

*Technical Assistance Bulletin*

Volume II

No. 7, November 1998

Child Victims Project  
Model Courts Status Report  
1997-98

194268

PERMANENCY PLANNING FOR CHILDREN DEPARTMENT

**NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JUVENILE  
AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES**

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Office of Juvenile Justice and  
Delinquency Prevention

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**  
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*Office of Juvenile Justice and  
Delinquency Prevention*

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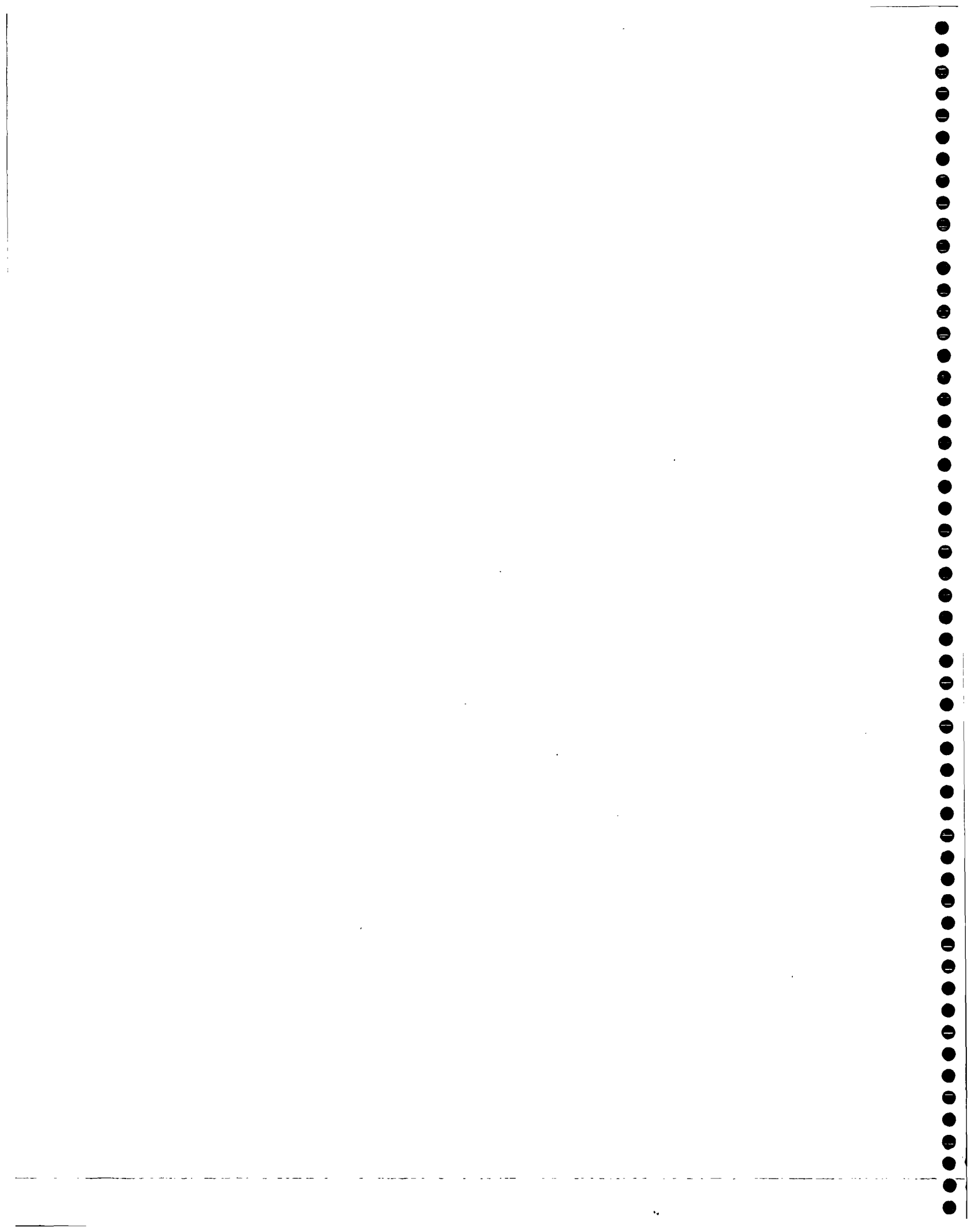
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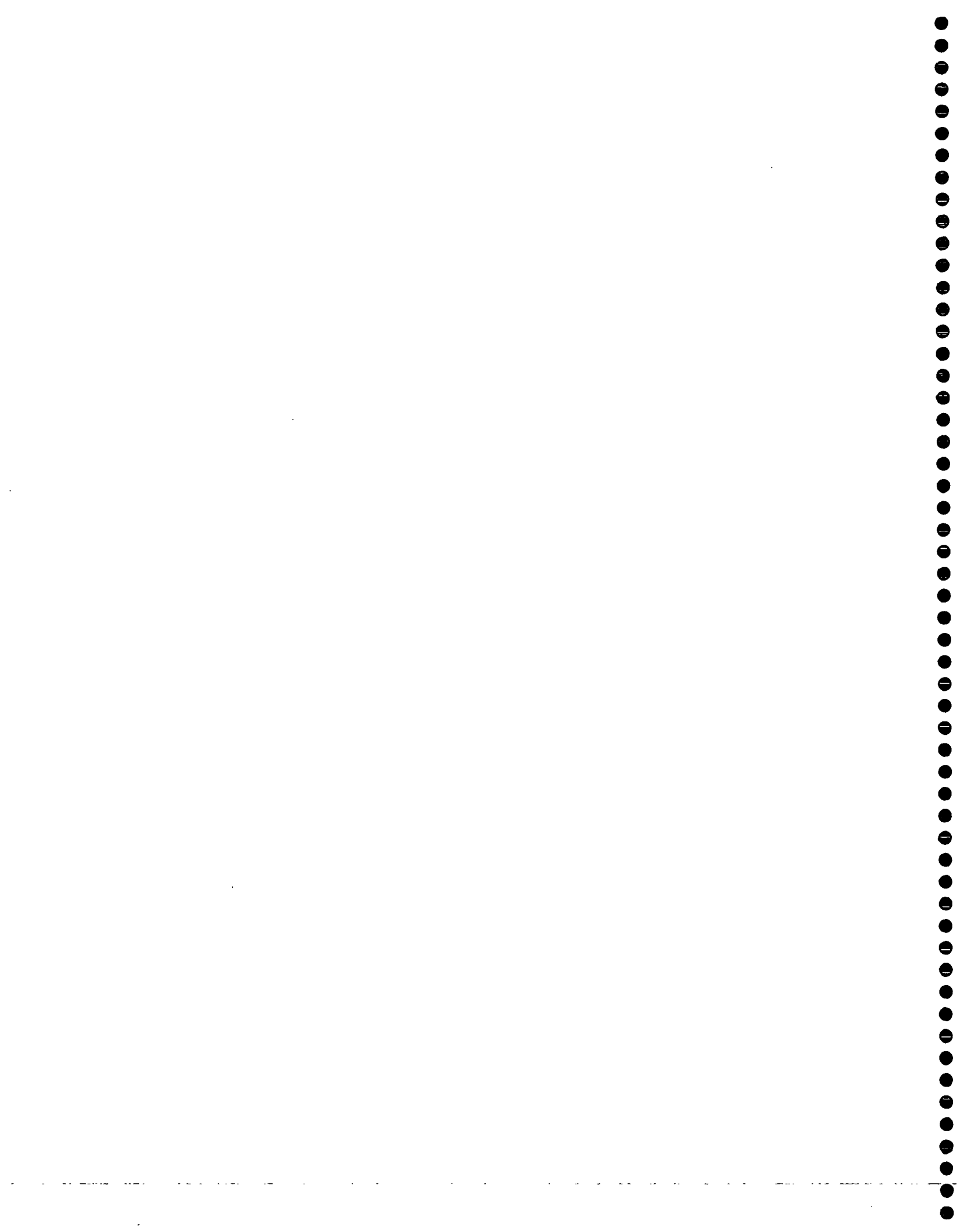
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## Background

### ***History of NCJFCJ Judicial Training in Permanency Planning***

Traditionally, system professionals have considered removal of children from abusive or neglectful homes a “safe” outcome. However, past decades have seen too many abused and neglected children grow up in a foster care system ill-equipped to meet their emotional or developmental needs. Child safety and healthy development could not be assured as children were moved from placement to placement, assigned multiple caseworkers, and denied family stability. In the early 1970s, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) recognized the need for judicial oversight of child abuse and neglect cases with establishment of its Children in Placement Project. Originally funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the project brought national attention to the plight of children lost in “foster care drift.”

