 square miles is devoted to farming⁴⁶. Rochester, a big industrial city, accounts for one third of the county's 724,418 inhabitants. The county's population is primarily of northern European descent. Twelve percent of the residents are African-American; more than 95% count English as their first language. It is an affluent county with the highest earners accounted for by the county's biggest employers, Kodak, Bausch & Lomb, and Xerox.

Like all New York family courts, Monroe County Family Court handles child abuse and neglect, juvenile delinquency, paternity, child support, and domestic violence where the couple is married and/or has children. The socioeconomic characteristics of court consumers mimic the characteristics of the county as a whole.

Monroe County Family Court shares one floor of a thirty year old courthouse with the county's Surrogate Court. Because the building no longer meets the needs of its burgeoning case load, it is likely that a new facility will be built in the next few years.

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

In 1990, the Gender Bias Committee of the Greater Rochester Association for Women Attorneys (GRAWA) recommended the establishment of the Children's Corner. Over the two years preceding the program's inauguration, GRAWA put together a coalition of many interested groups. One of the coalition's participants said, "The best way to get a project started is to mobilize the community around it. The more able you are to draw in community resources like the United Way, child care experts, children's advocates, women's

groups, and the American Association of Retired Persons, the more credibility you have. The Women's Bar Association started the project alone but finished with an extensive partnership and strong community-wide support."⁴⁷ The program opened in March 1992.

FUNDING

The Children's Corner is operated by Catholic Family Center, a private non-profit multi-service agency. Its small budget is provided largely by the grant from the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children awarded to the Catholic Family Center for this purpose; the County donates the space and maintenance. Additional funds have been raised through solicitation of attorneys, other citizens' groups, foundations, the United Way, and the County of Monroe.

THE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

When families enter the building's first floor, they pass through a security check-in point where the Sheriff's Deputies inform them about the Children's Corner. The program is open for three hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon. The Children's Corner is housed on the third floor where the five family courtrooms are located.

Physical design: Some 320 square feet of what was once a lobby adjacent to the elevator were converted into the Children's Corner. The room includes a child size table and chairs; dolls, puzzles, blocks, books and games displayed so the children can reach them; and a crib. A comfortable rocking chair provides a cozy place for the staff to nurture smaller children.

Program content: The staff read to the children; assist them with various table activities like puzzles; and provides crayons, markers and coloring books for them to use on their own. Because parents are required to wait with their children until their case is called, they participate in activities with their children. Although no food is served, the courthouse includes a cafeteria subsidized so that most families can purchase food there; vouchers are available to families who cannot afford anything.

Staffing: The staffing revolves around one paid coordinator who holds a bachelor's degree in elementary education and is working on a Master's degree in special education. Her salary is based on a 35 hour work week and entry level pay ranges from \$18,500 to \$24,000. Currently, she is assisted by several volunteers and student interns.

The program does not require a license because New York licensing regulations exempt programs where the children are separated from their parents for fewer than three hours.

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS

The adults who accompany the children to court are present during much of the time their children are in the Children's Corner, leaving only long enough to attend their own hearing. While in the center, they talk informally with the program coordinator and with other parents while they supervise their children's activities.

The program coordinator offers interested parents information about child care and HeadStart. Additional services are offered to parents through Catholic Family Center's Community Resource Services office, when it appears that such a referral would be useful. Tangible support to families include the supply of mittens and hats that they keep on hand for children who arrive without proper winter clothing.

FUTURE PLANS

Additional efforts will be made to recruit volunteers in the coming year.

ULSTER COUNTY FAMILY COURT NURSERY

Kingston, NY

Contact: Kathy Lasko, Chief Clerk
Ulster County Family Court
16 Lucas Avenue
Kingston, NY 12401
(914) 339-7820

Ulster County is one of the state's mid-Hudson counties including in its boundaries a portion of the Catskill Mountains. Primarily rural, Kingston is its largest city. Family Court hears cases involving child abuse and neglect, juvenile delinquency, visitation, support, and cases of domestic violence where children are involved and/or the couple is married. In 1987, officials of the court approached the local United Way for assistance in establishing a children's waiting room. The United Way laid the groundwork for the center, organized the donations that furnished and equipped the nursery, and worked out a volunteer arrangement with the Foster Grandparent program. The nursery is overseen by the Family Court's Chief Clerk who steps in when there are problems and personally supplies many of the small items requested by the foster grandparents.

In a small room on the first floor (196 square feet) of the Ulster County Family Court, four volunteers provide care and supervision to

as many as ten children who range in age from infancy through ten years old. The nursery is open from 9:00 to 4:30 every day, serving an average of 30 or 40 children each month. Working in teams of two to cover the nursery's morning and afternoon hours, the volunteers are all participants in the Foster Grandparent program which pays them a stipend to allow them to volunteer. The volunteers play with the children as they explore the toys, puzzles, stuffed animals, doll house, books, arts and crafts materials, and climbing structure. One of the volunteers, an 82 year old woman, joins the children on the climbing structure, slipping down the slide with great delight. Children spend as little time as 15 minutes in the nursery or as long as an entire day if their parents are involved in a trial, but the average stay is just over an hour.

YONKERS FAMILY COURT CHILDREN'S CENTER

Yonkers, New York

Contact: Jacqueline Pezzullo, Project Coordinator
Yonkers Family Court
Children's Center
53 South Broadway
Yonkers, NY 10701
(914) 423-5368

OVERVIEW

Putting a children's center at the Family Court in Yonkers is a humane, welcome development... This newspaper has long urged improvements at Family Court facilities which can be dismal as well as overcrowded... Having a place children can wait by themselves under supervision makes sense.⁴⁸

Editorial, White Plains Reporter Dispatch

Open to children from six weeks through age eight, the Children's Center's paid coordinator and two additional caregivers provide care and supervision to as many as six children at a time. Immediately popular in the Family Court it serves, approximately 160 children have enjoyed the Children's Center each month since its opening in May 1994. Between June and December 19, 1994, the Center served 796 children.⁴⁹

THE COURT

Yonkers Family Court is one of three family courts serving the cities and surrounding communities of Westchester County, New York. The county's 878,139 inhabitants include some of the state's wealthiest families and pockets of great poverty. The city of Yonkers is racially and ethnically diverse, with heavy concentrations of African-American, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern people, as well as many white residents. The families served by Yonkers Family Court Children's Center are primarily poor. About 18% of the children are white, 36% are Hispanic, 41% are African-American, and 4.5% are the children of Middle Eastern immigrants. The families appear in court to litigate a range of legal matters including child abuse and neglect, paternity, custody, and child support.⁵⁰

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

The bench officers of the Yonkers Family Court (two judges and a hearing examiner) have long wanted an alternative to having children in court. According to Family Court Judge Howard Spitz, "our biggest problem was trying to find someone to take care of the child... Most of the cases here have to do with the children abuse or neglect, paternity, custody and especially horrendous cases of sexual abuse. As a judge, the most important thing about having a place for the children to go is that it relieves both the trauma to the litigant and to the child." "It's good for everybody," Judge Spitz said. "We no longer have children running around the courtroom, which is very helpful to me. The child is not exposed to the courtroom, parents are relieved of the responsibility of taking care of a child while going through a legal proceeding. It's an idea that was a long time coming, but it is finally here."⁵¹

FUNDING

A private nonprofit child welfare organization, the Westchester Children's Association, having worked on the problem for some time, applied to the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children, for operational funding. The Yonkers Family Court was one of the six proposals selected for funding, enabling the center to begin providing services. The funding from the Commission covers 60% of the program's budget. Westchester Children's Association (WCA) conducts private fund raising to make up the balance.

THE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

When 4-year-old Ritchie arrived at the new child care center in Yonkers Family Court recently, his arms were pinned around his mother's neck in a desperate embrace, and he was wailing at full throttle. "I want to give Daddy a kiss!" cried Ritchie, ..."I want to give you a hug, Mommy!" Mommy and Daddy, in Ritchie's case, were embroiled in a bitter legal dispute involving the child himself...The judge presiding over the case had asked that Ritchie leave the courtroom, both to spare the

child the trauma of witnessing the proceedings and to prevent him from disrupting them...When Ritchie arrived at the center howling, ... the director quickly went to work. She first showed him the water fountain in the hall."It's pretty much magic how it works," she explained. After that she showed him a toy phone and then a truck with a siren. Within a few minutes she had him intrigued, and the little boy's sobs dissipated into a few desultory sniffs. Soon the child, who sported a blond tail down the back of his neck...was engrossed in painting a picture.⁵²

Yonkers Family Court is in an imposing six story building that houses several private businesses in addition to the court and some other public agencies. The Yonkers Family Court occupies the third and fourth floors of the building. Entry into the building is controlled by court officers, seated at metal detectors at the building's entrance. Everyone who enters is required to identify their destination within the building. When adults and children pass through on their way to Family Court, the court officers tell them about the Children's Center on the third floor. Although there are signs posted at various locations, the Center's Coordinator doesn't believe that the signs are the reason families find their way to the Center. Referrals from the court officers at the building's entrance are reinforced by other court employees working in and around the courtrooms and by the Coordinator herself who periodically canvasses the hallways of the court looking for families who might want to use the Center. She estimates that the Center cares for approximately 95% of the children who come to the court.

The Children's Center is open whenever the court is in session, usually from 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and from 1:30 to 5:00 pm. If there are no children in the Center, the Coordinator can begin clean-up at 4:30 to ready the Center for the next day's occupants. There are some days, however, when a court session runs long, and the Coordinator finds herself staying with a child during the lunch break or after 5:00. She refrains from straightening the room while a child is waiting after hours because she does not want the child to feel unwelcome.

Physical design: Located next to the Court Clerk's office, it is a small room, 216 square feet in size, protected by a locked Dutch door. The top half of the door is left open so that people passing by can see the center, but the bottom half is kept locked to prevent unauthorized adults from departing with children.

Looking into the room, the viewer finds a well lit and inviting place. To the left, the Coordinator's desk sits under an observation window facing the waiting area. Daylight comes from large windows overlooking the business section of Yonkers. To the right, and covering an entire wall, is a mural of a garden behind a white picket fence, donated by a local artist. Sitting in front of the mural is a white wicker rocking chair where the staff sit with infants.

The rectangular room is divided into two areas. About one fourth of the room is devoted to the care of infants. This area includes the white wicker rocker, a crib, a diaper changing table, and a tumbling mat for more mobile babies. The rest of the space is devoted to the care of older children. The biggest equipment includes an art easel, a table for arts and crafts activities, and a sandbox. A play kitchen, as well as hand puppets, animal figures and dolls, encourage dramatic play. Low shelves containing a variety of toys, blocks, puzzles, and books invite the children to explore the room at their own pace.

When children arrive with their parents, the Coordinator asks the parent a series of questions that enables her to complete the registration form designed by the Permanent Judicial Commission. Because use of the center is restricted to Family Court litigants, she checks the court calendar to verify the parent's legitimate presence in the Children's Center. In fact, however, she has never had a parent attempt to use the center while doing something other than attending to court business.

Program content: The program's staffing ensures that each baby can receive the undivided attention of a caregiver and that other children will have someone to play with them. Staff offer table activities to the children and take part in the block building, puzzle making, and sand digging children elect to explore. The coordinator reports that, although the staff does read aloud to children, the excitement the children experience when first exposed to the richness of the play materials precludes any thought of story telling for at least an hour after the children arrive. Snacks are offered to children in the morning and afternoon. During snacks the cassette player is often turned on to the songs of Sesame Street or Disney show tunes. When children need to use the bathroom a staff member accompanies them to the public restroom in the public corridor.

Children often do not want to leave the Center when their parents come to retrieve them. The Project Coordinator said that every child who has come into the Center has been grateful to the staff. They leave saying, "see you next time." She has run into children on the street who, when they see her and remember the Children's Center, ask, "can I go over your place?" To ease the transition out the door, the Center maintains a supply of second hand toys and books which are offered to the children as they leave.

While the program does not offer care to children nine years old and older, the Project Coordinator has a variety of games and other activities on hand that are suitable for older children. She loans them to children to use while waiting in the hallways and has been pleased to find the children universally returning them when they leave the court.

Staffing: The Children's Center employs one full-time staff person, the Project Coordinator. With a bachelor's degree and several years experience as a kindergarten teacher, her interest in pursuing a master's degree in early childhood education has been encouraged by the Westchester Children's Association (WCA). The starting salary for the full-time position was advertised as \$25,000.

WCA has been very successful at recruiting assistance in the Children's Center. The Project Coordinator is assisted by a variety of

volunteers, foster grandparents, Department of Social Services' Pride in Work (Workfare program) participants, students enrolled in the EARN (Employee Assistance Referral Network) program, and college interns. Many of these assistants receive pay or a stipend from the school or agency which places them at the Center.¹ When such assistants have not been available, WCA has paid per diem substitutes to ensure proper staffing levels in the Center. Typically there are three adults working in the Center each day, permitting much one-to-one interaction between staff and children and between the Coordinator and parents.

Like all the Centers outside of New York City, the Center is exempt from licensure. The Day Care Council has provided technical assistance to WCA, and their common address has facilitated WCA's participation in training offered by the Council to child care providers.

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS

One of the Children's Center goals is to connect families with other services as they seem appropriate. It is the Project Coordinator who undertakes these conversations with parents. She first learns about the family when she assists them in completing the intake form. During the registration process, she can assess the parents' willingness to accept any suggestions she might like to make to them about services. Some parents are abrupt and will immediately tell her they have no time to talk. Others are more receptive. By the time they reach the Center, they have usually been given information about every program that applies to them. The Coordinator tries to reinforce the advice offered by others. Referrals she makes most commonly include HeadStart; the supplemental food program for Women, Infants and Children (known as WIC); and Social Security Insurance for children with disabilities. She has also referred parents to the Boy Scouts for recreation and to Victim Services for counseling. Although she rarely assists parents in making appointments, she often follows up the referrals with a phone call.

FUTURE PLANS

The program is very young, celebrating its first full year of operation in May 1995. Continued funding is the biggest concern but the Project Coordinator seems optimistic that it will continue. The Center will continue to build good relationships with the court and the families it serves as it continues to provide drop-in child care to Yonkers Family Court.

OHIO

STARK COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOM Canton, OH

Contact: Paula Smith
Assistant Director
Victim/Witness Program
P. O. Box 20049
Canton, Ohio 44701
(216) 438-0887

The Stark County Prosecutor's Office is located in Canton, Ohio, and tries criminal cases in the Court of Common Pleas and juvenile cases in the Family Court. The Prosecutor's Office serves an area that is urban, suburban and rural. There is a small children's waiting room located in the Prosecutor's office which is across the street from the Stark County Court of Common Pleas. The waiting room has no full-time staff. It contains toys, a television and VCR, and an area for teenagers. Most of the items in the children's waiting room were donated by the Junior League. The room has been in existence since 1987, and is highly utilized. The room serves mostly court-involved children and families.

PENNSYLVANIA

FAMILY DIVISION CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOMS Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County Pittsburgh, PA

Contact: Hon. Max Baer
Administrative Judge, Family Division
Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County
601 City County Building
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
(412) 350-3829

Judy Kasban
National Council of Jewish Women
1620 Murray Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15217
(412) 421-6118

¹ Typically such wages are paid at an hourly rate equivalent to the state's minimum wage.