The NCJFCJ’s Children in Placement Project, under the guidance of early judicial leaders, developed a deskbook entitled “Judicial Review of Children in Placement.” Project leaders formulated a plan for the use of volunteer advocates for dependent children in juvenile court. This concept later gained recognition as the Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Program.

As the 1970s came to a close, congressional recognition focused on the rising number of children in foster care and problems associated with their lack of bonding to safe, secure and stable adults. Legislative leaders recognized that children who had been physically and emotionally harmed by their families frequently were re-traumatized by the child welfare system responsible for their care.

In 1980, Public Law 96-272, the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, was passed. That same year, the NCJFCJ’s “Children in Placement Project” was re-established as the “Permanency Planning for Children Project,” and a national effort was begun to educate judges in the provisions of the new legislation. P.L. 96-272 placed the responsibility for regular review of child welfare cases squarely on the shoulders of the nation’s judiciary. Regular mandatory review of all dependent children became the focus of courts across the nation. Judges looked to the Permanency Planning for Children Project for training to help them meet the demands of their expanded roles and responsibilities.

In 1984, with funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) of the U.S. Department of Justice, the NCJFCJ’s Permanency Planning for Children Project put into place a framework for improving practice in child abuse and neglect cases. Permanency Planning Task Forces were established in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Task force members included supreme court judges, juvenile and family court judges, state legislators, child welfare personnel, attorneys, and volunteers. Task force members identified barriers to permanency in their states and, with the assistance of the Permanency Planning for Children Project, implemented training to move court and agency systems toward meaningful change. Throughout the 1980s, many

State Task Forces continued at work, and the project provided complementary training and technical assistance through funding from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

During the current decade, additional legislative milestones have been marked. The most recent was passage in November 1997 of Public Law 105-89, the Adoption and Safe Families Act. Among the Act's most significant provisions affecting judicial review of child abuse and neglect cases is statutory language defining child health and safety as paramount considerations in judicial decision-making. This and other important provisions of the new law have been incorporated into NCJFCJ technical assistance and training programs. The Permanency Planning for Children "*Project*" in 1998 also was re-designated as a formal organizational "*Department*" of the NCJFCJ.

The Permanency Planning for Children Department (PPCD) continues to: engage in research on court-related child welfare issues; develop new curricula; develop and initiate improvements in dependency court practice in individual Model Courts; and provide nationwide judicial training and technical assistance to improve court practice in child abuse and neglect cases.

## NCJFCJ Child Victims Model Courts Project

In 1992, the NCJFCJ established a new, national project supported by both private and federal funds, formally called, "Improving the Juvenile and Family Courts' Handling of Child Abuse and Neglect Cases: A Model Training and Technical Assistance Program Development Project." Project efforts came to be informally called the NCJFCJ Child Victims Model Courts Project.

The PPCD's most far-reaching initiative, this project was established in response to congressional passage of the Victims of Child Abuse Act, Public Law 101-647. This legislation allocated substantial OJJDP funding to allow the NCJFCJ to work in Model Courts nationwide to help improve governmental response to victims of child abuse and neglect. The first activity of this Child Victims Model Courts Project was to develop a document for use by juvenile and family court judges interested in improving court handling of child abuse and neglect cases. Over a period of three years, a hands-on bench book, entitled: *RESOURCE GUIDELINES: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse & Neglect Cases*, was developed by an NCJFCJ committee of judges, court administrators, attorneys, child welfare experts and others.

In August 1995, the *RESOURCE GUIDELINES* publication was endorsed by the American Bar Association and the Conference of Chief Justices. The *RESOURCE GUIDELINES* identify key aspects of careful, complete and fundamentally fair hearings at all stages of court proceedings. Since initial publication, 16,000 copies of the *RESOURCE GUIDELINES* have been distributed nationwide. At the time the *RESOURCE GUIDELINES* document was released, the Family Preservation Act also was passed, authorizing funding for State Court Improvement Programs nationwide. State Supreme Courts were charged with the task of establishing state-based committees, assessing child abuse and neglect case processing, and formulating plans for court improvement. Planning was to be followed by the implementation of recommended changes. State Court Improvement Programs recognized the *RESOURCE GUIDELINES* as a blueprint for change and many based their assessments, planning and implementation on the NCJFCJ guidelines. Many states also looked to the NCJFCJ for training and technical assistance to accomplish court improvement goals.

The second step in the process was to identify a limited number of courts which would focus on improving practice in child abuse and neglect cases, and which would commit to the principles outlined in the *RESOURCE GUIDELINES*. The project's first Model Court was the Hamilton County Juvenile Court in Cincinnati, Ohio. This court of juvenile and family jurisdiction was instrumental in development of the *RESOURCE GUIDELINES*, and now continues to serve as a study site for additional courts engaged in systemic improvements in dependency case processing.

With assistance from the staff of the Child Victims Model Courts Project, and through the example of the Cincinnati court, 12 other Model Courts continued working during the period 1997-98 to improve court practice based upon the *RESOURCE GUIDELINES*. Four additional Model Courts

were designated in mid-1998 in North Carolina, Oregon, New York state and New York City. All Model Courts use the *RESOURCE GUIDELINES* to guide systems change efforts. The Lead Judges in each jurisdiction guide Model Court Teams which focus on barriers to permanency, develop plans for court improvement, and work collaboratively toward systems change.

### **1997-1998 Child Victims Project Model Courts and Lead Judges**

**Alexandria, Virginia**  
Juvenile & Domestic Relations  
District Court  
Judge Stephen W. Rideout

**Chicago, Illinois**  
Circuit Court of Cook County  
Child Protection Division  
Judge Nancy Salyers

**Cincinnati, Ohio**  
Hamilton County Juvenile Court  
Judge David Grossmann (Retired)

**El Paso, Texas**  
65<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court Children's Court  
Judge Patricia Macias

**Honolulu, Hawaii**  
Family Court, First Circuit, State of Hawaii  
Judge John C. Bryant, Jr.

**Louisville, Kentucky**  
Jefferson County Family Court  
Judge Richard J. FitzGerald

**Miami, Florida**  
11<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Court  
Miami-Dade County Juvenile Court  
Judge D. Bruce Levy \*

**Nashville, Tennessee**  
Juvenile Court of Davidson County  
Judge Andrew Shookhoff \*

**Newark, New Jersey**  
Superior Court of New Jersey  
Judge Thomas P. Zampino

**Reno, Nevada**  
2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District Court, Family Division  
Judge Charles McGee

**Salt Lake City, Utah**  
3<sup>rd</sup> District Juvenile Court  
Judge Sharon McCully

**San Jose, California**  
Santa Clara County Superior Court  
Juvenile Dependency Division  
Judge Leonard Edwards

**Tucson, Arizona**  
Pima County Juvenile Court  
Judge Nanette Warner\*

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### **New 1998 Model Courts**

**Buffalo, New York**  
Erie County Juvenile Court  
Judge Sharon S. Townsend  
Model Court established July 1998

**Charlotte, North Carolina**  
Mecklenburg County Juvenile Court  
Judge William G. Jones  
Model Court established October 1998

**New York City, New York**  
New York City Family Court  
Judge Michael Gage  
Model Court established October 1998

**Portland, Oregon**  
Multnomah County Juvenile Court  
Judge Stephen B. Herrell  
Model Court established August 1998

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Transitions: the Hon. Steven Robinson became Miami Lead Judge in November 1998; the Hon. Betty Adams Green became Nashville Lead Judge in September 1998; and the Hon. John Davis will become Tucson Lead Judge in January 1999.

A synopsis of Child Victims Project Model Court activities and achievements for 1997-1998 is provided in the "Summary of Project Activities" which begins on page 11. Profiles of each of the Model Courts are found in the "Model Court Profiles" section which begins on page 15. Names of judges and staff to contact with questions or from whom to obtain additional information are provided at the beginning of each profile.

The purpose of this publication is to describe collaborative Model Court achievements to other jurisdictions, to state court improvement programs, and to other courts nationwide. The goal is to encourage courts to think collaboratively and to act imaginatively in developing new ways of fulfilling court responsibilities to the benefit of children and families. By comparing the demographics of other jurisdictions to those of the various Model Courts, readers may recognize similarities to their own courts – and opportunities for individual court improvements. Readers are encouraged to contact court representatives to learn more about achievements of interest.

This report chronicles the work of Child Victims Project Model Courts from July 1997 through June 1998, and outlines goals for each of the newest Model Courts. The continuing accomplishments of each of these Model Courts will be detailed in future *Child Victims Project Model Courts Status Reports*.

## ***NCJFCJ Permanency Planning for Children Department Today***

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The Permanency Planning for Children "*Project*" in May 1998 was re-established as a formal "*Department*" within the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. Current Permanency Planning for Children Department (PPCD) activities are centered around five initiatives supported by federal and private funds.

- ① The principal activity is the previously described multi-year initiative focused on improving court practice in child abuse and neglect cases, funded by the OJJDP, which is informally called the "Child Victims Model Courts Project."
- ② Also established under the auspices of the PPCD is the Permanent Families Training and Technical Assistance initiative, supported by the OJJDP.
- ③ The Diversion Model Courts initiative, supported by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, examines the court's role in diverting families from traditional child welfare services into community-based programs.
- ④ An Expedited Adoption initiative, funded by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and the American Honda Foundation, is implementing innovative techniques and programs related to termination of parental rights and adoption, and developing court guidelines to expedite adoptions.
- ⑤ The State Court Improvement training and technical assistance initiative integrates PPCD activities with ongoing, state-based efforts to improve practice in dependency cases, and is developing new tools for improved court practice related to judicial workloads and technology/performance measures. This initiative is funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

All these interrelated initiatives are carefully coordinated to maximize resources and expertise. Each Child Victims Project Model Court is supported in its improvement efforts by PPCD faculty and staff. Over the past year, both department personnel and publications have been expanded to meet an increased national demand for permanency planning information, training, and technical assistance. With support from the Child Victims Grant, the PPCD has developed a new Research and Technical Assistance Resource Division to:

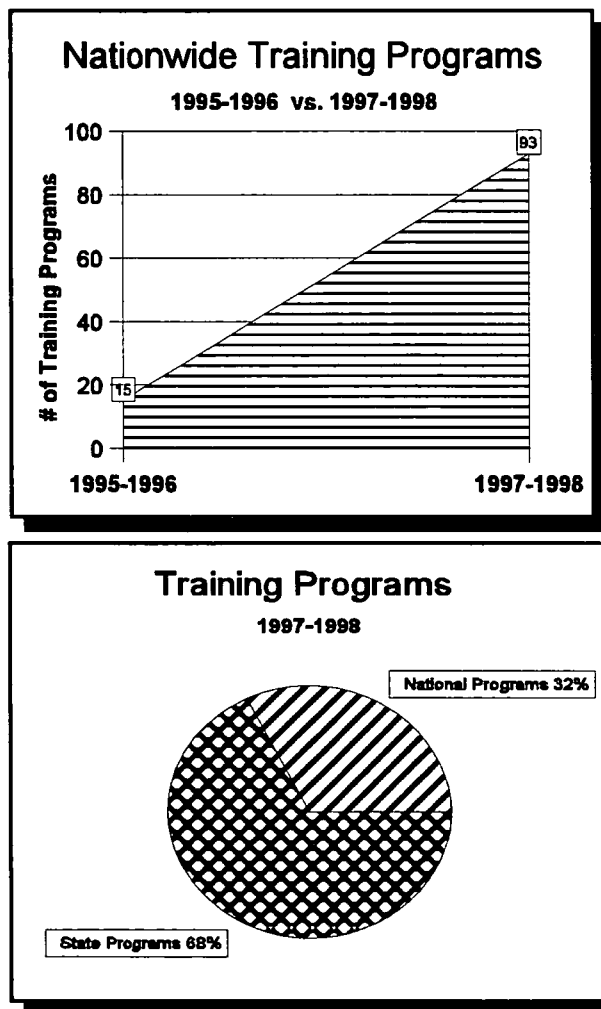
- (1) initiate and produce cutting-edge permanency planning research and information on innovative court processes and outcomes; and
- (2) provide ongoing technical and resource support to courts across the nation, and to respond to continuing requests for project information.

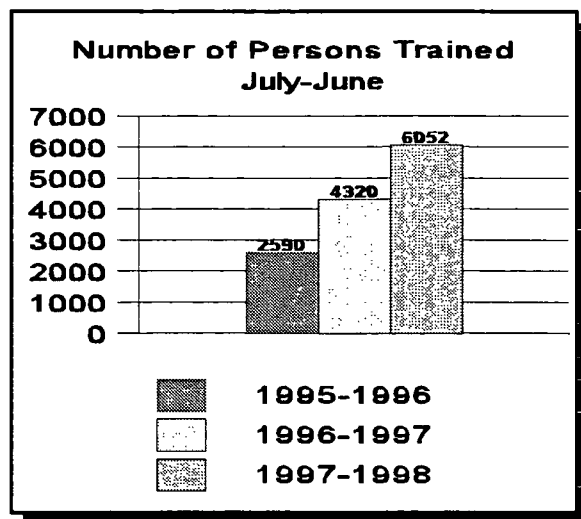
This division also supports the work of the Model Courts and provides valuable resource information to state-based court improvement programs, judicial educators, appellate courts, and court administrators nationwide. See the "Resources" section on pages 71-72 for information about the most recent *Technical Assistance Bulletins*, other PPCD publications, and the department's new Website.

## ***Nationwide Training and Technical Assistance***

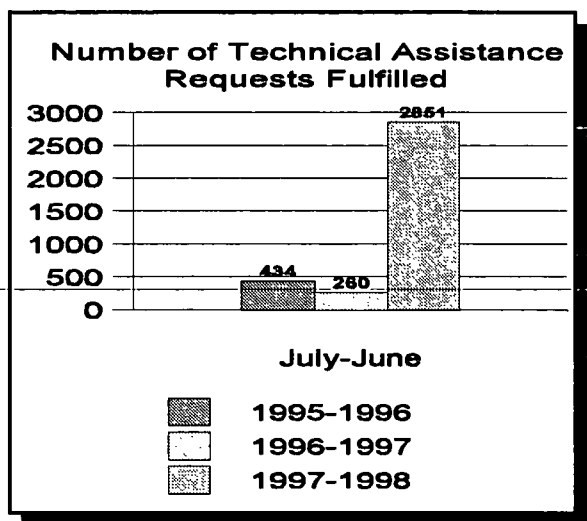
Departmental requests continue to increase significantly for both state-specific and nationally-focused training in permanency planning for abused and neglected children. In response to these demands, the National Council's PPCD over the past year has placed special emphasis on expansion of faculty resources and curriculum development.

During the period July 1997 through June 1998, a total 93 programs, including 30 national and 63 state programs were developed and implemented by PPCD faculty and staff. In attendance at these training programs were a total 6,052 judges, court personnel, attorneys, social service agency administrators, agency personnel, and volunteer advocates. The 93 state and national training programs implemented during this period represent a sharp 520% increase over the 15 programs conducted 1995-1996.





PPCD training is provided at national conferences, regional programs, state workshops, and jurisdiction-based training meetings. Registrations encompass individuals from court systems, the social service sector, and related child- and family-focused systems. Recent increases in PPCD statistics are significant. From July 1995 through June 1996, a total 2,590 persons participated in national, regional, state or local training presentations sponsored by the PPCD. From 1995 to 1998, the number of participants increased 134% from 2,590 in 1995 to 6,052 persons trained in 1998. Related requests for technical assistance increased 557% from 1995 to 1998.



These notable increases can be attributed to a number of factors, including an increased departmental commitment to research and technical assistance resources. Training program enrollments also have been boosted by an increased national awareness of the importance of permanency planning in child abuse and neglect cases. Judicial and legal authorities, child welfare policymakers, legislative leaders, and others are increasingly becoming aware of the implications of permanency planning and its potential for preventing emotional and developmental problems in children which may lead to juvenile delinquency and future adult criminal behavior.

## ***Development of National Permanency Planning Curriculum***

Permanency Planning for Children Department faculty and staff continue final development of a comprehensive national permanency planning training curriculum first implemented at a special, one-week session of the National College of Juvenile and Family Law in Reno May 31-June 5, 1998. The first national college session of its kind, entitled "Child Abuse and Neglect Institute: The Role of the Judge," brought together juvenile and family court judges from across the nation to receive judicial training based on the new curriculum. This curriculum incorporates advanced written, audio-visual, and technological training tools.

The Child Victims Model Courts Project, and other departmental initiatives, continue to lend faculty resources and materials to fine-tune and improve the new curriculum. The final curriculum,

scheduled for dissemination in late 1998, will be available to NCJFCJ faculty, state judicial educators, state court improvement programs, and individual jurisdictions requesting assistance in their training and court improvement efforts.