The family division of the Court of Common Pleas of Allegheny County is located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and has two children's waiting rooms, staffed full-time with volunteers from the National Council of Jewish Women and Senior Citizens. The senior volunteers are paid through an Urban League community service jobs program for seniors. The waiting rooms are located in the Juvenile Court, which hears child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency cases, and in the Adult Family Court, which hears divorce and custody cases. The children's waiting room in the Adult Family court has been in existence since 1979; the Juvenile Court children's waiting room opened in 1990. The rooms are very large and well-equipped with toys and furniture, a television, a VCR and a record player. There is a children's bathroom and a diaper-changing area. Most of the items in the room have been donated. Some have been purchased through special allocations from the court's budget, but there is no regular funding stream for the waiting rooms themselves. The rooms are highly utilized; the National Council of Jewish Women estimates that 5,000 children used the waiting rooms in 1994.

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOM

Reading, PA

Contact: Jack Borden, Director
Placement and Court Services
Berks County Services Center
Children and Youth Services
633 Court Street, 9th Floor
Reading, PA 19601
(610) 478-6728

The Berks County Juvenile Court is located in Reading, Pennsylvania. It serves an urban area. The Court hears child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency cases. There is a children's waiting room run by the Department of Social Services located on the respective floors they occupy. It is occasionally staffed with volunteers, but children are generally supervised by their parents or other adults when in the waiting room. The room has toys and children's furniture, most of which are donated. Some have been purchased with county funds but there is no specific budget for the children's waiting room itself. The 225 square foot room is highly utilized, serving about ten to 15 court-involved children per day.

PHILADELPHIA COUNTY COURT OF COMMON PLEAS CHILDREN'S NURSERIES

Philadelphia, PA

Contact:

Andrea Hoffman Jelin
Director, Children and Youth Services
First Judicial District of Pennsylvania
Court of Common Pleas
1801 Vine Street-Room 306
Philadelphia, PA 19103
(215) 686-4012

Sandra DeMuro
Court Administrative Officer
Medical Branch
Court of Common Pleas
Family Court Division
1801 Vine Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103
(215) 686-4180

Jeffrey Rosoff
Philadelphia District Attorney's Office
Juvenile Court
Victim/Witness Unit
1801 Vine Street, Room 136
Philadelphia, PA 19103
(215) 686-4094

OVERVIEW

Children from birth through 18 years of age are welcome in the two Children's Nurseries operated by the Philadelphia County Court of Common Pleas. The two Nurseries are located in Domestic Relations and Juvenile Division courthouses. Each waiting room is supervised by two paid staff. As many as 30 children are permitted in a Nursery simultaneously but usually no more than 25 children are present at a time. Together the rooms serve approximately 300 children each month, with utilization in the Juvenile Division Nursery accounting for about 60 percent of the total.

THE COURT

Philadelphia, the city and county, is an urban area covering 129 square miles. Just over half (54%) of the 1.6 million residents are white; African-Americans account for 40% of the county's residents. Twenty percent of the population is impoverished.⁵³

One waiting room is located in the Domestic Relations Branch where cases regarding child custody, visitation, child support and domestic violence are heard; the other is in the Juvenile Branch where adoption, juvenile delinquency, and child abuse and neglect cases are heard. The nurseries are highly utilized by families of all races, the majority of whom are impoverished.

An additional children's waiting room is operated by the District Attorney's office for the Juvenile Court. The victim/witness assistance program in the DA's office serves children and adults who are victims of or witnesses to crimes committed by juvenile offenders. There is a victim/witness waiting room so victims and witnesses do not have to wait with defendants. This room has children's toys and books

and a television. The program uses volunteers to make victims and witnesses feel as comfortable as possible while in the courthouse. The District Attorney's office also runs a Court School for children who will be required to testify in court. Children are taught about the procedures and rules of the courtroom and the various roles of the people they will see there.

HISTORY OF THE PROGRAM

We will deal with the juvenile in a manner that will correct ills and reduce delinquency by removing the causes thereof, with the purpose of not only correcting the child, but using the child to correct the parents and make the home.⁵⁴

Hon. Charles L. Brown
President Judge (1939)
Municipal Court of Philadelphia

The Municipal Court of Philadelphia was established in 1914, and the Children's Nurseries followed soon after. The nurseries began providing care for the children of litigants in 1915. Between 1915 and 1939 they served 115,249 children⁵⁵, an average of 92 each week.

FUNDING

The Nurseries are a department that fall under the Children and Youth Services Division of the Family Court. As such, all costs associated with operating them are paid for by the court. They also receive donations from local groups in the way of books and other smaller items.

THE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

The two children's waiting rooms are located directly in the courthouses themselves. In addition to providing drop-in child care to the children of litigants, social workers from the local department of human services and various private agencies in the city also use the Nurseries when they bring children to court. In addition, the nurseries are used for supervised visitation.

The Nurseries are open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. and can accommodate 30 children each. Children of all ages are permitted to use the rooms. Parents must sign in when they drop off their children and indicate who will be retrieving them. Parents are required to remain in the courthouse, as the court is not a licensed child care provider. Children may be in the rooms anywhere from minutes to hours. The nurseries' supervisor reports that the rooms are highly utilized.

Physical design: The nurseries are brightly painted rooms, containing children's furniture, toys, books, games and a television which is used occasionally. The major furnishings include two cribs and four child-sized tables and 24 chairs for older children. There are chairs for adults around the perimeter of the rooms. The rooms are equipped with separate bathrooms for boys and girls, and diaper changing areas.

Program content: Nursery staff are responsible for supervising children. They play with children and set up activities for them. Staff change diapers and accompany small children to the bathroom. The program content varies from day to day and is dependent on the number of children present in the Nurseries. At times when only a few children are present, staff sit down with them at the tables to make crafts or color in coloring books. On busy days, staff are absorbed in supervising the independent activities of the children, preventing problems and interceding when there are disputes. Food is not provided due to budget constraints but when necessary staff will find snacks for hungry children if parents fail to return for several hours.

Staffing: The nurseries each have two full-time staff persons. They are called Child Care Aides and have annual salaries of approximately \$20,000. Staff persons are required to be high school graduates. The current staff persons are mothers or grandmothers themselves.

Neither Nursery holds a child care license.

INTERACTION WITH PARENTS

Parents are required to remain in the Nurseries until their cases are called. Some of them watch their children from the adult seating that rims the Nurseries. Others actively work with the staff to care for their children. When parents voice the need for diapers, or other personal care supplies, the staff attempts to accommodate them. The staff does not engage parents in conversation about their personal circumstances.

FUTURE PLANS

The Family Court is currently engaged in discussions with the Hahnemann University Creative Arts Therapy Department and the Please Touch Museum. The three organizations are attempting to develop a collaborative program that would facilitate meaningful interaction between non-custodial parents and their children during supervised visitation.

RHODE ISLAND

CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOM PROGRAM

Contact: R.C. Harrall
State Court Administrator
Rhode Island Supreme Court
250 Benefit Street
Providence, RI 02903
(401) 277-3263

The State of Rhode Island has 5 regional courthouses that hear family, criminal and civil matters. Two of these courthouses, one serving Providence and one serving the rural area that includes South Kingstown, have large (30 ft. x 20 ft.) children's waiting rooms. The Providence waiting room has been in existence since 1980. The South Kingstown room has existed since 1987. The rooms contain children's toys and furniture and a television and VCR. Most of the toys are donated by Hasbro, which is headquartered in Rhode Island. Both rooms have a children's bathroom and/or diaper changing area. The waiting rooms are periodically staffed by senior citizen volunteers from the Red Cross Foster Grandparents program. The rooms are highly utilized and serve their purpose well. The state is planning to open another children's waiting room in the courthouse located in Warwick in 1995.

VERMONT

CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOMS, FAMILY COURT

Contact: Linda Ryea Richard
Judicial Operations Coordinator
Office of the Court Administrator
109 Maple Street
Montpelier, VT 05609-0701
(802) 828-3278

The State of Vermont has children's waiting rooms in 11 of the state's 14 family courts. Family courts in Vermont hear divorce, child custody, child maltreatment, domestic violence, and juvenile delinquency cases. Most courthouses in Vermont contain the family court and other courts, e.g. criminal, small claims, etc.

The children's waiting rooms are very small rooms (6 ft. x 6 ft.) located in the family court sections of the courthouses, usually away from high-traffic areas. The rooms typically contain a television and VCR, toys and stuffed animals, and child-sized furniture. All contents of the children's waiting rooms are donated as there is no budget for these rooms. These waiting rooms do not have any staff. Children must be supervised by the adults who brought them to court. Any child in the courthouse may use the children's waiting rooms (with supervision).

BEAR-LY LEGAL PROGRAM

Windsor County Family Court
White River Junction, VT

Contact: David Scribner
Court Officer
Windsor County Family Court
White River Junction, VT 05001
(802) 295-8838

The Windsor County Family Court in White River Junction, Vermont runs a special program called the Bear-ly Legal Program. This program provides teddy bears to two groups of children under the age of thirteen: subjects of child maltreatment cases, and witnesses in criminal court. The program was begun when David Scribner, an officer of the family court, recognized the need to reduce children's traumatic court experiences where possible. Bear-ly Legal began in 1993 and is funded completely through grants and donations from the Ben and Jerry's Foundation and Vermont Teddy Bears. The program receives support from the local senior citizens' center; its members make outfits for the bears. Mr. Scribner is currently seeking funding to expand the program statewide.

WISCONSIN

DANE COUNTY FAMILY COURT COUNSELING SERVICE

Madison, WI

Contact: Kathleen Jeffords, Director
Dane County Family Court Counseling Service
City County Building, Suite 108
Madison, WI 53709
(608) 266-4607

The Dane County Family Court Counseling Service is located in the courthouse in Madison, Wisconsin. Family Court Counselors mediate and evaluate custody, physical placement, grandparent and step-parent visitation disputes in divorce and paternity cases. There is a small children's room which contains donated books, toys and furniture. The children's room adjoins the adult waiting room. This room is used only by clients of the counseling service, not by families attending court hearings. The Family Court Counseling Service is funded mostly by the county and partly by marriage license fees.

CHILDREN'S COURT CENTER CHILDREN'S CORNER

Milwaukee County Circuit Court

Wauwatosa, WI

Contact: Janice Ereth
Children's Court Center
10201 Watertown Plank Road, Room 9
Wauwatosa, WI 53226
(414) 454-4189

The Children's Court Center of the Milwaukee County Circuit Court hears cases regarding juvenile delinquency and child maltreatment. This court has a children's corner in the general waiting room where there are toys and books with which children can play. There is also a toy shelf in each of the six courtrooms.

MILWAUKEE COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S EMERGENCY CHILD CARE ASSISTANCE

Milwaukee, WI

Contact: Ms. Jo Kolanda
Victim Witness/District Attorney's Office
821 West State Street
Milwaukee, WI 53233
(414) 278-4646

The Milwaukee County Courthouse which hears criminal matters, has no on-site children's waiting room. The District Attorney's office handles some child care problems on an ad hoc basis. Children are sent to a day care facility across the street from the courthouse. This service is available to children of adult witnesses; it is not used for children who are victims or witnesses themselves. The costs are covered by the District Attorney's office.

CHAPTER V

A CLOSER LOOK AT CHILD CARE IN THE COURTS:

PROGRAM MODELS

IN NEW YORK CITY AND LOS ANGELES

The Children's Centers are a bright spot in the State court system literally and figuratively. We are excited by the idea that, while helping ourselves maintain orderly judicial proceedings, we are also actually helping people in crisis turn their lives around. I see these centers as part of a larger effort to stop the revolving door that returns families to court again and again, with worsening problems.⁵⁶

Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye
New York State Court of Appeals

To better understand how court-based child care programs actually operate, this chapter provides a more extensive look at two court-based child care programs: the Children's Center serving Manhattan Civil, Criminal and Housing Court in New York City and the Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court in Los Angeles, California. The Edelman Children's Court is a model facility designed to meet the needs of children, and was created and funded expressly to accommodate unique programs such as Shelter Care. The Manhattan Children's Center is located in a courthouse more typical of a different age, where little if any space is available for new programs. The Edelman Children's Court programs serve children up to the age of 18. The Manhattan Children's Center, more modest in funding and space resources, serves younger children only. Manhattan's three courts focus on adult civil and criminal matters; the Edelman Children's Court deals only with child abuse and neglect. Recognizing that every program in operation includes unique and innovative elements, we selected two examples that illustrate how child care can be useful in courts with widely divergent jurisdictions. The two case examples were also chosen for their geographic diversity. The descriptions draw on observations of the courts and the child care programs during one week in December 1994, interviews and correspondence with court employees, and numerous documents provided to the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) by the two courts. Each is profiled in turn below.

NEW YORK: THE CIVIL, CRIMINAL AND HOUSING COURT IN MANHATTAN

HISTORY OF THE NEW YORK CHILDREN'S CENTER PROGRAM

New York recognized that young children need sanctuary from crowded courthouses to protect their well-being, to enable parents to fully participate in proceedings, and to promote efficient court operations. It further recognized that the State's courthouses provide a unique opportunity to reach the poorest and most vulnerable children. In 1988, the former Chief Judge of the State of New York created the New York Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children to "address the problems of children in New York whose lives and life chances are being increasingly touched by the court system."⁵⁷

The Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children (the Commission) established a system of Children's Centers in New York State's Courts that offer a two-prong service. Nine Children's Centers provide a safe, supportive environment for children while their caregivers attend to court business. Additionally, the centers will soon serve as sites to connect families to essential services such as HeadStart, WIC, and child care. Five additional Children's Centers will open in 1995.

In order to build the Children's Centers in its courts, New York has been engaged in a multi-year effort including:

- *Needs Assessment.* With a grant from the W.T. Grant Foundation, the Commission conducted a needs assessment to evaluate the need for child care and the opportunity to provide services for children in courthouses. The results of the needs assessment

verified the daily presence of hundreds of children in the courthouses. It also bore out the hypothesis that the children waiting in the courthouses are among New York's poorest and most vulnerable children and that an alarming number are unconnected to vital services.

- *Funding for Centers.* Using the needs assessment, the Commission was able to persuade the New York State Legislature to earmark child care funds for start-up of a system of Children's Centers in the State courts. In 1994, the Commission was able to secure funds for the Children's Centers in the Court budget and also to be included in New York State's three year State Plan for the Child Care Development Block Grant. At the beginning of 1995, nine centers were fully operational. They had served over 10,000 children in 1994. They serve upstate and downstate courts, and are operated through contract with a variety of not-for-profit providers such as victim services agencies, children and family services agencies, and Y's. The Centers are low cost programs funded through a variety of sources. Over forty percent of the funds are provided through local matches.
- *Minimum requirements.* In cooperation with the New York State Department of Social Services, the Commission developed a set of minimum requirements for Children's Centers. These requirements recognize that the Children's Center Program is fundamentally different from regular, full-time child care and, therefore, the minimum requirements adapt State child care regulations and allow program development that is responsive to local needs. The minimum requirements served as a basis for two requests for proposals. All centers are exempt from State licensure requirements because children spend less than three hours in the program on any one occasion. Although not required, in New York City, Victim Services has an agreement with the New York City Department of Health which licenses day care in New York City, providing them with a license and waiving non-applicable requirements.
- *Statewide expansion.* A Court Rule was developed by the Commission and adopted by the New York State Court of Appeals requiring the inclusion of Children's Centers in courthouses when any new construction or renovation of courthouses occurs.
- *Building a quality system.* To monitor the effectiveness of the system of Children's Centers in the courts and compliance with the minimum requirements and to provide technical assistance and training to its staff, the New York State Court System has established a permanent position for a Coordinator of the Children's Centers. The Coordinator, who began her job in May 1994, is a person with vast experience in child care. The staff of the Children's Centers have participated in two training sessions, held in April and November 1994. A comprehensive start-up and operational manual is also being prepared.
- *Service connections.* In 1994, the Commission moved into the second phase of the Children's Center project—the effort to build service connections. In addition to information and referral services, three models for making service connections were planned: out-stationing workers from other agencies, deputizing center staff to enroll families in specific services, and hiring generic workers to connect families to vital services. In collaboration with the HeadStart program at the regional office of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Commission developed a joint venture to out-station HeadStart family workers at two Children's Centers. The HeadStart family workers will connect the children and families to HeadStart, other early childhood programs and vital services. Staff at several Children's Centers have been deputized to enroll families for Lifeline phone services and discussions are underway to deputize staff to begin the WIC enrollment process.

HISTORY OF THE MANHATTAN CIVIL, CRIMINAL AND HOUSING COURT CHILDREN'S CENTER

Historically the New York City courts have provided volunteer child care to some court consumers since 1948 in the form of nurseries. A program in Queens was one of the first and provided a seating area and a television to occupy children. The Brooklyn Criminal Court Children's Center was opened in 1975 by the Vera Institute of Justice under the Witness Assistance Project. It was the first child care center in the state to be staffed by paid teachers. In 1978, the newly-created Victim Services, Inc. took over operation of the program. The Manhattan Civil, Criminal and Housing Court Children's Center was a joint effort of the Commission, judges, court personnel working in the affected Courts, and the Association of the Bar of the City of New York.

OVERVIEW

The Manhattan Civil, Criminal, and Housing Courts Children's Center is one of five free drop-in child care centers operated by Victim Services, Inc. under contract to the Office of Court Administration. Victim Services operates over 60 programs throughout New York City. The programs, which are based in schools, hospitals, courts, police precincts and communities, help more than 150,000 people each year. Victim Services was founded in 1978 to reduce the trauma and inconvenience of being a crime victim. In 1982, Victim Services merged with Travelers Aid, expanding the overall mission to include services for stranded travelers, the homeless and runaway youth. Victim Services strives to heal the wounds of violence and prevent victimization. All Victim Services programs seek to restore to victims a sense of power and control, strengthen neighborhoods by decreasing feelings of alienation, reduce vulnerability and fear, and improve victims' relationships with the criminal justice and social service system.

Other sites of Victim Services, Inc. Children's Centers include the Brooklyn Criminal Court, and family courts in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island. The sister programs have the capacity to serve 13, 27, 22, and six children respectively. The Brooklyn, Bronx and Manhattan programs are located in the courthouses they serve. The Staten Island center sits in an adjacent public building.

The center that is the focus of our study is located on the main floor of the building containing Manhattan's Civil and Housing

Courts. The Manhattan Criminal Court, also a contributor to the Center, is across the street. The center provides short-term child care services to child victims and witnesses who must come to court, as well as children whose parents are involved in court proceedings. The Center does not serve jurors, lawyers, or court employees. The Center is staffed by a full-time head teacher and a part-time teacher's assistant and can serve as many as 14 children aged three months to six years at any one time. The program operates Monday through Friday from 9:00 AM until 4:45 PM, closing during the court lunch break which occurs from 12:45 PM until 2:00 PM daily. It is estimated that 3,400 children will be served by the center annually. Since its opening in May 1994, the Center has served an average of 150 children each month.

THE COURT

The area served by the Manhattan Civil, Criminal, and Housing Courts covers 28 square miles and has a population of approximately 1.5 million, with just under half (44%) of this group being Caucasian.⁵⁸ Civil Court handles cases involving small claims, victims' compensation, and inquests. Criminal Court deals with misdemeanors and felonies. Housing Court focuses on landlord and tenant issues.

FUNDING

Space for the center was donated by the court. The Department of General Services repainted the center, installed a new floor, and provided other refurbishing services. Toys, clothing, and money for the center have been contributed by individuals and businesses such as Gund, Learning Curve Toys, and Dakin, Inc. The Unified Court System provides the center with \$48,400 in operating funds while Victim Services provides matching funds.

THE CHILDREN'S CENTER PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN

The goals and objectives of the center are: (1) to enhance the safety and well-being of children who accompany their parents to court by providing them with a safe, supportive alternative to attending court proceedings, (2) to link needy families with services by providing information and making referrals to community resources (i.e. HeadStart, WIC, food stamps), to be implemented in 1995, and (3) to improve the administration of justice by enabling caregivers to participate fully in court proceedings and court staff to concentrate on court business.

Attracting Families: The center is physically located near the main entrance of the 12 story, high-rise court building. As families enter the court, they need to pass through a security checkpoint equipped with a metal detector before coming to an information desk. The center is to the far left of the entrance, near the courtroom where the calendar call for Housing Court is conducted. Bulletin boards outside the center list the cases being heard that day and their courtroom number.

Families learn about the center through the signs posted in hallways. The court officers make referrals to the Center on a regular basis. Center staff periodically walk through the hallways of the courthouse to tell parents about the Center. The Center's staff find it easiest to canvas the hallways in the morning because the presence of two teachers during this time allows one to cover the classroom while the other conducts outreach in the halls. Center staff find that usage of the center varies daily; most families use the center during the morning. There are periods during the day when there are no children in the center. When children are not in the center, staff clean, catch up on paperwork, and set up future activities.

Physical Design: The center is approximately 608 square feet in size. The room is brightly painted in primary colors and decorated with a variety of children's art work and teacher-made or purchased cut-outs and drawings (many of them Disney characters), about one-half at the children's eye level and one-half above. Directly opposite the entrance is a teacher's desk, chair, and a child-sized table with seating. Off to the side, the room is divided into three areas bordered by child-sized shelves. Each of these areas also contains a table and chairs, so that the room is equipped with a total of four tables and 16 chairs. In addition, the first area houses a set of cubbies for children's coats and some materials for dramatic play. The second area contains a record player, books, and various manipulatives. The third section is an infant area housing two cribs, a playpen, and additional manipulatives. A small plastic see-saw is located just outside this section. The great diversity of materials is organized into specific areas (dramatic play, books, blocks, housekeeping, busy boxes, puzzles) on low, open shelves so that children can reach them. Many children who use the Center have few if any real toys and are tremendously excited by the many play opportunities presented for them. Children's songs play on the record player for most of the day. The center does not have a television. The wall opposite the three divided sections contains a set of cabinets, an adult-size sink, refrigerator, and an art easel. A children's bathroom is located at the far end of the room, near the block area, and is equipped with a child-sized sink and an infant changing area.

Important rules and regulations are posted on the center wall. They discuss diapering, the care of sick children, and the center's discipline policy. The center will not administer medications or care for children who are sick. The discipline policy states that corporal punishment, the use of food, and isolating the child are not allowed in managing behavior problems.

Program Content: The Center is a busy place, with families constantly entering and exiting. Children spend the majority of their time at the center exploring the play materials or completing teacher-directed art projects such as pasting and coloring. During CSSP

observations at the center children played with lego-blocks, pushed strollers with dolls in them, explored the housekeeping area, played with play-dough, and glued pieces of colored paper together to make pictures.

Teachers focus their activities on getting children involved in some kind of productive activity and then allow them to work on it independently. For example, when Ramsey, a three and a half year old boy, entered the center he surveyed the room and chose to play with a tambourine that was located near the record player. Staff members immediately redirected him toward a set of lego-blocks on a nearby table. The child continued to build independently with the blocks throughout most of his stay at the center and even initially refused other projects staff offered. Eventually he was drawn to a pasting project at one of the tables. Later that morning, a toddler-aged girl named Keota entered the center with her mother. The child was initially very hesitant and clung to her mother, but said she wanted to stay when asked. Staff members encouraged her to take off her coat, then brought her a doll with a stroller she could push around the room. Eventually the little girl settled into the kitchen area and began to explore the materials there. Ramsey asked another child who entered the room, "Do you want play with me?" Center staff instructed the little girl to take off her coat, hang it up, and join Ramsey in the pasting project if she wanted. In a short time the little girl was also engaged in the art project.

The majority of children observed at the center were toddlers and preschoolers. During these observations, only two infants utilized the center.^j The room was quite crowded so the infants spent most of their time independently exploring various toys they had been given while they sat in a playpen or crib. Children (except infants) eat snacks in groups sitting around a table at 11:00 AM and 3:00 PM daily. Parents are required to leave instructions to guide staff in infant feedings.

Children can only be released to the person who registered them, unless there is a written court order directing staff otherwise. Parents are asked to pick up their children on time and children must leave the center during the mid-day lunch break. This information is conveyed to parents on an information sheet that is available to caregivers in both English and Spanish.

Staffing and licensure: The center is staffed by a full-time head teacher with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education. An assistant teacher with 35 credit hours towards a degree in education works at the center in the mornings. The salaries for the teaching staff start at \$23,000 for the head teacher and \$11,000 for the part-time assistant's position. Although not required, Victim Services has a letter of agreement with the Department of Health, granting it a license with a waiver of non-applicable provisions.

Connections to other services: Research sponsored by the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children found that approximately half of the parents interviewed were interested in receiving information about services available to them in their community.⁶⁹ Although it is not yet a regular part of the program, it is the goal of the Children's Center to begin routinely providing such information during the second year of the Center's operation. Thus, during the observation period, no referrals were made to other services, although parents were free to pick up fliers on services, displayed near the Center's door. Most pamphlets were on Victim Services programs and finding child care.

THE FAMILIES WHO BRING THEIR CHILDREN TO COURT

The families in the New York City area who bring their children to court are primarily African-American (57.7%) and Hispanic (36.6%). About two-thirds receive Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Three quarters of the children who accompany their parents to court are infants and toddlers; fewer than one fourth are as old as 4 or 5 years. Many of the children have chronic health problems (30.6%). Most of the families do not have regular child care arrangements.⁶⁰

THE FAMILIES WHO USE THE CHILDREN'S CENTER

To learn more about the families the Children's Center serves, CSSP reviewed the standard intake forms required by the Commission. Parents or guardians are required to complete intake forms with the assistance of staff, if necessary, before they are allowed to leave their children at the center. While the form is in English, the Head Teacher at the center is bilingual and can translate the form for Spanish-speaking families. The form asks for the following information: caregiver's name, address, phone number, and relationship to the child; an emergency contact; the name of any other person authorized to pick up the child; the name, age, allergies/illnesses, and special needs of children being left at the center, as well as any financial entitlement programs they receive assistance from; the reason the child was brought to court; the type of case the parent is scheduled to appear for, including the location of their courtroom and their time of arrival and departure from the center with their children.

A review of intake forms for November 1994 confirmed the findings of the Commission's 1993 needs assessment: the center is indeed serving a very low income population. Statistics generated from these intake forms indicate that 185 children visited the Manhattan Children's Center during November 1994, with the mean age of children being 2.8 years. Children's average length of stay at the center was 2 hours. The majority of children accompanied their caregivers to court because they did not have other child care arrangements (90%). Most families who utilized the center were poor, with 84% of the children receiving assistance from more than one government entitlement program, usually Medicaid in combination with another service (42% received AFDC and Medicaid, 48% received AFDC, Medicaid, and WIC). Sixteen percent of the children were single service users (AFDC, Medicaid, WIC, or SSI). The majority of families were attending to business in Housing Court (78% as respondents, 13% as petitioners). The intake forms do not indicate whether or not families were referred to community services such as child care, WIC or HeadStart. As part of the Commission's second phase effort to create service linkages, an additional section is being developed for the intake form to record this information.

^j CSSP observations at Manhattan Civil, Criminal and Housing Court took place from December 13 through December 16, 1994. The proximity of the Christmas holiday may have contributed to reduced court activity, and consequently lowered Center utilization.

PARENTS' ASSESSMENT OF THE CHILDREN'S CENTER

In general, parents who used the Manhattan center have positive impressions of the staff and the services offered. During one day of CSSP observations at the center, surveys were administered to parents who chose to utilize the center. On the whole, parents believed having their children at the center improved their ability to take care of their business at court and were very satisfied with the services the center provided their children. At the same time, some parents were skeptical about utilizing the Children's Center, and therefore did not use it.

COMPARISON WITH ANOTHER COURT WITHOUT A CHILD CARE CENTER

In an effort to examine the impact child care has on the operation of the Manhattan court, detailed observations were also conducted at the Brooklyn Civil and Housing Court which does not offer child care. The Brooklyn court serves approximately the same population and case mix as the Manhattan Civil and Housing Court, with a population of 2.3 million in a 71 square mile area, 37% of whom are Caucasian.⁶¹ Observations were conducted to examine the number of children present in corridors and courtrooms, what they were exposed to during their day in court, and how their presence influenced court operations.

Children in Courtrooms and Corridors: Many fewer children were present in the corridors of Manhattan Civil and Housing Court than were present in Brooklyn Civil Court. On average, there were 21 children present per hour in corridors in Brooklyn versus 8.25 children present per hour in Manhattan where child care was available. Similarly, fewer children were present in courtrooms in the Manhattan courts than in the Brooklyn court. On average, there were 3.5 children present per hour in courtrooms in Brooklyn versus 2 children present per hour in Manhattan.

While waiting with their parents in courthouse corridors children were subject to poor conditions, particularly in Brooklyn where the corridors are narrow and there are few seating provisions. The CSSP observer witnessed extremely long lines in the housing areas in Brooklyn where families complete and file several sets of paperwork. It is a process that can take three hours or more. There were approximately 100 individuals in the hallway at one time during the day of the CSSP observation.

The stress associated with court appearances can have a negative impact on parent/child interactions, some of which could be alleviated by the presence of a child care center. The CSSP observer noted that parents in Brooklyn Court, where there is no child care available, exhibited more anger toward their children than at the Manhattan courthouse. In Brooklyn, the press of people included adults and many children confined in warm crowded hallways for as long as three hours at a time. Two examples illustrate the point. A toddler standing in line with her mother in the Brooklyn Court, was trying to take her coat off. The child's caregiver reprimanded the child, saying "Don't take it off. Want a beating?", then grabbed and slapped the girl's hands. Another caregiver, trying to escort her toddler through a crowded hallway, yelled at her child when the little girl tried to lead her in the opposite direction across the hallway. The caregiver then struck the child on the head, knocking her to the ground.

Children contribute to increased congestion in courthouse corridors: The presence of more children in courthouse corridors tends to impede the flow of traffic through the courthouse. In Brooklyn, a young child was having a tantrum in the middle of a crowded hallway. He was later pulled back into the housing line by his mother. Unfortunately, the child chose to grab onto his mother's leg so that he blocked a door that court personnel and other clients were attempting to enter, causing further disruption to ongoing court business. Another preschool-aged child tried to amuse himself by twirling around in a hallway, bumping into everyone who crossed his path.