### ***Special Juvenile and Family Court JOURNAL Permanency Planning Edition***

In November 1997, the department published a special, 72-page issue of the NCJFCJ's scholarly research quarterly, the *Juvenile and Family Court JOURNAL*. Judges, consultants and staff contributed research and reference articles on permanency planning topics including descriptions of successful court improvement efforts, an analysis of state statutes with respect to permanency planning, and an examination of the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children.



## **Summary of Child Victims Project Activities 1997-1998**

Six outstanding areas of achievement have been identified in a majority of the Child Victims Project Model Courts:

- ❖ Introduction of alternative dispute resolution methods such as court-based mediation services and family conferencing;
- ❖ Use of community-based services and other outreach efforts;
- ❖ Initiation of multi-disciplinary, court-led meetings and training programs;
- ❖ Court calendar improvements;
- ❖ More substantive, expanded preliminary hearings; and
- ❖ Increased representation for families and children.

All of the Model Courts are developing practice changes in one or more of these areas. It is important to recognize that these are interrelated and overlapping areas of achievement. Illustrative examples of Model Court achievements within these six areas are discussed briefly below.

### ***Alternative Dispute Resolution Methods***

Family group conferencing, mediation, and settlement conferences are several alternatives to formal court hearings which have been initiated in various Model Court systems. Each Model Court has adopted, adapted and integrated processes which “fit” within its community and professional environment.

Representatives of Santa Clara County Superior Court’s Juvenile Dependency Division in San Jose, Calif., report their primary goal has been to establish a child welfare system in which alternative dispute resolution is available and utilized by all families who come to governmental attention because of alleged child abuse or neglect.

The Pima County Juvenile Court in Tucson, Ariz., has expanded the preliminary protective hearing process to include pre-hearing conferences. Attorneys, parents, case workers, extended family members, school officials, and tribal representatives are all welcome to participate. As a result of pre-hearing conferences and expanded substantial preliminary protective hearings, the Tucson court reports significant improvement in timely case processing.

The 11<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Court in Miami, Fla., has begun to utilize Family Conferencing Coordinators who meet with family members immediately after the first hearing. Family Conferences are being used to minimize the need for contested hearings and to shorten the time from removal to placement.

## ***Community-Based Services***

The Family Court of the First Circuit for the State of Hawaii integrated the principles of alternative dispute resolution in a family conferencing project to safely divert families from formal child protective services to community-based programs. This effort was called the "Ohana Conferencing Project." ("Ohana" means "family" in native Hawaiian.) The Ohana Project was a collaborative effort of the Family Court, the Department of Human Services' Social Services Division, and the local Wai'anae community, located on the leeward coast of Oahu.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District Court in Reno, Nev., in conjunction with its Family Drug Court Program, has assembled a multi-disciplinary team from throughout the community to assist in rehabilitation and reunification efforts for families affected by substance abuse.

The 65<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court in El Paso, Tex., has begun to draw upon a network of community professionals to help increase awareness of problems associated with child abuse and neglect, and adoption placement resources.

Three Model Courts, the Hamilton County Juvenile Court in Cincinnati, Ohio; the Family Court of Honolulu, Hawaii; and the Circuit Court of Cook County, Chicago, Ill., are engaged in concerted efforts to find adoptive homes for abused and neglected children. These courts already have hosted - or plan to host - Adoption Fairs in their communities, joined multi-county collaborations, and employed resources on the World Wide Web in a concerted effort to address the permanency needs of children in extended foster care.

Another Model Court, the Santa Clara County Superior Court in San Jose, Calif., is examining the potential for wrap-around services for emotionally abused or disturbed children. All 13 Model Courts are focusing in some manner on community-based care and placements.

The Jefferson County Family Court in Louisville, Ky., exemplifies how judicial leadership can be exerted to develop community partnerships for the protection of children and the provision of services to families. Court procedures now provide discretion to Family Court judges to refer a family to such programs at any point after a case becomes court active.

## ***Meetings/Training***

Model Court Lead Judges have established routine, regular meetings of multi-disciplinary groups to improve court handling of child abuse and neglect cases. Model Court Lead Judge Nancy Salyers, of the Circuit Court of Cook County in Chicago, established a Child Protection Advisory Work Group of professionals from governmental offices, agencies and universities. Even long-established Model Courts continue to maintain interdisciplinary training as a high priority.

Salt Lake City's 3<sup>rd</sup> District Juvenile Court has initiated interdisciplinary training on placement options and related services, and the Juvenile Court of Davidson County in Nashville, Tenn., sent attorneys and mediators on a site visit to San Jose to observe and collect information on dependency mediation and calendaring improvements.

## ***Calendar Improvements***

No matter how much a jurisdiction improves its procedures in child abuse and neglect cases, the potential for additional calendaring improvements remains, and all Model Courts continually seek to improve caseload handling. At the Superior Court in Newark, N.J., additional court days have been assigned to allow greater access for cases and to streamline the review process.

In 1997, the Hawaii Family Court in Honolulu transformed its master calendaring system to an individual calendaring, one-judge/one-family system. Court representatives indicate the reformatted calendar is resulting in fewer children lingering in extended foster care and quicker overall termination of parental rights in appropriate cases.

The Cook County Model Court in Chicago has implemented a staggered case calendaring procedure which has resulted in less waiting time for all parties. This procedure provides a time-certain process which is more respectful of the parties, attorneys and caseworkers. Hundreds of worker hours have been freed for casework.

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## ***Substantive, Expanded Preliminary Hearings***

The main purpose of a preliminary protective hearing is to determine whether or not a child can be immediately and safely returned home while a trial is pending. This initial judicial determination is often the most important decision to be made in a child abuse or neglect case. Although such decisions often are made on an emergency basis, they must be based on a competent assessment of the risks and dangers to a child. A primary achievement of many Model Courts has been to make preliminary protective hearings as thorough and meaningful as possible. A thorough and timely preliminary hearing can help simplify and shorten the dependency process and can move a case more quickly to later stages of adjudication, disposition and review. This not only preserves court resources but reduces the cost and harm of unnecessary, prolonged out-of-home placement of children.

Informed decision-making at this vital stage of the dependency process requires adequate docket time. Model Courts have implemented new one-family/one-judge calendar systems, staggered calendar calls for dependency cases, and other innovative methods of restructuring court calendars. The *RESOURCE GUIDELINES* recommend that a minimum one hour be allocated to the initial preliminary protective hearing, and Model Courts continue to strive to expand the time currently spent on initial hearings.

## ***Representation***

The Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court of Alexandria, Va., cites early appointment of attorney guardians *ad litem* (GALs) as one of that court's top achievements. Lead Judge Stephen W. Rideout indicates that early appointments of GALs for children, and appointment of counsel for parents involved in child abuse and neglect cases, are helping to streamline hearing schedules. GALs are required to attend multi-disciplinary staffings and to submit court reports at least every six months. While more contested hearings are being set for adjudication of abuse and neglect cases, more settlements and agreed orders also are being achieved.

Attorney or social worker GALs are appointed in all cases in the Circuit Court of Cook County, Chicago, Ill.; Hamilton County Juvenile Court, Cincinnati, Ohio; Family Court of the First Circuit, Honolulu, Hawaii; Jefferson County Family Court, Louisville, Ky.; Superior Court of New Jersey, Newark, N.J.; 3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial District Juvenile Court, Salt Lake City, Utah; Santa Clara County Juvenile Dependency Court, San Jose, Calif.; and Pima County Juvenile Court, Tucson, Ariz.

## **Model Court Profiles**

The following section, developed by judges and court personnel, provides brief synopses of activities and achievements in each of the 13 Child Victims Project Model Courts active during the period July 1, 1997 through June 30, 1998.



Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court

# Alexandria, Virginia

Lead Judge – Hon. Stephen W. Rideout, Chief Judge

*"I continue to be impressed with the energy and commitment of the people within the City of Alexandria and at the state level who are working to make positive changes for children who are abused and neglected. It is at times difficult to hold back one's emotions as you see mothers come into court for a hearing where their child is officially returned to them. Their pride of accomplishment and the friendship that they and the social workers exhibit is heart-warming. Participating in these hearings makes all the other things that we do to achieve the result worth the effort."*

-Judge Rideout

Contact: Mrs. Arlene Rager, Clerk of Court  
520 King Street, First Floor  
Alexandria, Virginia 22314-3160  
(703) 838-4141  
(703) 838-4092 FAX

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## Demographics

Area served:	City of Alexandria, Virginia
Estimated population:	112,000
Juvenile population:	17,000
Children in out-of-home placement:	142
Agency:	State system with local units
Judges hearing dependency matters:	2
Cases assigned:	By prior family involvement; otherwise, randomly
GAL:	Appointed in all cases
CASA:	Active program provides training for GAL attorneys

Among the most recent project achievements in this jurisdiction have been innovative collaborative efforts among the Alexandria Police, the Department of Social Services (DSS), Child Protective Services (CPS), and Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. Calendaring reorganization, strict enforcement of hearing schedules, and early appointment of counsel in abuse and neglect cases also are improving court handling of child abuse and neglect cases.