A disruptive influence on courtroom proceedings: The presence of children in courtrooms can also make it difficult for court employees to conduct court business. In Brooklyn, a preschooler and toddler created a great deal of chaos during a proceeding by yelling "Let's see who talks too much", "I want some lemonade", "I want to go home Mommy", "Can I wear them now?" (speaking about the mom's hat and gloves), "Can we go home?", and "Can we go to McDonalds?" The presence of children in corridors also has a negative impact on the administration of justice within courtrooms. During one set of observations in Manhattan a young child crying in the corridor could be heard in the courtroom even with the door closed. The incident spanned over one-half hour and could be heard above the court proceedings.

A courthouse is a poor environment for children: Children witness disturbing stimuli and are faced with difficult situations in courthouses that are likely to be detrimental to their development. For example in Manhattan, a woman brought her five children into court as she faced an eviction. In Brooklyn, two lawyers argued over whether a woman could be trusted to pay her back rent while her four year old son looked on. One lawyer questioned if the woman could really have had "an emergency every month" and inquired where her shelter allowance was going. The mother's lawyer tried to reiterate that the woman's son was sick and that her apartment lacked heat.

The comparison between the Brooklyn and Manhattan Civil and Housing Courts strongly suggests that the Children's Center decreases the number of children in courthouse corridors and courtrooms. There were roughly twice as many children present in the courtrooms and hallways of Brooklyn Court where no child care is offered. Their increased presence contributed to more disruptions and greater congestion.

CHILDREN'S CENTER UTILIZATION

No child care center ever serves all the children who might be eligible for its services. The CSSP observer found this to be true at the Manhattan Children's Center as well. While there were many fewer children present in the halls and courtrooms than in Brooklyn, several children were observed in various public areas of the Manhattan courthouse. Program staff and parents waiting in courthouse corridors with their children offered three main reasons about why not all families in Manhattan were using the child care center. Their thoughts suggest themes common to every court-based child care program's experience.

- *Eligibility criteria limit utilization.* Every program makes decisions about who may and may not use their child care service. The Children's Center serves children aged 3 months to 6 years. Approximately one-fourth of the children present in corridors and one-half of the children present in courtrooms at the Manhattan courthouse were too old to use the Children's Center located there. In some cases, the children were too young; the CSSP observer saw two mothers with infants too young to utilize the center: one who had a 17 day old infant, and another who had a one month old baby.
- *Parents choose not to use the Center for a variety of reasons.* Because there is no standard procedure to exclude children from court proceedings parents have the option of waiting in courtrooms with their children. Understandably, some parents are uncomfortable about leaving their children in an unfamiliar place. Some are afraid their children will be unwilling to stay in the Center without the parent. This supposition is supported by research in which almost half the parents interviewed (47.2%) while waiting with children in courthouse waiting rooms said that they would not or did not use a court-based child care center, many out of fear that their child would cry if left alone.⁶² Also, many court consumers believe they will get out of court quicker if judges see they have children with them.
- *Families may not learn about the center while they are in the courthouse.* Outreach to potential clients can be a time consuming task. Recently, many of the housing courts formerly found on the first floor near the Center have been moved to the upper floors of the courthouse. Hence, families may not visually encounter the center during the course of their day in court. The availability of the center is announced during a general calendar call that takes place near the Children's Center, but clerks, judges, and lawyers do not universally refer families to it. The CSSP observer did not witness any court personnel referring families to the center during eight hours of courtroom and corridor observations. Experience in other courts has shown that referrals from court personnel will increase over time.

PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE CHILDREN'S CENTER

In a building where the business of life can be pretty gloomy, the Center... is a place of joy and opportunity for children who may never have had toys of their own, teachers to attend to their care, comfort and developmental needs and a safe haven from what are too often difficult lives. As the Commission moves forward to implement the service connection piece of the multi-year plan, the Center will also be a place where critical connections to essential services will take place, providing even greater opportunities for children and families.⁶³

Ann B. Siegel, Counsel
The Chief Judge of the State of New York

The director of the Children's Center and her staff believe that the program meets its central objectives and CSSP's observations also suggest that the Children's Center is meeting its goals. In addition to a primary goal of removing children from courtrooms, the program provides children with several opportunities they would otherwise not have. They are exposed to a variety of new materials, activities and potential skills through participation in an early childhood environment. Children also get the chance to interact with peers. They can learn new coping skills as they separate from their parent(s). They can release some of their negative emotions through play. One of the program's strengths is the diversity of materials found in the room, displayed so children can select them independently. Staff are also skilled in keeping children busy while at the Center and moving them from one activity to the next. The Children's Center also allows court officers to conduct their work in a less disruptive environment, enabling them to process cases more efficiently.

The Children's Center that serves Manhattan Civil, Criminal and Housing Court had been open seven months at the time of the CSSP observation. As the program develops over time, it will confront various developmental challenges common to every court-based child care program. Children's Center staff identified five areas of ongoing work:

- *Building even greater collaborations between the center and the courts.* Recognizing the problems caused by the presence of children, the center was greeted with tremendous enthusiasm by many in the court. Perhaps because of the relatively short duration of the service, the center has not become enough of a fixture in the courthouse so that court employees always remember that it is available to families. Staff reported feeling that they need more support from court personnel in terms of making referrals to the Center and posting signs around the court.
- *Meeting the ongoing funding challenge.* The program's operating budget is almost entirely devoted to staff salaries and essential supplies. Like programs elsewhere, the shoestring fiscal situation challenges their ability to provide equipment to enhance the program. For instance, staff indicated they would like to introduce a computer and sand/water table into the classroom.

- *Engaging families who can be mistrustful of government bureaucracy.* This theme was also mentioned by staff at other court-based child care centers. Often, parents who must appear in court are suspicious of proffered assistance. While the center is not itself part of the systems that have led to this suspicious response, its location and function make it vulnerable to parental distrust. It can be particularly difficult to make strides with families who are hostile and resistant and, in addition, facing such consuming problems as extreme poverty or homelessness.
- *Managing surges and lulls in daily utilization.* The center's newness and the age restrictions may contribute to unpredictable utilization. While mornings are generally the busiest time for center utilization, the program is filled to capacity during certain periods and empty during others.
- *Managing parent-child separations.* Staff and parents often have to deal with the uncertainty of how children will react when the parent leaves them in the care of the Center's staff.

The program is optimistic about its future. In the short-term, they would like to expand the center to meet the needs of school-aged children and to serve more families. In addition, they are working with the Commission to hire a generic worker to help provide families with connections to WIC, health care and other vital services. In the long-term, they hope the program will help families feel more comfortable and positive about their interchanges in the court.

CALIFORNIA: THE EDMUND D. EDELMAN CHILDREN'S COURT IN LOS ANGELES

OVERVIEW

The Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court is solely dedicated to handling the child abuse and neglect cases for Los Angeles County. With 46,000 children under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court, the Edelman Children's Court has a bigger caseload than most states. The Edelman Children's Court, architecturally designed and outfitted to calm and console children, offers two key programs for the children who spend time there: Free Arts for Abused Children and Shelter Care. Free Arts for Abused Children offers an ongoing series of supervised arts projects in the public waiting areas of the court; any child present in the waiting areas is welcome to participate in the Free Arts activities. The Department of Children and Family Services Shelter Care is a large child care center for children in foster care who are at the court because their cases are scheduled for hearings.

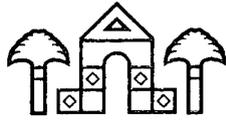
The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) receives approximately 9,000 to 10,000 telephone calls monthly to the 24 hour Child Abuse Hot Line regarding suspected physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and/or neglect, or exploitation. Of that number, 6,000 to 7,500 referrals require an in-person, face to face contact to determine the children's needs for protection and safety. In a large number of cases, however, when children are endangered and there is no reasonable means to protect them in their own homes, DCFS is required by law to initiate legal action to remove them from their homes. The Edelman Children's Court only becomes involved in DCFS cases when the Department takes legal action to protect a child. Typically cases remain open between one and five years, although almost half the cases closed in 1991 had been active between five and nine years.⁶⁴ Ninety seven (97) percent of the children seen in court will spend some period of time in foster care during their tenure as clients of DCFS.⁶⁵

SHELTER CARE; COURT-BASED CHILD CARE FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

Shelter Care is a program of the Department of Children and Family Services. DCFS operates the program so that the children in its custody can be present for their legal proceedings. It serves between 1,000 and 1,500 children each month⁶⁶, or about 70 children each day.⁶⁷ In an expansive suite of rooms designed as a child care center, Shelter Care's 29 staff members provide care and supervision for as many as 150 children between the ages of four and 18 years. All the children who spend time in Shelter Care are in the custody of the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and reside in a private foster home or one of several congregate care facilities. They only come to court if a hearing pertinent to their case is on the docket. The philosophy of the Court and DCFS holds that children should be present at hearings that will decide their future. It is also the only time the bench officer can see the children without arranging a special conference.

FREE ARTS FOR ABUSED CHILDREN; AN ARTS ENRICHMENT PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN AND THEIR PARENTS

Many of the children whose cases are handled at the Edelman Children's Court live with their parents or have been placed with relatives, and so, when they come to court, spend time in the large, comfortably appointed waiting areas on the second, third, and fourth floors where the courtrooms are located. Each waiting room includes a number of child-sized tables and chairs where, for two hours in the morning and another two hours in the afternoon, volunteers set up arts and crafts activities for any child who wants to participate. Coordinated by a nonprofit organization called Free Arts for Abused Children, the volunteers work in teams of two to six, demonstrating the use of the materials; assisting children who need help with scissors, glue or another tool; and re-supplying the tables for new children.



We the Children

This mural is composed of 36 self portraits produced by youth in the County's Dependency system. It hangs on display in the Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court as a reminder of who this courthouse was built to serve — the children.

Theodoric, 16 Paul, 13					Shamsid, 15 Sam, 7
Irene, 14 Christina, 15					Mark Denise, 15
Greg Kaysia, 16					Evan, 5 Jon, 14
Shadrick Candice, 13					Aaron Jason, 13
Susan, 6 Jeffrey					Linda, 11 Pam, 8
Kevin, 17 Cassandra, 13					Lawrence, 17 Deshawn, 15
David, 10 Adolfo, 15					John Yolanda, 14
Chris, 14 Anthony, 13					Jackie, 17 Alene, 10
Martha Ronny					Angelica, 8 Sheri, 18

THE COURT

Los Angeles County covers 4,083 square miles and includes 56 school districts. There are nine million people living in the county, in communities as dissimilar as Pasadena and Venice, Santa Monica and Whittier. It is racially and culturally diverse, with significant African-American, Mexican-American, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Filipino, and Native American groups. Sitting on a hill that overlooks the San Gabriel Valley and the Long Beach and Santa Monica Freeways, the Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court is five miles from downtown Los Angeles, in Monterey Park. The Edelman Children's Court handles almost all^k the child abuse and neglect cases involving the children of Los Angeles County. The six story edifice contains 25^l courtrooms where arraignments, detention hearings, pretrial resolution conferences, trials, disposition hearings, judicial reviews, permanency planning hearings, and other judicial procedures are carried out. The volume of business is high with an average of 41.76 matters per day per courtroom.⁶⁸

During three and a half hours of observations in courtrooms, 26 children attended 12 of the 23 hearings that took place during that time period. Eighteen of the children came to the courtroom with their parents or other adults; eight were brought in by Department of Children and Family Services staff or a court-appointed special advocate. The majority of the children (15) were between the ages of six and 12 years and five were between 13 and 18. Because there is no legal mandate to bring children to court who are under the age of four, only three were younger than three years. The bench officer spoke to children in four of the cases. Three of those interchanges involved the presentation of teddy bears to the children.^m In just one instance did any of the children make enough noise to be audible over the proceedings.

HISTORY OF THE EDMUND D. EDELMAN CHILDREN'S COURT

With a caseload that necessitated a full time judge for the first time in 1974, the number of LA County's dependency cases continued to escalate. Additional permanent space for dependency court was found in the Los Angeles Criminal Courts Building in 1977. Children said that the Criminal Courthouse made them feel bad, "like I killed someone," or "like a criminal."⁶⁹ Psychologist Carolyn M. Newberger explains, "A child who has already been traumatized is much more susceptible to additional harm from an experience like going to court than another child would be...When they can be made more comfortable, emotionally and physically, they are spared greater harm, and they can be more effective witnesses."⁷⁰

When judges, child psychologists, and social service agency staff began advocating the concept of a child friendly courthouse in the 1970s, County Supervisor Edmund D. Edelman began lobbying for such an institution. Initially approved as early as 1978, funding did not become available until 1987. A Children's Court Design Committee was established in 1988 with representation from the many public agencies that would work in the court. The committee worked with the architect and child design consultant to develop a building that simultaneously comforted children and impressed parents with the gravity of their situation: "The court experience must begin the healing process; not add to the trauma...Children must be nurtured, supported and made to feel important and worthwhile. They should leave the Court having had a positive experience with adults. While they may not fully recover for years from their child abuse experience, the Courthouse environment and programs should begin the recovery process."⁷¹ Richard Martinez, Assistant Dependency Administrator said, "the end result was a compromise but one everyone feels good about."⁷²

Shelter Care design reflected the committee's desire to change children's attitudes about the court. "Shelter Care set the tone for the entire court experience; it is one of the most important child environments in the Courthouse facility."⁷³ In the Criminal Courts Building, before the Edelman Children's Court was built, while waiting to appear in court, the children were confined to three small rooms dominated by a television. Although the staff offered games, crafts, and reading materials, there was very little space to do anything meaningful.

The dependency court remained in the increasingly overcrowded Criminal Courts Building until July 1992 when the move to the Edelman Children's Court was completed. On a 4.2 acre site, the \$59.7 million building took seven months to design and 18 months to build.⁷⁴

Dependency Court Administrator Charlene Saunders said her greatest satisfaction is "the way the building is fulfilling its intent. You see validations of what children's court should be. It has the space employees need to do their work... People in the system feel valued...The Court validates everyone as coming together; we all want to make it work."⁷⁵

SHELTER CARE

The goals of the Shelter Care Program are to have a beneficial effect on the developing child through a choice of activities, as well as, to decrease the trauma of the court environment experience. The play area provides a safe place for age appropriate activities, free from questions or interviews. Small attorney interview rooms are available across from the family visiting rooms. These rooms provide the child a confidential place to talk, without distractions. Staff provide emotional support and a renewing sense of positive self-esteem. Through every aspect of the Shelter Care experience, children receive the

^k At the Lancaster Courthouse, dependency cases involving families who live in the Antelope and Santa Clarita Valleys are heard two days each week. It was opened in July 1993 to save families living in the farthest reaches of LA County from the long trip to Monterey Park.

^l Although the Court contains 25 courtrooms only 17 are currently in use.

^m Comfort for Court Kids was started in 1991 to distribute stuffed animals to children to help address their emotional needs while in dependency court.

message that they are nurtured, supported, and respected. Listening staff share concerns of the children with the supervisor to take action on behalf of the child. It is the intention of DCFS to provide an environment, staff, and program where children can begin to re-establish positive, trusting relationships with caring authority figures. Through a carefully designed environment, program, caring adults, and management policy, the Shelter Care Program can make a significant contribution to the child's healing process.⁷⁶

Gail McFarlane-Sosa
Supervisor
DCFS Shelter Care Program

Shelter Care is unique among the court-based child care programs described in this report. It is far larger than any other program, serving as many as 150 children at one time, and because of its size and the concentration of resources, is able to offer a much wider array of activities and events. The suite of rooms that constitutes the Shelter Care program includes a separate Primary Care Area for children from four to 11 years, another set of rooms for the exclusive use of adolescents 12 to 18 years old, and a shared outdoor play yard. Access between the Primary and Adolescent Care Areas is limited to prevent victimization of the younger children. When siblings come to Shelter Care, the older child is allowed to visit with younger brothers and sisters in the Primary Care Area.

Children are greeted at their foster home by the Shelter Care driver as early as 7:00 AM. The vans are driven into a secure underground parking area. Children are then escorted through an open air passageway restricted for security use which feeds directly into the Shelter Care area. At Shelter Care the children are checked in and invited to explore. An orientation is held for new children around 8:30.

Children are monitored by staff assigned to various activity areas. Using a walkie-talkie, staff radio the child's movement from one activity area to the person monitoring the child's intended destination. Staff assignment to activity areas is based in part on the expressed interests of the staff themselves. They are required to design one lesson plan each week for use with the children who present themselves at the activity area. Primarily however the areas are set up for independent exploration by the children.

Physical design: Visitors to the Court pass a security check point with metal detectors and very vigilant guards; a small pair of nail scissors at the bottom of the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) observer's purse, overlooked in several other courthouses, was found and removed before entrance to the building was permitted. The lobby of the building is a well lit, spacious area with a two story atrium. Facing visitors as they enter is a 36 panel mural, rising well up into the atrium. The panels are the self portraits of 36 children, five to 18 years old, who are somehow involved in LA County's dependency system. Walking directly forward, after passing security, visitors come to an eight foot high partition, flanked by two wooden palm trees. Behind that screen, there is a locked door with a small window, where visitors to Shelter Care present themselves.

Consistent with the Department's primary mission —keeping children safe— Shelter Care is a secure area. Regular access to Shelter Care is limited to employees of DCFS who carry keys. Once the receptionist, who sits behind a counter, uses a buzzer to unlock the door, visitors can see a series of small glass-fronted rooms on the other side of the reception counter. The rooms are decorated like small living rooms with comfortable chairs, sofas, and pictures on the walls. Family visits take place in these rooms, some of which are large enough to comfortably accommodate eight people. The receptionist screens visitors and, using the walkie-talkie carried by every Shelter Care staff person, summons the appropriate person.

Shelter Care was elegantly designed and equipped through generous contributions from private citizens, corporations, and foundations, totalling over one million dollars. Visitors entering through the reception area, pass behind the receptionist and through a door into the Primary Care Area. On the other side of the door there are carpeted risers to the left with bead mazes and various kinds of building blocks set out for children to use. To the right is a small theater where the younger children watch videos or take part in theater arts activities led by volunteers from the Los Angeles School of Music and Arts, The Music Center, a professional mime, and others. Presentations on safety are led by the California Highway Patrol and Monterey Park Fire Department. Health presentations are offered by groups like the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association.

The theater is a square room, organized like a baseball diamond, with doors at first and third bases, carpeted bleachers around the outfield and a large screen video set up at home plate. Scattered generously over the bleachers are pillows of various sizes and colors. Every day after lunch the children spend some time in the theater (half an hour to an hour) watching a movie. The day of the CSSP visit, the children were watching *Mighty Ducks II*. Because the children may be called to court at any time, naps are not possible. Sitting in comfortable positions in a darkened room is the closest approximation to an afternoon nap the children can get.

Passing the theater entrance, continuing through the block area, the next two areas are devoted to arts and crafts tables where children are invited to make things like felt puppets and picture frames. Creative materials like markers, water color paints, buttons, glue and paper are regularly available as well. In a series of small alcoves on the right children can experiment with computer games, play with the impressive array of Barbie paraphernalia, or read in the book corner. Partitions provide the children with a sense of privacy but, at only three feet in height, permit easy visual access for the adults. In the science center, children can experiment with computer learning games or make banners, experiment with science through plants, microscopes, magnets, or watch the fish in a large tank.

A little further on, on the right, the dramatic play area is built on an ascending ramp that circles around into a two room house with child size furniture. Adults can look in through the door or windows. To the left are children's bathrooms. Straight ahead, built into a partition, are cubbies for the children to use while they are in the Courthouse. A wide opening to the right of the cubbies shows an open expanse of carpeted space with a Nintendo set up on the right, a checkers table, ping pong table, and table hockey available for the children to use together or in the company of a staff person. The wall to the left divides the Primary Care Area from the eating area that the primary and adolescent programs share. It is covered with velcro and many brightly colored bean bags hang from the wall in readiness for a game of striking the target, tic tac toe, or any other tossing game the children fancy.

The eating area offers a morning and afternoon snack. For lunch the children are offered two entrees. They have the choice of the meal they would like to eat. All of Shelter Care eats together, the young children, adolescents and staff. During good weather, children have the opportunity to eat outside, as well. A nutrition committee attempts to provide nutritious meals that the children will eat. Sometimes it is difficult to manage both. The food service provides one special menu monthly. For example, Thanksgiving was a week early in Shelter Care, complete with all the trimmings.

Continuing the straight path that began at the entrance to Shelter Care, the Primary Care Area ends at floor-to-ceiling windows looking out on a large enclosed playground. A wide corridor to the right houses the offices of the Shelter Care managers and the first aid/infant care room.

The playground is paved in parts and grass covered in others. Although enclosed, the large mural, bright colors, trees, and planters suggest a spaciousness greater than the actual space. A huge checkerboard laid out in the center of the enclosure is sometimes set up to permit a game of chess with two feet tall chess pieces. The climbing structure is made up of brightly colored tubes. A smaller play structure for younger children is set up as a house and store. There are tubes for crawling, and a stand for water play. A number of tall vertical poles are set up to serve as supports for creative play structures.

An equal amount of indoor space is devoted to the Adolescent Care Area. The more grown-up version of the arts and crafts area has drafting tables and professional art supplies to work with. The adolescents can utilize materials ranging from crayons to air brushes. The theater presents videos to entertain and encourage, as well as staff presentations about the Independent Living Program sponsored by DCFS. The game area sports pool, table tennis, Nintendo, pinball, and board games. The living room keeps casual reading materials, like newspapers and magazines, available. Group games and latch hook rugs are also offered in this area. The library is warm and comfortable, with books that can aid a student in completing a homework task or share information about a favorite hobby or interest. Storytellers, presenters from Cabrillo Marine Aquarium, and others use the library to gather adolescents for unique presentations. The dance and aerobic area enables the adolescents to listen to music and physically express themselves through movement. Weekly a class of hip hop dancing is offered. Space is available for a proposed radio/TV recording studio. Equipment donations and staffing are a future goal.

A First Aid room has equipment for minor emergencies. It also has preparations for the occasional infant that is detained directly from court. Formula, baby food, diapers, and car seats are ready to meet the need. Emergency clothing is available for the children who experience car sickness on the way to court, have accidents, are dressed in ill fitting clothing, or want to wear shorts under their dresses while playing on the outdoor equipment.

Children's Activities: During the CSSP visit, no one played in the block area. In the science area, children were most interested in using the computer. The staff person assigned to the area gave patient instructions to the eight year old girl who was loading a game. While children played independently in the play house and with the Barbies, no one used the book corner. One staff person, stationed at the checkers table, played with a few children.

In the arts and crafts area, three children were making brightly colored hair ribbons to give to family members for Christmas. The teacher's use of the materials enabled the children to make finished products they felt good about. One child went from watching to creating quite easily; another was less self assured but received the encouragement he needed to proceed.

Every year Santa Claus visits Shelter Care. Santa is a court administrator. When he asks children what they want for Christmas, many simply say they want to go home. He responds with compassion to those children. The Pasadena Junior Women's Club donated funds to purchase Polaroid film for each child to have his or her picture taken with Santa. The pictures taken during Santa's visit are placed in decorative cards or frames made by the child as a special memory.

Two boys, ages nine and ten, and a nine year old girl, agreed to talk with the CSSP observer about Shelter Care while they ate their lunch. They all said they liked it. When asked why, the girl said, "I get to play and see my mom and see the judge. I got a teddy bear." The ten year old said, "I like playing outside." The nine year old boy gave blanket approval: "it's fun...everything."

Going to court: When children are required to leave Shelter Care for their hearing, a Shelter Care staff person often accompanies them. Sometimes the child's attorney or a CASA volunteer will escort the child to and from court. Children travel from Shelter Care to a secured elevator that issues directly into the private corridor behind the courtrooms. As they walk down the hall, the judges' chambers run along one side of the hall and the courtrooms on the other.

Each courtroom includes a small antechamber with toys and other children's accoutrements so that children can wait in comfort

until their cases are called. These courtrooms are smaller than typical courtrooms and less imposing. Once in the courtroom children can look to the right to find the court clerks seated at a nearby desk, and, just behind the clerks, by slightly raising their eyes the children can look at the hearing officer. The judges' benches are 12 inches above the floor rather than the regular 18 inches, so the child can more easily see the bench officer.

Facing the children as they enter is a semicircular table at which their parents, all lawyers, interpreters, and other parties to the case, sit. Other family members and the few visitors who are permitted sit on a bench positioned behind the litigants' table and a low barrier. Parents enter through the public entrance which is almost opposite the child's entrance and directly faces the bench. If the parent is shackled, the Court Officer will wait until the parent is seated before calling in the child. If the child must testify, the witness chair is positioned so that the attorney can shelter the child from eye contact with the parent a child may be asked to discuss. On the bench beside the witness chair are a number of stuffed animals.

Parent/child visitation: Sometimes the bench officer will order a supervised visit between the child and his or her parents. The child returns to Shelter Care with the staff person who brought him or her to the courtroom. The parent uses the public elevators to reach the receptionist. Once signed in, the receptionist radios Shelter Care staff to bring the child out for the visit. The visits are monitored by Shelter Care staff who sit outside the open door while the visit is ongoing. The visits can crystallize the pain the child is feeling. One young teen, after an apparently enjoyable visit with his mother, kicked the door inside the Shelter Care area, and angrily said, "she loves her drugs more than she loves me."

The reception area is also where court-ordered reunification takes place. The CSSP observer witnessed a father and his two young daughters greeting each other with obvious pleasure. Once their paper work was complete, the receptionist hit the button that unlocked the door separating the two girls from their father. He crouched to hug them and then, standing, took each by the hand.

The Shelter Care drivers leave as soon as all the children entrusted to them have finished in court. This can be as early as noon or as late as 5:30. Departure is sometimes difficult for the children. One eight year old girl, massaging the bear the judge had given her, sat alone in the table games area, crying quietly for several minutes before the final arrangements were made for the trip back to her foster home.

Staffing: Shelter Care includes 29 staff. There are 13 transportation workers and two Supervising Transportation Workers who are responsible for children from the time they are picked up until they are returned to their foster homes. The additional staff who care for the children while they are in Shelter Care are called Group Supervisor IIs; there are nine of them. Together with two social workers and the administrative staff they account for all 29 positions. Entry level salaries depend on the specific position and range from \$29,484 to \$38,712 per year. Five of these job categories require at least two years of college and two years related experience. The three most senior positions require a Bachelor's degree or more.

All staff are expected to participate in the care of children during their stay in Shelter Care. Because some of the employees were hired as drivers rather than as child care staff, the educational director has to work very closely with them to develop the teaching aspect of their jobs. The advent of regular supervision and in-service training, and the addition of new staff with previous experience teaching children, have contributed to improvement in the general quality of the adult/child interactions.

The work of the Shelter Care staff is augmented by the efforts of volunteers who currently provide activities like dramatic improvisation on a regular basis. Volunteers include professional actors, musicians, dancers, and artists, as well as 20 college students from a number of local colleges. The Los Angeles campus of California State University is located across the freeway from the Children's Court. A partnership relationship has been developed. Cal State students receive field work hours for participating in the Shelter Care Program.

Shelter Care is not considered a child care center by the county regulatory agency. As a result it does not hold such a license.

FUNDING

Shelter Care is a department of the County's Department of Children and Family Services. The DCFS budget covers Shelter Care staff salaries, facility maintenance, and major equipment and supplies. The CiVIC Foundation, established during the Court's construction, raised significantly more money than the outfitting of Shelter Care required. For special projects, Shelter Care can apply to the Foundation for funds. In addition, the director is a skilled fund raiser, with much success in winning donations from local merchants, corporations, and private individuals interested in specific features of the Shelter Care program.

FUTURE PLANS

The Director of DCFS Court Services, of which Shelter Care is a part, has requested a specific budget allocation for training Shelter Care staff. A proposed training curriculum was presented with the request for funds.

The Shelter Care Program Director hopes to increase the sophistication of the Shelter Care curriculum for children. She continuously reaches out to new volunteer specialists to expand the range of experiences offered to the children. As new employees are hired to work with the children in Shelter Care, she expects to hire people with previous teaching experience and training in fields related to the care and education of children.

FREE ARTS FOR ABUSED CHILDREN

The latest weapons against child abuse. [ballet slippers, a violin, pen and paper, paint and brushes, scissors and construction paper, a mask, a xylophone, puppets, crayons] Funny what happens when we teach abused children how to draw, write and sing. They end up learning something even more important. How to heal.⁷⁷

The second program for children at the Edelman Children's Court is Free Arts for Abused Children. Free Arts serves children who have come to court with their parents or other adult guardians. In the waiting areas on the three floors where the courtrooms are located, volunteers offer arts and crafts, drama, music, and storytelling to any child or adult who cares to participate. Smaller and less formal in nature than Shelter Care, it nevertheless provides restless children with an opportunity to have fun.⁷

HISTORY

Free Arts for Abused Children (FAAC) is a non-profit California corporation established in 1977 to introduce creative arts to children who are the victims of abuse. Working primarily in shelters, residential facilities and group homes, volunteers engage abused children in a wide range of arts activities. Program literature states, "FAAC volunteers in dance, drama, writing, music, painting, sculpting and film increase the child's self-worth and build character by unlocking the child's imagination. Children participating in this ongoing program learn new ways to channel emotion, release anger and come to know the meaning of success."⁷⁸

The idea for the Courthouse program came about through exposure to another of FAAC's programs. A member of the Courthouse Design Committee said, "We were worried we'd designed space for children's activities on the public floors without any certainty what we could do with them... Judge Boland [the presiding judge at the time] and I met with Free Arts about something else... Now it is one of the most valuable pieces we have; it really shows families we care."⁷⁹

Physical design: The Free Arts tables are centrally located in the waiting areas of each floor. The public floors are shaped like isosceles triangles. The two corridors of courtrooms form a V with a bank of windows joining the V into a triangle. The design of the waiting area subdivides it into two major sections. The use of structural support columns, furniture placement, and angled partitions further subdivide each area into smaller alcoves. An interior series of benches and chairs border the spacious corridors leading to the courtrooms. Shoulder high partitions separate this series of small waiting alcoves from the larger area where Free Arts activities take place. The larger waiting area commands a spectacular view of the surrounding hills through the ceiling high picture windows that occupy one entire wall.