With the cooperation of the Chief of Services for the Alexandria Department of Social Services, the court now reports to CPS in most cases of domestic violence in which a child was present, and in all cases involving families with a history of continuing violence. CPS workers offer services to a family and, when appropriate, will file a petition seeking a protective order or removal of a child.

The Alexandria Police also now are reporting to CPS when children are present in a home whenever police respond to a report of domestic violence.

Working relationships among professionals and volunteer advocates involved in court handling of child abuse and neglect cases have improved with new calendaring procedures. The new calendar process requires timely hearings and gives abuse and neglect cases precedence on all court dockets. The efforts of attorneys, social workers, and CASA volunteers all are being enhanced by the court's improved culture of starting on time and setting all cases for a time certain. Strict adherence to hearing schedules is contributing to timely court appearances by all parties, and improved judicial decision-making.

Early appointments of attorney-guardians *ad litem* (GALs) for children, and counsel for parents, involved in child abuse and neglect cases also are helping to streamline hearing schedules. GALs are required to attend multi-disciplinary staffings and to submit court reports at least every six months; specific duties of representation are set forth in the final removal order or final protective order. More contested hearings are being set for adjudication of abuse and neglect cases, but more settlements and agreed orders also are being achieved.

Another innovative step recently taken by the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court is the setting by court order of initial appointments with Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services personnel. Service providers now set weekly Wednesday morning appointments for all individuals referred by the court in an effort to provide "one-stop" mental health and substance abuse services for individuals involved in child abuse and neglect cases. The court enters an order and requires the parent's signature on a release of information form. Necessary forms are provided and social workers pick up the required forms and court orders from the court clerk's office. This new process is designed to speed delivery of mental health and substance abuse services and the ultimate adjudication of child abuse and neglect cases.

Alexandria Social Services now is screening foster care homes as pre-adoptive placements to allow these homes to be more quickly available to children when parents' failure to comply with treatment opportunities results in termination of parental rights. The Virginia Division of Child Support Enforcement also is now working effectively with Alexandria Social Services to file and pursue support orders for children in foster care.

Additional initiatives of the court and its Core Group include the following:

- (1) The court has served as a place for a site visit by personnel of another court from within the state of Virginia;
- (2) The court is in the process of establishing semi-annual training sessions for attorneys to meet with the judges and DSS personnel to be trained on issues relating to the work of the court including child protection issues;
- (3) Regular meetings of the Core Group are held every two months;
- (4) Lead Judge Stephen W. Rideout continues to be a member of a subcommittee of the State

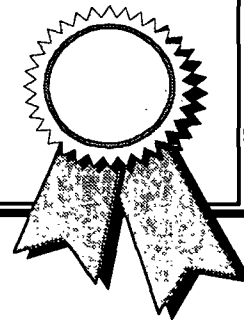


Court Improvement Project which will be proposing legislation in the upcoming legislative session;

- (5) The court and the DSS have initiated contact with the faith community in Alexandria through an interfaith alliance to promote community involvement with children who are in foster care. This is expected to increase the number of city residents who are foster parents, promote involvement of the faith community with children who are in foster care, provide alternative respite care for parents, and encourage adoptions;
- (6) The court is in the process of developing a mission statement;
- (7) The court and the Core Group plan to undertake a public education campaign to promote awareness of child protection issues in the City of Alexandria;
- (8) The Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program and the Department of Social Services are working collaboratively to obtain art work created by children in foster care for display in the hallways of the juvenile court.

Alexandria, Virginia  
Top 3 Achievements

- ❖ Increased collaboration among law enforcement, the Department of Social Services, Children's Protective Services, and Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
- ❖ Calendaring reorganization
- ❖ Early appointment of Attorney Guardians *Ad Litem*





Circuit Court of Cook County, Child Protection Division

# Chicago, Illinois

Lead Judge – Hon. Nancy S. Salyers, Presiding Judge, Child Protection Division

*“While being continually exposed to new ideas and best practice models from around the country, I am supported in making choices and developing initiatives that will work in my jurisdiction.*

*“The size of my jurisdiction can’t be the issue – the depth of my commitment to children must be. Participation as a Victims Model Court Lead Judge is the ultimate personal challenge – there are no excuses when I know I can access the tools for building meaningful, systemic changes to achieve permanency for children.”*

-Judge Salyers

Contact: Peggy Slater, Director, Policy Initiatives  
Child Protection Division, Circuit Court of Cook County  
2245 W. Ogden Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60612  
(312) 433-4487  
(312) 433-6695 FAX

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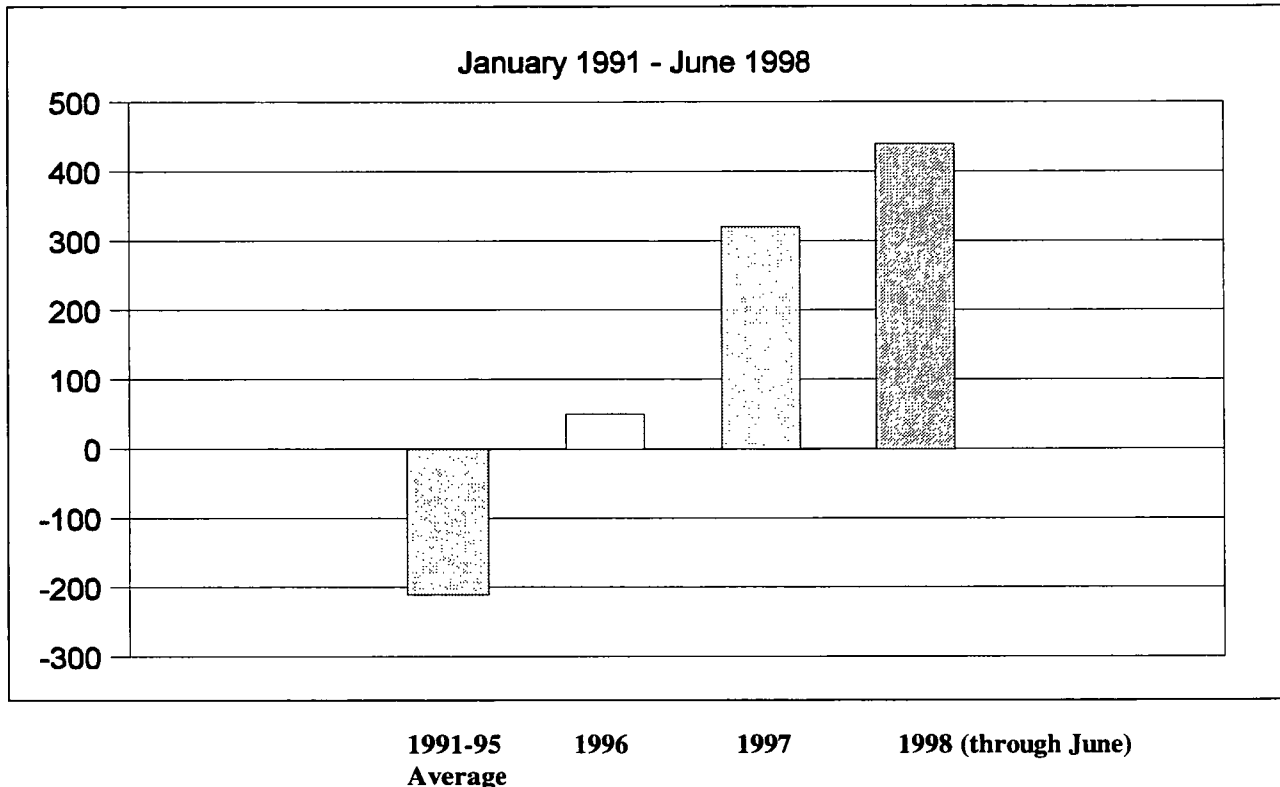
## Demographics

Area served:	Cook County, Illinois (Chicago metro area)
Estimated population:	5 million
Juvenile population:	1.7 million
Children in out-of-home placement:	31,534 as of August 31, 1998
Agency:	State-based
Judges hearing dependency matters:	17 judges – Additional court hearing officers also hear post-dispositional matters and make recommendations to judges
Cases assigned:	Random assignment
GAL:	Attorney appointed in all cases
CASA:	By appointment at request of parties or on judge’s own motion

The Child Protection Division of the Circuit Court of Cook County serves the Chicago metropolitan area. In 1995, there were 58,000 children for whom the court was responsible. Careful evaluation and screening of cases over the past two years have resulted in a reduced number of cases entering the system. Improved case management has resulted in a consistent increase in the number of cases closed.