The use of carpets, upholstered chairs, and partitions effectively reduces the noise level to a murmur at almost all times. During two and a half hours of observation, seated in three separate locations, the CSSP observer heard the television only once even though there were four television monitors within her sight lines at all times. The noise drew her attention because it was a blast of what sounded like gunfire. It turned out to be TinTin and two groups of combatants engaged in a gun battle with semi-automatic rifles. Every other time a television monitor was glimpsed, the shows appeared to feature Muppet-type characters or imaginary cartoon figures. The court officers have access to remote control boxes that can be used to alter the volume of the individual monitors, but the programming is controlled from a television set in the administrative offices.

Children's activities: The volunteers approach their work in a number of ways. "Some of them talk and sing with the kids. One volunteer sits down while the kids are coloring and begins to do the activity."⁸⁰ Some volunteers utilize the suggested activities designed during their monthly meetings with the Volunteer Coordinator. Pipe cleaner candy canes, imaginatively decorated Christmas trees made of construction paper, and Santa Claus paper dolls were the focus of the sessions observed by CSSP staff. Other volunteers design their own activities. One sets out various children's books and reads them aloud as children bring them to her. Another, who is getting her Master's degree in drama therapy, does improvisation and drama activities with the children. With her they play a variety of games. Sometimes she reads them a story and then the children act it out. On one occasion, one child was a washing machine and all the rest were the clothes being washed. During the summer of 1994, a guitarist came regularly to play for the children and sing with them. About once a month the Buddy Collette Trio gives a concert in the waiting area. Many of the children have never heard live music before this experience and are awed by the close proximity of a saxophone, bass violin, and clarinet.

During one CSSP observation, there were two children seated at the Free Arts table the minute the Free Arts volunteers appeared. Other children quickly began to edge toward the tables. Within 15 minutes there were 11 children and five adults engaged in decorating paper Christmas trees. Five minutes later four more children were sitting down. Although the volunteers appeared not to say much, they worked closely with the children, providing scissors, replenishing ornament makings, and furnishing new trees as children seated themselves. On another day, a woman turned to an 11 year old girl she was waiting with and encouraged her to go to the Free Arts table, saying, "it will make the time pass."

The children appear to enjoy themselves. After the Volunteer Coordinator told a child that her art work looked "really neat," the child said, "I never heard anybody tell me so much how much they like my things."⁸¹ The Volunteer Coordinator said that children let the Free Arts volunteers know they like the program in four ways: "telling [me] or volunteers directly how happy it makes them; running to the tables when volunteers approach with art supplies; smiling & participating voluntarily (they don't have to be at the art table); and wanting to come back to court to make art!"⁸²

ⁿ To contact the program directly: Barbara Lashenick, Executive Director, Free Arts for Abused Children, 11605 West Pico Boulevard, 2nd floor, Los Angeles, CA 90064, (213)479-1212.

Free Arts for Abused Children welcomes parents to participate in the activities they are offering to the children. Often, however, parents will sit at a little distance from the arts and crafts tables, watching the children while chatting with another adult. Some parents sit down with their child at the table, busily creating their own art project, or assisting their child. Parents must remain nearby throughout the Free Arts activity period since Free Arts does not provide child care. During the two and a half hours of observation, three separate sessions were viewed. The interactions with parents, observed from several feet away, appeared to be quite informal and to revolve solely around the activity at hand.

Staffing: The Courthouse Children’s Program is managed by a Courthouse Volunteer Coordinator who recruits, trains, and schedules volunteers; and supervises the design of the activities the volunteers carry out. She holds a Bachelor’s degree in Art and is herself a practicing artist. She oversees the work of some 85 volunteers who vary tremendously in education and background. Although her first language is English, she speaks Spanish fluently. This is a great asset since about 50% of the volunteers speak Spanish more easily than English and some speak no English at all. The volunteers are LA County residents, and include an international group, coming from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Peru, Germany, and other countries.

The volunteers, working in teams of two to six, set out the materials for the day’s activities just before 10:00 or 1:00. Staffing permits Free Arts tables to operate morning (from 10:00 to 12:00) and afternoon (from 1:00 to 3:00), on the third and fourth floors, and sometimes in the smaller fifth floor waiting room. In addition to setting out paste, feathers, pipe cleaners, construction paper, ribbon, buttons, markers, scissors, colored fluff balls, and other assorted materials for the session’s arts and crafts project, the volunteers provide coloring books and crayons at some of the tables.

The volunteers overcome many personal hurdles to participate. Many of the volunteers come from some distance away. One woman takes three buses to get from South Central LA to the courthouse, a trip that with good connections takes her an hour and a half. Many of them have personal experiences like the families appearing in dependency court. Many are immigrants to the U.S. who are not at ease with the different routines of life in this country. One of the volunteers is an older woman, a retired teacher, with a visual disability that restricts her to a darkened room much of the time. Although this limits the amount of time she can spend with the children, she assists with materials preparation from her home. Describing the children she said, “I don’t want to know their stories. Just what I see is enough to break your heart. The children don’t care what the activity is; they just want to participate.” In response to “the children are lucky to have you,” she shook her head. “I’m the lucky one,” she said.

The Volunteer Coordinator, like many of the people employed at the Edelman Children’s Court, is a warm, compassionate person. By supporting the volunteers as they find their way, by accepting what they bring, the Volunteer Coordinator believes that Free Arts helps them gain confidence. Their volunteer work gives them experience with leadership. “When you let them be, you find that they have something to give to the children... Volunteering allows them to bring out their own talents.”⁸³

The Volunteer Coordinator has a gift for making the people she works with feel valued and respected. It is an unusual experience in the lives of many of the volunteers. When Free Arts hosted a volunteer recognition event in Beverly Hills, a large number of the Courthouse volunteers would not have been able to attend had the Coordinator not arranged a car pool. The volunteers soaked up the appreciation, taking photographs and carefully reading the citations issued by Free Arts.

FUNDING

Free Arts for Abused Children is managed from an administrative office in Los Angeles. The administrative office coordinates fund raising from a range of private sources. The Courthouse program receives funding from Los Angeles County through the Children’s Court Parking Trust Fund and the Civic Foundation that covers the Volunteer Coordinator’s salary, office space, telephone, and the supplies budget. Professional artists and musicians donate their time. FAAC and foreign language interpreters also spearhead in-house fund raising efforts to provide free lunches for families who come to their initial court hearing unprepared to purchase lunch.

FREE ARTS’ EFFECT ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Two sources of information attest to the program’s effectiveness: the Volunteer Coordinator and a sample of parents who have used the program. The Volunteer Coordinator asserts its usefulness in much the same terms that the Dependency Court Administrator did. She said, “The benefits are far reaching for both children and families. Immediately, it allows both a chance to relax and do something entertaining. For children, it also provides them a place to feel safe being children (playing, creating, laughing) in a stressful situation. For parents/caregivers, it provides a chance to rest (if they don’t join in) or a time to do something positive and creative with their children, if they do participate. Hopefully, we are also conveying the idea of positive communication and outlets through the arts.”⁸⁴

She believes its biggest benefit to children is having “the opportunity to know that someone cares about them, for just who they are. Our volunteers provide unconditional support of their creative efforts and this is an important part of the program. When children find out they are unpaid volunteers, they are surprised and pleased.”⁸⁵

Parents’ reactions to the program vary. During the CSSP observation some parents seemed genuinely pleased to receive the creations their children carried over to them. One parent however, called his two sons away from the table saying, “leave that stuff. Come on, let’s go.” The boys ran after him without complaint.

Parents were asked by the Coordinator to complete a short questionnaire about Free Arts jointly designed by CSSP and Free Arts. Nineteen responses were available to CSSP at the time this report was written, 14 in English and five in Spanish. Representing the

caretakers of 35 children, their responses were on the whole enthusiastically positive. Two thirds (66%) of the respondents had taken advantage of Free Arts activities on two or three previous visits to the Court. Sixteen (16) percent were experiencing the program for the first time and another 16% had used the program five or more times. In general families had only recently encountered the program; over half (53%) had used the program for the first time between June and December 1994.^o Parents reported bringing children from seven months to 16 years with them on the day they filled out the survey. Over one fourth (28%) were younger than three years old. Over half (57%) were between the ages of three and six. The rest, ranging in age from seven to sixteen, accounted for the balance of the children discussed in the survey responses.

Parents were asked four questions about the effect of Free Arts on their ability to cope with the legal matters that brought them to court. The survey responses suggest that the Free Arts program has one important effect: it makes it easier for parents to focus on the business that brought them to court. Two thirds (65%) of the adults said it improved their ability to concentrate on their business at the court. There was far less belief that Free Arts had any effect in the other three areas. Between two thirds and three quarters of the parents said that Free Arts had no effect on their ability to give testimony (73%), to appear for their scheduled hearing (63%), or to respond to requests from court personnel (71%).

Every other question elicited overwhelmingly positive responses. There was almost unanimous agreement (93%) that the Free Arts program lowered the stress associated with going to court. Every caretaker was very satisfied with the care their children received. Over 90% of the parents could tell by their children's smiles, words, or proud display of finished activities, that they had enjoyed Free Arts. One mother said, "my daughter was quite excited she made something on her own."

Another parent said, Free Arts "gives nervous and restless children a controlled outlet for their energy." In the words of other parents, Free Arts "gives the children something to do," with the consequence that it "keeps children entertained," and "happy." One parent said of the volunteers: "volunteer have such good ideas and doing swell."

One of the program's limitations is its inability to follow up with the children and families who take part in Free Arts activities after they leave the courthouse. According to the Volunteer Coordinator, "there are limitations on how much we can provide for the children as we only see them once (and randomly thereafter for court appearances.) There is no way to do follow up or ensure that we extend the type of creative communication we offer into their home life."⁸⁶ The survey provided some encouraging data in this regard. Almost half (47%) of the adults who completed the survey said that the art program gave them ideas about activities they would like to try with their children at home.

FUTURE PLANS

The Volunteer Coordinator wants to increase the number of volunteers in order to enable Free Arts to expand services to include regular reading and music opportunities for children. They also plan to disseminate information relevant to parents. They would like to put together a handout to give parents ideas for art activities they could do with their children at home.

Recently, Free Arts began a program for toddlers and their parents. Using a utility room located on each floor where families can go to eat and talk around a table, Free Arts has developed a clever travel kit that allows the rooms to be converted into carpeted play rooms for children too young to get much out of the Free Arts table activities but too old to remain in a stroller. They hope to recruit enough new volunteers so they can operate the play rooms on each floor each morning.

INTERAGENCY LINKAGES AT THE EDELMAN CHILDREN'S COURT

Understanding that the children and families they see at the Edelman Children's Court need a variety of services that the Court cannot provide by itself, court staff have reached out to community organizations for assistance. In February 1992, the Dependency Court Resources Committee was formed with representation from the court, the legal community, local service providers, and academia. Their ongoing goal is "to identify and address areas in which collaboration between the court and the community can create new services or, at least, remove impediments to the full utilization of existing services."⁸⁷ Several of the new services available at the Edelman Children's Court grew out of the initiative of this committee.⁸⁸

In 1993 alone the Committee paved the way for on-site assessment and triage for substance abusing parents through the Watts Health Foundation; for low cost accessible drug testing, often a requirement for substance abusing parents, through a collaborative arrangement with SmithKline/Beecham Laboratories; and for court-based assistance in expediting release of foster care and AFDC funds to families.

LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT SCHOOL-DEPENDENCY COURT LIAISON

A School-Dependency Court Liaison Counselor is employed at the court to help children living in the city of Los Angeles remain involved in appropriate schooling, whether that involves a transfer for a child whose foster placement is changing or intervention with a chronically truant child.

The first court liaison counselor position was established in 1975 to serve the Delinquency Court. But it wasn't until Judge Tucker and colleagues at the Children's Court took the initiative that a Liaison Counselor was stationed at Children's Court. Judge Tucker believed that education was part of rehabilitation. Provided by the LA Unified School District, and serving the city of Los Angeles only,

^o Only ten of the 19 people who filled out surveys gave the date of the first time they used the art program.

the counselor is a member of the Pupil Services and Attendance Department. The position is similar to what the lay person would refer to as a truant officer. In June 1994 the first Dependency Court Liaison Counselor began her work at the Edelman Children's Court. She said, "case work is what we do in our job. I'm working with kids other people have given up on."⁸⁹

Described in its brochure as "the **link** between the schools and the courts," the Counselor expedites the processing of transfer requests for children who appear in the Edelman Children's Court. She assists children, families, foster parents, court personnel, and Department of Children and Family Services social workers as they try to provide continuous school placement for children. She makes sure necessary information is communicated between the school, DCFS, and the court. She assists LA Unified School District employees who must testify in court and she testifies on her own cases and as an expert in matters pertaining to school policy and children's academic reports.

In many instances, when children in foster care are forced to move, the records that permit their transfer from one school to another are hard to locate. Because of the difficulty in producing birth certificates and transcripts, such children often experience periods when, too far from their old school and not yet enrolled in a new one, they cannot attend school at all.

Shelter Care asked for her assistance with an eighth grade girl, who, after a successful year in a special education placement in sixth grade, had been chronically truant throughout seventh grade. For some reason, she had been placed in a regular classroom where her sense of accomplishment was so badly jeopardized she just stopped going to school. With the intervention of the Liaison Counselor, an eighth grade placement was found for her in a special education program. Because the Counselor understood the School District's transfer mechanism so well, she was able to tell the staff at the District administrative office how to expeditiously manipulate the computer to produce the documentation this child needed in order to begin her eighth grade placement. If the child's social worker had attempted to achieve the same end, it would have required a much greater expenditure of time and effort on the social worker's part with a reduced chance for success.

The children in the Liaison Counselor's caseload are all too frequently in situations where their victimization has involved them in drugs, prostitution, and gangs. One sixth grade boy was in the custody of his elderly grandmother. He was completely out of her control. The judge ordered him to leave his elementary school and try junior high. The junior high sent him home to change out of the gang clothes he was wearing. Three weeks later he had not returned to school. During this period the police took him home three times. The Liaison Counselor made two appointments with his grandmother. The grandmother missed both. At the time of the CSSP visit, the Counselor was continuing her efforts to get the boy back in school.

In his case and others like it, her tactics include repeated telephone contact, home visits, and arranging compromises the children are willing to accept that ease their discomfort about returning to school. "I never let go. I keep a file called Pending. Periodically I return to the file and check on kids where I have hit a wall. I mark birthdays and call kids. I've found that birthdays are a great day for punishment if the parents are abusive. That way they don't have to buy the kid a gift. I also feed kids. They can be very nasty when they're hungry. Or I'll make them take a nap."⁹⁰

As she tries to accomplish her stated mission getting children to go to school she treats them with care and concern. Her methodology is pragmatic; if she can only get a mother to court-ordered psychiatric testing by going with her, she goes. If a boy, long truant, will only go to school for one hour at first, she takes him for the hour. During the course of our interview, she talked about many children and the course of their cases and the simple tangible efforts she made to reach out to them. Her concern for the children and her ability to find ways around the problems confronting them made it clear that she was among the very dedicated and intelligent professionals employed at the Children's Court.