The chart below illustrates the change in trend from rapid growth in court caseload to a steady decrease. As of June 30, 1998, the court had a caseload of 32,519. Figures released just prior to publication of this *Technical Assistance Bulletin* indicate the court's caseload continues to decrease. As of August 31, 1998, the court caseload had dropped to 31,534.

### Cook County Juvenile Court Difference Between Petitions Closed and Petitions Opened - Monthly Average



Source: Monthly statistics provided by the Circuit Court of Cook County,  
County Department, Juvenile Division

A Child Protection Advisory Work Group of professionals from governmental offices, agencies and universities was established by Presiding Judge Nancy Salyers and continues at work to improve court handling of child abuse and neglect cases. Among court improvement goals set last year were: 1) establish court-based family conference policies and procedures; 2) institute extended temporary custody hearings, including a pre-hearing joint conference of litigants, to ensure timely and informed judicial decision-making in the early stages of dependency litigation; and 3) adopt a staggered call for all dependency dockets.

Both court family conference procedures and extended temporary custody hearings, in accord with national recommendations published in the NCJFCJ's *RESOURCE GUIDELINES: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse & Neglect Cases*, have been introduced court-wide. Both concepts have been embraced by the Department of Children and Family Services and included in its policies and

procedures. Preliminary data indicate success in identifying better placements for children and permitting more children to return home in early stages of the case.

A new case calendaring procedure allowing a staggered call for dependency cases already is resulting in less waiting time for all parties. The time-certain process provides a more respectful atmosphere for litigants and frees up hundreds of worker hours which can be reallocated to vital casework. Court authorities continue efforts to fully implement and smoothly execute the staggered call calendar system.

The number of adoptions of children in foster care in Illinois has doubled in the past year, exceeding 4,000. A new office of the Adoption Information Center of Illinois, which operates the state listing service for waiting children, opened in the court in July. This office will expedite the identification of Cook County children available for adoption. The court also is entering a joint project with the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services to do adoption outreach to the African American community.

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services is establishing a "HELP" unit at court to respond to resource and service issues which arise during court proceedings. The unit will provide referrals to available resources, problem solve, provide short-term clinical interventions and direction, and will identify systemic problems and recommend solutions.

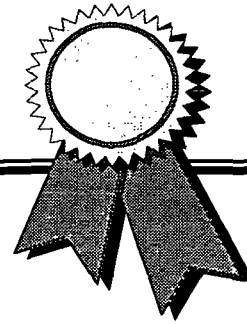
A study of the impact of federal welfare reform on the Child Protection Division has resulted in draft policy guidelines governing an interface between the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and the Illinois Department of Human Services to coordinate child welfare and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) service plans. Work has begun to implement a pilot program to coordinate services for dual child welfare and TANF clients. This service coordination pilot will result in data collection to inform the planning of service provision to this overlapping state population.

Interdisciplinary training of court and social services staff continues to be undertaken at annual two-day set-asides co-sponsored by the Child Protection Division and the NCJFCJ. The most recent "Children Can't Wait II" conference was held May 19-20, 1998, in Chicago.

Progress continues toward additional court goals: encourage filing of termination of parental rights petitions before adoptive placements are identified with regular reports and judicial review until adoption is secured; establish a court-based Resource Center to provide immediate access to services for families and children leaving courtrooms; and full implementation of subsidized guardianships. A parent education in court procedures program is underway under the auspices of a State Court Improvement grant.

Chicago, Illinois  
Top 3 Achievements

- ❖ Court family conferences
- ❖ Extended temporary custody hearings
- ❖ New calendaring system:  
staggered call



Hamilton County Juvenile Court

# Cincinnati, Ohio

Lead Judge – Hon. David E. Grossmann, Presiding Administrative Judge (Retired)

Contact: Ms. Lisa Portune, Dependency Supervisor  
Hamilton County Juvenile Court  
800 Broadway  
Cincinnati, Ohio, 45202  
(513) 852-4858  
(513) 852-4608 FAX

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## Demographics

Area served:	Hamilton County encompassing metropolitan Cincinnati and surrounding vicinity
Estimated population:	900,000
Juvenile population:	250,000
Children in out-of-home placement:	1,300
Agency:	County
Judges hearing dependency matters:	One judge and six magistrates filling four full-time dependency positions
Cases assigned:	By date of Day One hearing
GAL:	Social worker GAL appointed for children with attorney backup as needed; attorney GAL appointed in any case involving alleged abuse
CASA:	By appointment

Hamilton County Juvenile Court efforts over the past year have focused on two specific areas: case tracking and information system improvements; and increased community efforts to find adoptive homes for abused and neglected children.

## Technology

Early in its court improvement program, this court recognized the need for specialized data to serve a number of purposes: (1) to track specific details on families and children; (2) to track information on exactly how cases move through court and agency systems; (3) to provide information on trends in court practice; (4) to provide performance statistics on parties involved in the court process; and (5) to provide case documents for immediate use.

The Cincinnati court in the early 1990s installed a state-of-the art case tracking system. With constant use, it became apparent that this system needed additional functions, and that the court needed the computer capacity to design and produce additional reports and functions as necessary. Work just now being concluded has made the system more user-friendly, allowing court staff to create reports, issue documents, and perform additional functions.

### ***Adoption***

As improvements in Hamilton County's information system made it possible for court staff to track trends and case movement, it also became apparent that cases moving efficiently through the court system still were stalling at the "back end" or post-termination phase. Too many children whose parental rights had been terminated were spending too long in extended foster care awaiting adoption. As this population of waiting children grew, the court recognized the need for action. Lead Judge David Grossmann initiated a public awareness campaign, and put into place a variety of projects focused on moving waiting children into adoptive homes.

A tri-state, multi-county adoption initiative was established, bringing together the efforts of agency personnel, court officials, and related professionals from 23 counties in Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky, who formed a coalition to identify and address local, state and regional barriers to adoption.

In June, a group of celebrity spokespersons joined in a "Celebrity Chef Cook-off" fundraiser to generate financial support for continuing adoption efforts. Partial funding for this charitable event was provided by Wendy's International.

A new adoption Web site was created by the court to allow Internet users to access up-to-the-minute information on children awaiting adoption. The Web site at [www.hcadopt.org](http://www.hcadopt.org) is the result of collaboration among five local agencies with support from The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. The site provides a brief description of special needs children awaiting adoption, including their physical, mental, emotional, and learning challenges. Visitors to the Web site also can obtain administrative information on adoption, including application procedures and the procedures involved in a pre-adoptive home study.

Since the site went on-line Oct. 1, 1997, it has accumulated an estimated 11,000 "hits," or visits to the site. More than 381 messages have been submitted by prospective adoptive parents. Of those visitors leaving messages, 61% expressed an interest in adopting sibling groups, and over 60% of interested parties visiting the site completed approved home studies. Hits have proven most frequent during evenings, weekends, and holidays.

Additional Hamilton County projects focusing on adoption include:

- (1) An Adoption Transition Committee, organized by the Hamilton County Department of Human Services, to identify all tasks related to the adoption process, such as recruitment, home study, placement and finalization. The committee also will determine which tasks, if any, can be cost-effectively contracted outside the Department of Human Services.



- (2) Project 150, an initiative focused on the fact that the number of children entering permanent custody remains larger than the number of children leaving permanent custody. Project goals are to create an informational video on adoption; increase recruitment of African American adoptive homes through work with churches; make pre-service training available to Department of Human Services employees; hold group sessions to encourage foster parents to adopt permanently committed children; and privatize the home study process to accelerate approval of adoptive parents.
- (3) A long-term foster care/permanent custody initiative to decrease the number of children entering long-term foster care and to increase the number of finalized adoptions. The Hamilton County Department of Human Services project seeks to: define acceptable use of long-term foster care; define acceptable use of temporary custody extensions; define an "unadoptable" child; and develop a policy to move children out of foster families and into permanent custody.
- (4) An Adoption Mediation Pilot Project is being developed in collaboration with the Hamilton County Juvenile Court, Department of Human Services, and Adoption Options Agency. The pilot project is designed to enable families to more easily make the choice to free a child for adoption, as well as to help create the terms of that adoption. Project goals are to provide children with better explanations from parents as to their inability to parent, and their love and devotion to their children's best interests; to reduce docket time needed to hear permanent custody trials; and to increase cooperation among parents, the juvenile court, agency, and adoptive parents.