INFO LINE

"The mission of INFO LINE is to strengthen the capacity of all Los Angeles County residents to improve their quality of life by securing those health and human services that will effectively address their most urgent needs."⁹¹

Info Line was the newest innovation at the time of the CSSP visit, another result of Judge Tucker's initiative. With a two month demonstration grant from CiVIC, the private foundation that equipped Shelter Care and provides operating funds for Free Arts, they opened for service on December 1, 1994. One full time Information Specialist sits in an office on the perimeter of the first floor lobby. Anyone can come in for information about a host of services available in Los Angeles County. INFO LINE's computer data base holds information about public and private services in the areas of parent education, health care, substance abuse treatment and much more. With the client's home zip code, the Information Specialist can locate the desired services in the most convenient places. In the first week, the most common requests had been for food and shelter.⁹²

WATTS HEALTH FOUNDATION AND THE HOUSE OF UHURU

Drug abuse affects approximately 80% of the families who appear at Children's Court.⁹³ Crack cocaine is the drug of choice, with amphetamines the next most popular.⁹⁴ Funded by a federal grant, the Watts Health Foundation office at the Edelman Children's Court offers assessment and referrals for treatment. Parents who are under court order to get drug treatment can learn about their options and receive assistance in finding a program that fits their circumstances. The Watts staff at the court provide case management from intake until the next court appearance. Watts staff also provide some training to court personnel about the signs and symptoms of substance abuse.

FORENSIC SCIENCE RESOURCES

Every month more than 1,300 parents are ordered to participate in drug testing or substance abuse counseling.⁹⁵ However, low cost programs are inaccessible to many county families. To respond to this need, Forensic Science Resources and Smithkline-Beecham Clinical Laboratories set up a program for parents who are required by the court to have regular drug screening. Referrals are made by attorneys and courtroom staff so that parents can receive direction to the low cost test facilities that have been set up around the county.

BIENVENIDOS FAMILY SERVICES

Bienvenidos Family Services Court-Based Support Program works with families where there is imminent risk that their children will be placed in foster care, or in instances when children will immediately be returning home from foster care. By offering a comprehensive set of services to every member of the family, Bienvenidos seeks to stabilize precarious family environments, making it safe for children to live with their parents. Bienvenidos staff working at the Children's Court complete the intake process so that services can begin immediately.

MENTAL HEALTH UNIT

The Dependency Court Mental Health Unit is a division of the LA County Department of Mental Health. The Unit has been operating in the Edelman Children's Court since July 1992, providing consultation to judicial officers, attorneys, social workers, child advocates, and others professionally involved in cases. Any child in the custody of DCFS who needs prescription medicine must have the court's approval; Mental Health Unit staff review the child's history and diagnosis before making a recommendation to the court about medicine.

Mental Health Unit staff also do some crisis intervention with parents or children who are suicidal or uncontrollably crying. They may be asked to speak with a parent who seems disoriented to determine if the parent understands where s/he is. In one case a mother with a long history of mental illness threatened to kill herself if she didn't get her children back. The Mental Health Unit staff worked with the mother, her therapist, and court staff to negotiate a compromise. The children, while not released to her, were allowed to visit with her in Shelter Care, and again over the weekend at MacClaren Children's Center where they were in foster care. In return, the mother agreed not to kill herself.

CHILD ADVOCATES OFFICE

Lucy was taken from her mother when she was two years old. That's when cocaine was discovered in her newborn baby brother's blood. Lucy's mother received drug counselling and eventually recovered her infant son. But months in MacLaren Children's Center and foster homes had left Lucy with emotional and behavioral problems that made her "too much trouble" for her mother. So Lucy's mother stopped seeing her. Lucy was five and in her third foster home when her kindergarten teacher recommended therapy. The child psychologist found an angry, anxious child functioning well below her age level. After eighteen months Lucy's longest placement yet Lucy's foster mother was on the verge of giving up. Then the court put a CASA on the case - a Court Appointed Special Advocate. And things began to look brighter for Lucy. Lucy's CASA volunteer reviewed the case record, got to know Lucy in weekly visits, and spoke at length with Lucy's foster mother, social worker, teacher, and therapist. She found a foster mother who cared for Lucy deeply, but just couldn't handle Lucy's rage. The CASA convinced Lucy's foster mother that she could learn to help Lucy control herself by attending therapy with her. The CASA recommended that the court order funding for additional therapy, and the judge agreed. Soon Lucy's behavior began to improve. Now this bright and loving little girl is about to begin the first grade. Her foster mother doesn't talk about sending Lucy away anymore. Instead, she's talking about adoption.¹¹¹

The Los Angeles County Dependency Court Child Advocates Office was one of the first such programs in the U.S. Since its inception in 1978, 400 programs have sprung up in 47 states. The Child Advocates Office at the Edelman Children's Court coordinates the work of some 270 volunteers who are called Court Appointed Special Advocates or CASAs. The Edelman Children's Court CASAs play two roles. In some cases they take on the role of Guardians Ad Litem, and in every new case, they provide general information about the court process to children in foster care who must appear in court.

CASAs talk with children in Shelter Care who have come to the court for the first time. They provide the children with an overview of what will happen during their day in court, using a photo display that depicts the courtroom. After the hearing they answer children's questions and explain what happened in court. When a CASA volunteer asked one little boy what he heard the judge say, he responded, "I don't know. He didn't say anything about me. He just talked about the minor."⁹⁷

As Guardians Ad Litem (GALs), CASA volunteers are "specifically charged with helping a child's case reach the best conclusion in the least amount of time possible."⁹⁸ As GALs, the volunteers develop close relationships with the children, becoming a predictable and loving force in the children's disrupted lives. They work with all the adults involved in a case to learn as much as possible about the child's situation and to make recommendations to the court about the child's future.

MEDIATION

Dependency Court Mediation has been included in dependency court operations since 1983. The staff come from diverse professions and include attorneys, social workers and former bench officers (referees). It is a service offered to families in the hope that some of the

problems that brought them to court can be resolved without contested hearings. "Mediation enables early resolution to accelerate the process of family reunification at the earliest possible date. Mediation attempts to bring everyone involved in the process together to resolve all of the issues, however, if this is not possible, it tries to assist in narrowing the issues for the purpose of trial."⁹⁹ Mediation can be used at any stage of the process, from adjudication through permanency planning. The mediators rely on four basic techniques: they re-frame the problems, maintain neutrality toward all parties and attorneys, balance the interests of everyone connected with the case, and demonstrate the benefit of compromise. One of the mediators said, "It may be the first and possibly the only place in the system where parents feel they're treated with respect. Since mediation is confidential, they can talk openly; they need to vent to someone connected with the system. It's been my experience that if parents are treated differently, they're going to behave differently."¹⁰⁰ In 1993, almost 3,100 cases were fully or partially settled through mediation, reducing trauma to families and saving the court time and fees.¹⁰¹

ALLIANCE FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The Alliance for Children's Rights Dependency Pilot Project "makes specially trained volunteer attorneys available to abused and neglected children who need assistance with legal issues outside the dependency court, such as medical and educational services, supplemental security income, government benefits, immigration, discrimination due to HIV-positive status, and probate matters, among other issues."¹⁰²

PROGRESS AND CHALLENGES FOR THE EDELMAN CHILDREN'S COURT

*I'd like to see us get to the point where families have the resources to deal with their problems before they get here.*¹⁰³

The day after the Edelman Children's Court opened, an article in the Los Angeles Times stated, "For all of its advantages, the new building is unlikely to do much, if anything, to solve chronic problems facing the Dependency Court system."¹⁰⁴

Specifically, the Los Angeles Times article cited an LA County Grand Jury investigative report that found that many in the judicial system view dependency court as the "bottom of the barrel." Judges do not want to be assigned to hear dependency cases and do not stay long enough to develop expertise in juvenile law. As a result most dependency courtroom bench officers are commissioners or referees. The lawyers who represent children and families do not have a set of uniform practice standards and a "significant number" submit questionably large bills. The caseload is increasing, and one of every five children who pass through dependency court end up in Juvenile Delinquency Court facing criminal charges.

While work remains to address all the Grand Jury's criticisms, the Edelman Children's Court has made significant progress in addressing these concerns in the two and one half years since the LA Times published that article. Judges are no longer in such a hurry to leave dependency court. The use of referees was reduced substantially, saving the Juvenile Court \$189,973 in the 1993 fiscal year.¹⁰⁵ In 1994, guidelines for court appointed attorneys were issued by the Los Angeles County Commission for Children's Services. Private attorney fees have been curbed through the introduction of a flat hourly rate of \$45 with savings estimated at \$2.8 million in FY93.¹⁰⁶ The use of private attorneys is decreasing through increased reliance on public service law firms.

Most importantly the staff is dedicated to providing services to families that will decrease the need for court supervision. Planning is ongoing to prepare older adolescents for independence. The hard work of the liaison for the LA County Unified School District is reducing the periods of time when relocating children are between schools, and increasing the ongoing accountability school teachers have for the children in their classes. Special efforts are directed at those children most likely to escape into juvenile delinquency. Two subcommittees of the Dependency Court Procedures Committee are working on these issues: Dependency/Delinquency Procedures and Emancipation Preparation Issues.

The Juvenile Court won the Grand County Productivity Award for its DEAR program. DEAR stands for Dependency/Delinquency Early Alert Report. The reports alert court officers and attorneys in dependency court "of any police agency referrals to Probation of dependent minors. This enables rapid identification of dependent children who are potentially "at-risk" for serious delinquent behavior and facilitates an early intervention by appropriate agency representatives on the child's behalf...Based on 1992 caseload data, single-year projected potential cost savings accruing from DEAR-related information are estimated to be approximately at \$4 million."¹⁰⁷

Realizing a dream of automation, the Dependency Court Administrators anticipated with pleasure the electronic transfer of judges' orders. Early in 1995, computerization was to end the sometimes lengthy waiting period between the issuance of a judge's order and the time all the relevant parties learn what the order says. With the instantaneous transmission of judges' orders, the field social workers and other court departments can immediately begin to assist the family in complying with the orders.

Moreover the new courthouse has contributed to other positive changes. The Dependency Court Administrator said, "being isolated has brought out the best in everyone."¹⁰⁸ Diana Bichler, the Department of Children and Family Services Administrator agreed, "the morale of staff is much improved. People are all trying to work toward the same goal. People are kinder, not as tense. In the Criminal Courts Building, there was a lot of stress related to the environment...parties to cases would get into fights a lot at the Criminal Courts Building. That rarely happens here—the environment was obviously designed for them."¹⁰⁹

This is a courthouse devoted to children. Staff in every department share a common goal: to improve the lives of abused and neglected children. As Shelter Care's Program Director said, "I have not experienced any department of the court or DCFS that has been unavailable to address the identified needs of a child. All contacts have addressed the problem or assisted in offering a referral to someone who could help."¹¹⁰

While problems remain, the intense commitment evidenced by every program administrator, every staff person, and every volunteer who offered information for this report is reflected in a wide range of exciting and innovative programs. It is the belief itself that is so powerful. Every person interviewed by CSSP staff conveyed their personal belief in the Court. The management ethos of Judge Tucker has given more than permission to staff to propose new programs; it has positively encouraged them to apply their creativity, skill and devotion to the problems they see in the courthouse. The synergistic interplay between the building's welcoming environment and the court's employees has created a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

CHAPTER VI

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE DESIGN OF COURT-BASED CHILD CARE PROGRAMS:

In today's society, children are involved in our judicial system more than ever before. As a result, hundreds of children come into our Nation's courthouses daily. They come as parties or witnesses to testify; they come with parents, guardians, friends, or others who are there to participate in court proceedings. Frequently, these children are scared, uncomfortable, or both. Many of these courthouses are not friendly places for them they are not safe havens to paraphrase a term of the '90s, they are not "user friendly" for our children.

The blunt fact is that many of our courthouses fail to address our society's and our children's needs. We must respond now to these needs.¹¹¹

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This chapter draws on the history and experience of operational court-based child care programs and the Center for the Study of Social Policy's assessment of their potential. In it, nine specific program design elements are recommended for court-based child care programs. Many of these elements can be found in existing programs (profiled in Chapters Four and Five).

While not every courthouse needs a child care center, there are some predisposing factors that increase the likelihood that such a program will improve the courthouse environment for employees and members of the public. For example, because low income families are less likely to have the resources that would permit them to leave their children at home while they appear in court, courts serving areas with a substantial concentration of poverty are more likely to need child care. Courts located in areas with high rates of community violence, and especially courts litigating cases involving gang members, might consider a court-based child care center as a good way to protect children while they are in the courthouse.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

Before launching a full scale effort to open a court-based, drop-in child care center, two activities should occur. First, a structured needs assessment should be undertaken to ascertain the severity of the problems caused by children in the courthouse. Second, a broad-based advisory group should be established to oversee implementation and to handle the public relations and fund raising aspects of start-up activities.

FUNDING POSSIBILITIES	
PUBLIC	PRIVATE
County appropriation State appropriation Court appropriation State or county child welfare agency Medicaid Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment program Title IV-A or Title IV-E of the Social Security Act Child Care and Development Block Grant Social Services Block Grant	Bar associations Foundations Corporate sponsors Junior Leagues

A *needs assessment* documents the conditions that contribute to the need for court-based child care. This undertaking, while important, need not be an onerous or expensive task. A simple employee survey can be designed to provide information about the prevalence of children in the court, their approximate ages, the difficulties they cause court employees, and the times of the day and week when they are most troublesome. Additional information could come from counting the number of children present at various times in different sections of the courthouse or a survey of litigants, attorneys, police witnesses, and others routinely present in court. All these activities will strengthen the case for a court-based child care program and provide important constituencies with some advance knowledge of the planning process. The results of the needs assessment can also be used to enlist the support of potential funders.

A *well defined target population* is essential. A needs assessment will inform decisions about the desired hours of operation and the eligibility criteria for families to use the center. Courts should base the eligibility for service on an assessment of the most critical needs. A well-defined target population will also protect the program from criticism. Staff need to explain their eligibility rules, and those rules need to seem fair to the public.

An *advisory committee* will provide the program with advocates and benefactors. Membership might include the presiding judge, other constituencies in the courthouse, and community leaders. This can begin with the recruitment of a few selected key stakeholders. Many courthouses convene a management group representing the various court departments; such a group could sponsor a task force or subcommittee to explore court-based child care. The galvanizing force need not even originate in the courthouse. While the encouragement of the presiding judge and other court personnel is essential, many court-based child care programs have benefitted from the assistance of the local chapter of the Junior League or a local bar association. In order to maintain the program over time, it will need friends in many places. An advisory committee representative of the community's power brokers can be very useful in fund raising and building community support.

An advisory committee can also be helpful in making the child care program a permanent feature of the local landscape. What starts out as a project of a single courthouse could grow to include collaboration and oversight by higher levels of judicial administration and human service organizations. If the court-based child care program eventually hopes to become an integral component of an ongoing strategy to serve the needs of vulnerable children, it will need the support of the courts, the child welfare agencies, and other public and private organizations involved in delivering services to children and families. Interest in court-based child care programs by the relevant agency directors may also help ensure stable funding.

California, Massachusetts, and New York have developed legislative strategies to foster the development of local court-based child care programs. A statewide initiative could increase support for the programs and influence local courts to consider such services.

PROGRAM DESIGN ELEMENTS

This section provides guidelines to consider in the design and implementation of new child care programs in the courts.^P These nine program design elements comprise the core ingredients for a court-based child care program. The description of each design element begins with the most basic essentials for operating such a program and concludes with suggestions for expanding upon the basic concept. In every instance the core element was derived from the work of one or several existing court-based child care programs. In some instances, we recommend a developmental trajectory that goes beyond what can be found in existing models.

1. FUNDING

The goal for any court-based child care program is to find permanent funding. At a minimum, the program will need a *funding base that allows it to carry out its core functions*. A mixture of cash and in-kind contributions can be gained in several ways. Cash contributions can come from public and private sources, including county, state, and federal government, as well as from foundations, fund raising events, and donations by individual patrons. In-kind contributions can come from local organizations and corporations and may include the space, equipment, toys and supplies, and volunteers who can be enlisted to do everything from paint murals on the center's walls to regularly working with children once the program opens.

The important goal is to secure long-term funding so the program has stability and longevity. Ideally, state and local appropriations for children's services combined with a number of federal funding sources could form the basis of a financing strategy. Private contributions of cash and in-kind donations of space, equipment, supplies, and staff, could then be added to the base to complete the plan.

2. SPACE

At a minimum, a court-based child care program should be located *in a separate room that has been prepared for children*. A room where children will spend time needs to be accessible to the families who find themselves in the courthouse. It should be well lit, clean, and free of the hazards children find so peculiarly attractive (uncovered electrical outlets for example). It should be large enough to accommodate the number of children the needs assessment suggests will use it.^Q If a children's bathroom and/or kitchen are not in the original plans, location near a plumbing stack will facilitate such improvements at a later date.

^P For the purposes of the following discussion, court-based child care centers are defined to include two basic elements: a separate self-enclosed room, and adult supervision by at least one paid caregiver.

^Q Roughly 35 square feet per child is recommended.

The program should be located in the courthouse or within easy walking distance. Many courthouses are so crowded that no room will present itself for child care. An alternative that is working in two Massachusetts courthouses and Staten Island, New York, is a program site in a nearby public or commercial building. Often the government buildings will provide the space at a very low cost.

In a more elaborately designed court-based child care center, the children's bathroom and an adult bathroom would be located within the center. A kitchen might be included so simple hot meals could be prepared and staff could engage the children in cooking projects. A dishwasher, and washer and dryer would allow the staff to clean and sanitize dishes, stuffed animals, and other toys. Unlike the many programs located on an internal corridor of the courthouse, daylight would stream in through big windows. Separate rooms would be available to adults for parent conferences, workshops, and informal conversation. Smaller play rooms could be used for meetings between children and their attorneys, mediators, or therapists.

3. FURNISHINGS AND EQUIPMENT

To open a court-based child care program, a *minimum of child sized furniture and equipment* is needed. At the outset of this section, it is important to say that this need not be dauntingly expensive. While the butcher block climbing structures and brightly painted tables and chairs pictured in children's catalogues are desirable, a child care program does not need them to provide a good environment for children. Recycled furniture, toys, books, games, and other supplies can contribute to a very rich program. Many of the existing programs rely heavily on exactly this type of donation.

The furnishings and equipment should reflect the ages of the children who will be using them, both in size and type. A program that primarily serves children four to 12 years old might want to include table seating that could accommodate all the children present. Children of that age enjoy board games, puzzles, arts and crafts projects, and other activities that are easier to do at a table. Children three and under should not be expected to spend much time at a table; their needs are best met by soft surfaces appropriate for crawling, low shelves with suitable toys they can reach, and sturdy construction so they can safely pull themselves to a standing position. A program serving a wide age range needs to provide the smallest children with an area where they can safely explore without fear of being trampled by bigger playmates.

As long as it is safe, any combination of furnishings that helps children relax will work. An ersatz family room is one option. Donations of that kind of second hand furnishing may be reasonably easy to arrange. A little creativity can produce a setting that is visually attractive and very functional.

The room should be arranged so that there are obvious traffic patterns. Many of the existing programs use low open shelving for toys and games because it encourages the children to use them and doubles as room dividers. Similar toys should be grouped together. For instance, putting the dress up trunk next to the doll corner will encourage more elaborate dramatic play and reduce the traffic flow in the room because children will find all the props they need conveniently at hand.

Over time the center may be able to add more sophisticated equipment. A soft-sided climbing structure, a two-story play house, an art easel, a furnished doll house, a child-sized kitchen set and a large sink at child height for water play are examples of the major purchases the center might want to consider over time.

4. SECURITY

Ensuring the safety of children requires *limited access* to the court-based child care center. Children should be protected from activities like gun play, hostage situations, and fist fights. If no other security measure is possible, the children's room should have a door that is kept locked and within easy communication of the court's security staff. Almost every existing court-based child care program keeps its outer door locked; some have two locking doors, one that permits entry into the center's vestibule or waiting room, and a second that separates the child care area from the waiting area.

Many programs are located inside courthouses, past the metal detectors where security personnel screen people entering the building. If the child care center is not protected by the security check at the courthouse entrance, a security camera can be trained on the entrance to the center to permit routine surveillance of the adults coming and going. This is how the Children's Center in Albany County, NY handles security. Within the easy reach of center staff, an inconspicuously placed panic button can produce an immediate response from court security personnel.

5. STAFFING

To ensure a basic level of compliance with the court's expectations, the center should employ *at least one paid staff person with appropriate training*. It is a common misconception that teaching young children requires no special training, and that it is no different from parenting or teaching elementary school age children. In fact, the developmental challenges facing young children are quite different from the ones they will confront when they reach school age. Because curriculum development and behavior management of children younger than six requires its own knowledge base, at least one staff member should hold a bachelor's degree (or higher) in early childhood education or a related field. In programs serving older children, expertise in the developmental issues and curriculum planning for the appropriate ages is necessary for the program to operate safely and effectively.

The best programs facilitate one-to-one adult/child interactions. Adults can only provide individual attention if there are sufficient staff. A combination of trained paid staff, foster grandparents and other volunteers may provide the nurturing and stimulation that will best occupy the children during their stay in court-based child care.

6. PROGRAM CONTENT

With some knowledge of early childhood programming and a minimal supply and equipment budget, a court-based child care center can offer a *range of interesting and absorbing activities for children across the age spectrum*. All children develop in four basic ways: cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically. Thus a child care program in the courts should address all four aspects in some way. In planning a court-based child care center, one more factor must be considered: children are confronted with an unfamiliar place where they are left in the care of strangers.

Children should feel welcome in the center. To overcome the children's initial anxiety, staff should focus on making sure that their physical needs (food, rest, toileting) are met. The second key to a successful program is an attractive and orderly arrangement of activities for the children to explore. By dividing the room into play stations, children can concentrate on a specific activity. The design of the play stations should reflect the four dimensions (cognitive, social, emotional, and physical) of children's growth and development. If possible, at least one area should allow children to use their large muscles. Examples include a tumbling mat, a play kitchen, a dress up box and dolls; a corner for block building; and an arts and crafts table where crayons, markers, and paper are available.

A more sophisticated enhancement might be the creation of play stations that give children the opportunity to work through the troubling life circumstances or events that brought them to court. With planning and professional consultation, a curriculum specifically designed for a drop-in program, could address issues like community or domestic violence, child maltreatment, substance abuse, and death, at the appropriate developmental levels.

7. PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Every center must *comply with any applicable licensing regulations*. In planning a court-based child care program, the planners must learn about the proposed program's licensing requirements. If licensure is required, the program must be designed to meet regulations. In fact, however, fewer than half the existing court-based child care programs are required to hold licenses. The 14 unlicensed programs are exempt because the parents are on the premises or because the children spend less than three hours in the center at a time.

While licensure is a matter decided by the state or county child care licensing agency, the adherence to some code of professional conduct is not. Because the provision of quality services to children requires attention to staffing and curriculum, the programs should strive to follow a set of program standards. There are two options that are easily accessible to novices, but based on the body of research that defines quality in early childhood education. They are: the accreditation standards developed by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, a division of the National Association for the Education of Young Children;^r and environment rating scales developed for infant/toddler programs and preschools by researchers at the University of North Carolina.^s

Using the National Academy's accreditation guidelines to inform program development will improve the program quality. A program must provide services for at least a year before applying for accreditation. This involves a collegial process within the center and a visit by an Academy validator to confirm the results of the center's self-evaluation. Only one existing court-based child care program, Roxbury District Court Child Care Center in Boston, Massachusetts, holds professional accreditation from the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs.

8. LINKING FAMILIES TO SERVICES

Every program should develop some mechanism to *provide parents with information about other services they might need*. The center should maintain a well stocked display of materials describing the broadest spectrum of services available to families. It should be located in a central location inside or adjacent to the center. In addition, staff can ask parents if there are additional services that might be helpful to them. By maintaining a file of basic information on the community's available resources, staff can provide telephone numbers and other relevant information.

Beyond this basic information referral, staff can try to engage parents in discussion about their children to help ascertain the extent to which assistance might be useful. Offering parents an opportunity to talk about their concerns may open the door. This does not mean the staff will talk to every parent every time. It does mean that the program staff interact substantively with parents when possible. Staff should stand prepared to make that first telephone call to a shelter or pediatrician if the situation lends itself to such an intervention. In the days and weeks following the family's visit, staff could pursue the contact with follow up telephone calls, or in the event that there is no telephone, a simple written message.

Referrals to helping agencies are important but it is likely that the parents using court-based child care centers will need more than referrals to negotiate the vast number of different agencies they confront:

^r The National Association for the Education of Young Children is based in Washington, D.C. and can be reached by telephone at (800)424-2460.

^s The environmental rating scales can be found in two books:

• Thelma Harms and Richard M. Clifford, *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale*, Teachers College Press, Columbia University, New York, 1980; and
• Thelma Harms, Debby Cryer, Richard M. Clifford, *Infant/Toddler Environmental Rating Scale*, Teachers College Press, Columbia University, New York, 1990.

Most children are reasonably well served by school, health care, and social service providers despite minimal contact among these providers... For the fortunate majority, the family is the collaborator and integrator of services. Fragile families, however, are less able to play this managerial role. Their needs are more likely to be complex and require services over extended periods. For several reasons, service collaboration strategies for families like these are critical. First, these families are more likely to have difficulty in accessing and using all of the services they need. Second, although they ultimately are more likely to be involved with several systems at once, these families are far less likely to have the skills to integrate the goals and requirements of the various services they are receiving. These systems need to develop case plans with reinforcing, rather than conflicting, goals.¹¹²

The staff of a court-based child care center could assist court-involved families as they try to understand the various services available to them. With some personal intervention, the center's senior staff members might guide such families through the maze of applications and reporting requirements to help them gain access to needed services.

In this way, court-based child care programs provide family support services. Family support services are defined as those that "promote parental competencies and behaviors that will promote children's safety, and lead to the healthy and positive personal development of children and families by:

- Providing assistance to build family skills and assist parents in improving their capacities to be supportive and nurturing parents.
- Providing assistance to enable families to use other formal and informal resources that are available within their communities.
- Creating supportive networks to enhance the childrearing capacity of parents and assist in compensating for the increased social isolation and vulnerability of families."¹¹³

Families involved with the courts can more easily take advantage of the services they need if they can get to them. The Edelman Children's Court is an example of a court where an array of key services is available to families. Because Los Angeles County is so huge, the Court's service providers handle intake for their agencies which then provide services in the communities where families live. Smaller jurisdictions could provide ongoing services in the courthouse or in buildings adjacent to the court. Children's Centers in New York State are planning to out-station staff from HeadStart programs and deputize staff working in the Centers to assist families with their applications to the federal supplemental food program.

9. ADMINISTRATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

The ability to provide child care to families who bring their children to court will revolve around *competent administrative control of the daily program operations*. Management of the program involves direct staff supervision, fiscal planning and accountability, and communication with the constituencies affected by the center. Several courts have defined the court-based child care center as a department of the court with the attendant definition of supervisory hierarchy and budgeting. A private agency could manage the program under contract to the court. Victim/Witness programs, child care agencies, YMCA/YWCAs, and family service agencies are some of the administrative entities that manage current court-based child care programs. With the advisory committee serving as a board of directors, and the program manager acting as their agent, the court-based child care program can incorporate as a separate non-profit agency, as happened at the Rhoda Bresler Children's Room in Chicago.

Program evaluation is an important component of center administration. Periodically parents, court personnel, and other constituencies regularly present in the courthouse should have the opportunity to complete satisfaction surveys on the court-based child care center. The center's administration and the advisory committee should review them and, based on the results, modify the program when that is indicated. A financial audit should be conducted annually by an outside accounting firm.

Using the services of a professional evaluator (or graduate students working under the supervision of a professional evaluator), the staff and advisory committee can engage in a more systematic review of the program's intent and its success in accomplishing its goals. Evaluation should be repeated regularly so that a review of the past can lead to more productive use of the center in the future.

IN CONCLUSION

The reasons for opening court-based child care programs are compelling: they improve the administration of justice while shielding children from unnecessary trauma. The nine program design elements presented here make it clear that court-based child care programs require leadership, resources, and expertise in children's programming and the legal system. With energetic support and creative stewardship, court-based child care programs can be successfully developed in courts where the need is demonstrated.

END NOTES

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- 4 Kate Stone Lombardi, "Children Finally Get Day in Family Court," New York Times Westchester Weekly, p.4.
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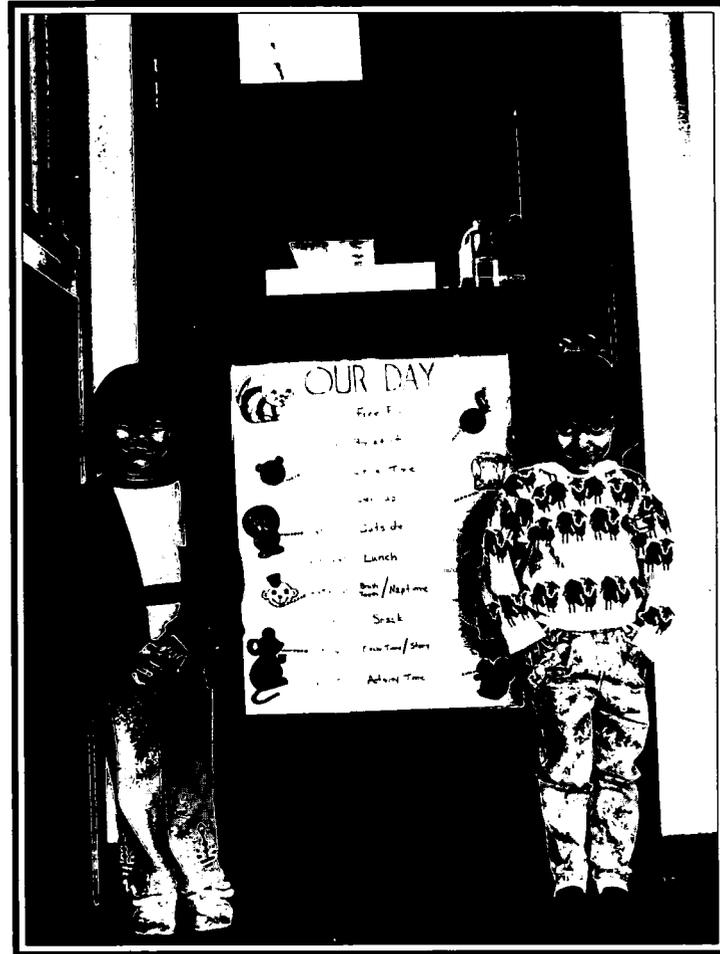
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