65<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court, Children's Court

# El Paso, Texas

Lead Judge – Hon. Patricia A. Macias, Associate Judge

Contact: Melissa Key, Model Court Coordinator  
65<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court  
500 E. San Antonio Street  
El Paso, Texas 79901  
(915) 546-2147  
(915) 543-3811 FAX

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## Demographics

Area served:	El Paso County
Estimated population:	670,000 (2.5 million in metropolitan Juarez and Las Cruces)
Juvenile population:	193,000
Children in out-of-home placement:	491
Agency:	State
Judges hearing dependency matters:	One judge assigned to dependency cases; one judge assigned to termination of parental rights cases
Cases assigned:	Entire dependency caseload assigned to one judge
GAL:	Appointed only in certain cases
CASA:	By appointment

Texas' 65<sup>th</sup> Judicial District faces unique challenges because of its proximity to the immediately adjacent Mexican cities of Juarez and Las Cruces (estimated combined pop. 2.5 million). The diverse ethnic heritage of families and children within the court's jurisdiction presents a need for careful case tracking and efficiently allocated court resources. Under the leadership of Associate Judge Patricia A. Macias, this court is at work in the following focus areas:

### ***Assessment Foster Home Initiative***

A new type of "assessment foster home" has been established to provide each abused and neglected child with a nurturing home environment where individual needs can be immediately identified. Assessment foster home providers receive 45 hours of special training in crisis management, skilled observation techniques, and methods of behavior documentation. Additional systemic changes related to assessment foster homes include:

- ❖ Regional Child Protective Services (CPS) restructuring to include two placement workers and an Assessment Foster Home developer. A treatment team approach taken in all cases produces recommendations on placement, needed services, permanency planning, visitation, and time frames prior to a full adversarial hearing.
- ❖ Substitute placements are identified based upon each child's individual needs. Psychosocial assessments are provided for each family member within five days of a child entering protective custody. Individualized service plans are drafted within five days of the first hearing based on recommendations from the treatment team.
- ❖ Delivery of services to meet individual family members' needs begins before the initial hearing.
- ❖ Specialized placement workers provide smooth transition of cases between caseworkers.
- ❖ Children entering assessment foster homes are provided with permanent homes within a year. Over half achieve this goal within six months. A total 149 children went through the assessment foster home process in the past year. Less than 30% required a change of placement during their stay in foster care.

### ***Mediation***

A newly established mediation program for dependency cases is providing trained, experienced mediators committed to accepting Children's Court cases on a *pro bono* basis. Supported by a grant through the Children's Justice Act, the mediation program to date has handled 76 cases. A total 57% of cases mediated resulted in an agreement. The mediation program is designed to empower families to contribute to decisions on permanency, custody, visitation and termination of parental rights. All cases set for termination trials are referred to mediation prior to trial. Settlement of issues has resulted in significant savings in court costs.

### ***Additional Court Improvements***

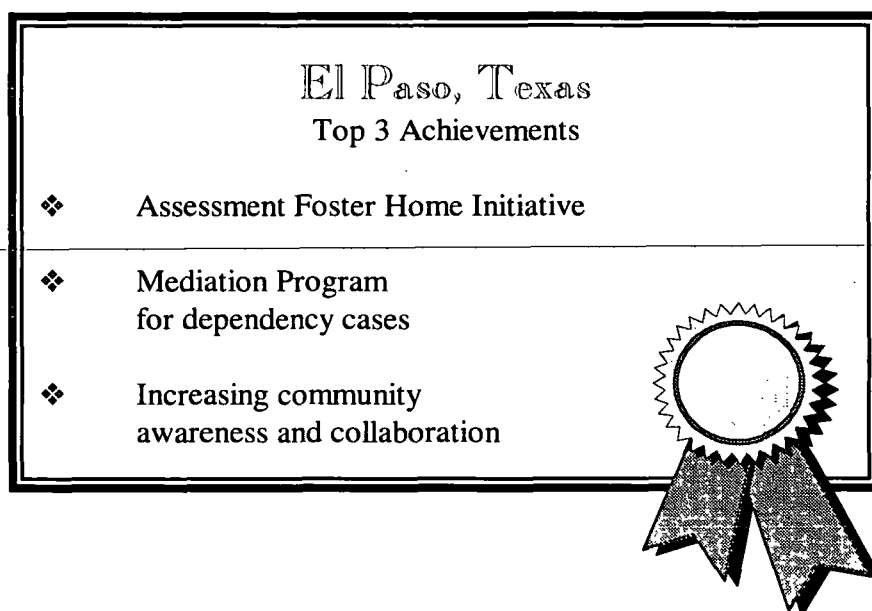
The El Paso Children's Court also has begun using local networks of professionals to increase community awareness of problems associated with child abuse and neglect. More than 85 community members serve on various advisory committees on mediation, assessment foster homes, foster parent standards, teen issues, and adoption. Community members are helping to increase local and regional awareness of the need to expedite adoption of formerly abused or neglected children.

The El Paso Family Bar Association, law firms and solo practitioners volunteer to represent children on a *pro bono* basis. Special guardians *ad litem* are appointed for undocumented children to ensure they are not returned to their home country if reunification is not the permanency plan. A special Model Court Coordinator, funded by the regional CPS, acts as a liaison and administrator for these and other court initiatives.

New video conference hearings now enable children placed in out-of-county residential treatment facilities to participate in their hearings via simultaneous video conferencing. Important live testimony from the child's therapeutic team supports decisions made by the court.

Other improvements in day-to-day court operations include:

- ❖ Simultaneous language interpretation for all non-English-speaking court participants;
- ❖ Foster parents attend and testify at each hearing and are included in mediation and as part of permanency transition teams;
- ❖ Children's cases are reviewed every three months;
- ❖ Court orders are drafted on the bench and distributed immediately after each hearing;
- ❖ Subsequent hearings are docketed prior to the conclusion of each hearing;
- ❖ "Front-loaded" services are provided early in the progress of each case to provide all possible opportunities for family rehabilitation and safe family reunification;
- ❖ All case processing time frames have been narrowed and court procedures streamlined.





Family Court, First Circuit, State of Hawaii

# Honolulu, Hawaii

Lead Judge – Hon. John C. Bryant, Jr., Lead Judge, Juvenile Division

*“Protecting kids is my job. Being a Model Court Judge has tremendously improved my ability to do that. The ideas and programs promulgated by the Model Courts Project have led to better case management, open communication and a dramatic increase in adoptions in our jurisdiction. It has led to safer homes and families for children.”*

-Judge Bryant

Contact: William Santos, Deputy Director, Family Court, First Circuit  
P.O. Box 3498  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96811-3498  
(808) 539-4414  
(808) 539-4504 FAX

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## Demographics

Area served:	Island of Oahu
Estimated population:	870,000
Juvenile population:	280,000
Children in out-of-home placement:	990 – Foster Custody 572 – Permanent Custody
Agency:	State
Judges hearing dependency matters:	Four – All four judges hear both juvenile delinquency and dependency matters
Cases assigned:	Related cases are set before same judge; otherwise by rotation
GAL:	Appointed in all cases
CASA:	Volunteer GALs are appointed in selected cases

In August 1996, this jurisdiction initiated efforts in conjunction with the NCJFCJ to safely divert families from formal child protective services to community-based programs. The resultant “Ohana Conferencing Project” (‘Ohana’ means family in native Hawaiian) was a collaborative effort of the Family Court of the First Circuit, the Department of Human Services’ Social Services Division, and the local Wai’anae community, located on the leeward coast of Oahu.

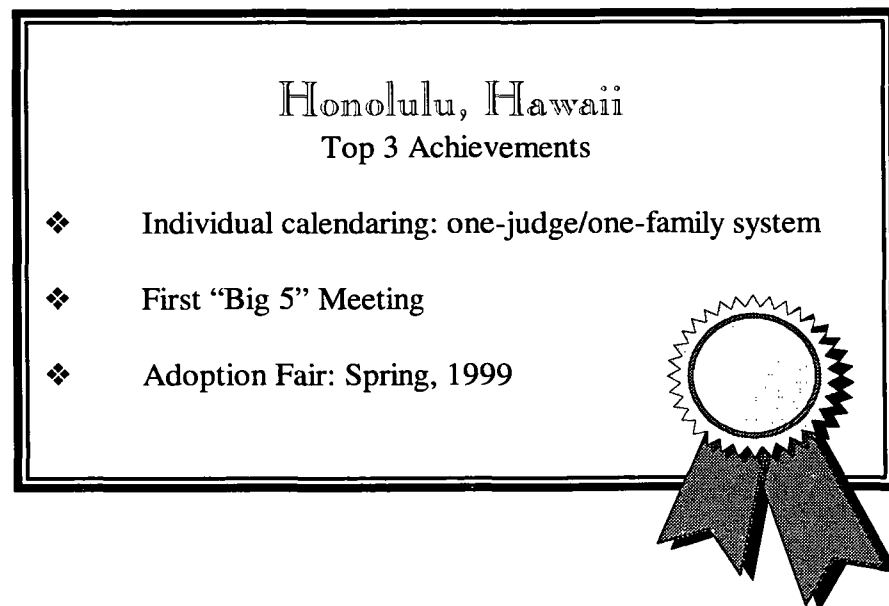
The ongoing project uses family conferencing as an intervention strategy only after child abuse or neglect reports have been confirmed. Ohana conferencing allows appropriate child abuse and neglect cases to be diverted from the Family Court, and the length of time these cases remain active with child protective services continues to be significantly reduced.

As part of continuing, related court improvement efforts, the Family Court in 1997 transformed its master calendaring system to an individual calendaring, one-judge/one-family system. Results are benefitting both court administration as well as children and families. The reformatted calendar is resulting in fewer children lingering in extended foster care, and quicker overall termination of parental rights in appropriate cases. A total 102 children were adopted under the old master calendar system in 1996, and a total 234 children were adopted during the first year of the new one-judge/one-family calendar system in 1997.

As a Model Court of the PPCD Child Victims Project, the Family Court of the First Circuit held a meeting in March 1998 of representatives from the "Big 5" factors integral to court improvement: 1) Family Court; 2) Department of Human Services, Children's Protective Services; 3) Attorney General's office; 4) Foster Parents Association; and 5) Child & Parents Advocates. Primary among collaborative goals is systemic improvement in child abuse and neglect case handling, including proposed legislation, simplification of Safe Family Home Reports, and increased funding for guardians *ad litem*. "Big 5" representatives continue to meet regularly.

The Family Court of the First Circuit also is developing and planning a community-wide "Adoption Fair" in the Spring of 1999 through which information on children whose parental rights have been terminated will be disseminated, and prospective adoptive placements identified. Organizational meetings for this event are continuing throughout 1998.

The court also is continuing to improve case management practices such as no return of child to unidentified perpetrators, no stipulations to jurisdiction without admissions or findings of fact, and good fact-finding trials.





# Jefferson Family Court

# Louisville, Kentucky

Lead Judge – Hon. Richard J. FitzGerald, Chief Judge, Jefferson Family Court

*“The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges has been an invaluable resource in the ongoing development of the Jefferson Family Court. Because of the Council’s integral role and expertise in providing technical assistance, Family Court has a better and improved working relationship between the community and social services, legal and law enforcement agencies. This collaboration is providing better outcomes for the children and families of Jefferson County.”*

-Judge FitzGerald

Contact: Jim Birmingham, Family Court Administrator  
Jefferson Family Court  
600 W. Jefferson Street  
Louisville, Kentucky 40202  
(502) 595-4392  
(502) 595-3270 FAX

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## Demographics

Area served:	Jefferson County, Kentucky
Estimated population:	672,918
Juvenile population:	164,865 children under the age of 18
Children in out-of home placement:	Approximately 1,200 children
Agency:	Cabinet for Families and Children, State of Kentucky agency
Judges hearing dependency matters:	9 judges
Cases assigned:	Alphabetical assignment by oldest child’s last name
GAL:	27 Guardians <i>ad Litem</i> (3 specialized attorneys for each judge); GAL appointed in all cases
CASA:	Referrals made by the court

A primary goal of the Jefferson Family Court is to fully utilize all available governmental and community resources to keep children safe, preserve family unity whenever possible, and to protect the rights and welfare of children. The project transcends the traditional, strictly adjudicatory function of the courts by maximizing the use of non-adversarial approaches whenever appropriate.

Prior to its designation as a Child Victims Project Model Court, the Jefferson Family Court was one of four jurisdictions which participated in a PPCD “Diversion Project.” This initiative examined the juvenile and family courts’ role in diverting families from traditional child protective services to

community-based programs. Two serious barriers which initially faced the court were: families and children were not being provided relevant and focused services appropriate to their needs; and relevant resources were inadequate.

Through combined federal and private support, the court overcame these barriers by exerting judicial leadership in the development of new community partnerships for the protection of children. Court procedures now provide discretion to Family Court judges to refer a family to newly developed or expanded community-based programs. Referrals may be made at any point after a case becomes court-active. Related court services also provide mediation for formal dependency, neglect, and abuse cases which meet identified criteria. Pre-court cases which are successfully resolved are not referred to a formal court hearing. Each successfully mediated case allows scarce judicial resources to be more efficiently utilized. Family mediation is the result of collaborative efforts among the Family Court, the Cabinet for Families and Children, the county attorney, Just Solutions, and Neighborhood Place Ujima (two community-based programs), all of which provide in-kind administrative services. A "Family Group Decision-Making Program" also has been instituted.

Kentucky's state court system also is participating in a federally-supported Adoption Opportunities program designed to advance timely adoption of children. Among adoption activities are implementation of a risk assessment matrix, recruitment of foster care/adoptive homes and development of streamlined legal representation.

PPCD Child Victims Project-related court improvement programs in the Jefferson Family Court are:

### ***Families in Transition***

A divorce adjustment education program to help families recognize and respond to the difficulties experienced by children of divorce. A sliding \$1-\$50 fee is charged, supplemented by administrative services from the University of Louisville Family Therapy Program.

### ***Mediation for Custody, Visitation and Property***

Cases involving custody, visitation and/or property disputes are referred to mediation unless waived by court order for good cause. Litigants pay for mediation on a court-approved sliding fee scale.

### ***Domestic Violence Information Sessions***

Free information sessions for victims of domestic violence, family members or other interested persons examine the court process and available resources. Sessions are sponsored through in-kind services provided by the Family Court, Center for Women and Families, and the Cabinet for Families and Children.

### ***Children's Guardian Ad Litem Initiative***

Specialized guardians *ad litem* are assigned to each of nine Family Court divisions to improve the representation of children in a cost-effective manner. Court-developed standards and expectations of practice are articulated in court rules. GAL payment is mandated in Kentucky Revised Statute and the Civil Rules of Procedure.

### ***Turning it Around Program***

Designed for individuals facing sentencing or already sentenced for paternity non-support, this program offers educational sessions related to fatherhood, employment, child support and co-parenting. Ongoing services are provided through a \$45 participant fee and in-kind services.

### ***Family Access Center***

With support from the Division of Child Support Enforcement of the Cabinet for Families and Children, the Jefferson Family Court is developing a visitation center which will provide safe access and a nurturing environment for quality parenting time.

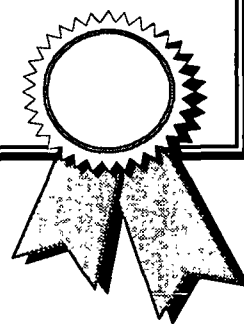
### ***Truancy Court***

This school-based collaborative effort between the Jefferson County Public Schools and the Family Court focuses on improving student attendance and diverting children from the court system. This program brings students and parents before a volunteer Family Court judge on a weekly basis, and, combined with enhanced social services for families, monitors school attendance.

An evaluation component is built into each program to assess its value to children and families served by the court, and programs are adjusted over time to be responsive to community needs.

#### **Louisville, Kentucky Top 3 Achievements**

- ❖ Adoption Opportunities Grant
- ❖ Community Partnerships  
for the Protection of Children
- ❖ Family Mediation Project





11<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit Court, Miami-Dade County Juvenile Court

# Miami, Florida

Lead Judge – Hon. D. Bruce Levy, Juvenile Division, Circuit Court \*

*"Watching the completion of the first successful Model Court cases can only be analogized to a combination of watching the earth move, my child being born, and knowing how Thomas Edison felt when someone said, 'Hey, who turned on the lights?'"*

*"There really are no words to described the feeling. This system really does work."*

-Judge Levy

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Administrative Office of the Courts  
Miami-Dade County Courthouse  
73 W. Flagler Street  
Miami, Florida 33130  
(305) 375-5278  
(305) 375-4211 FAX

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## Demographics

Area served:	Miami-Dade metropolitan and surrounding areas
Estimated population:	2,300,000
Juvenile population:	500,000
Children in out-of home placement:	1,542 children in foster care and shelter care; 3,950 children in families under supervision*
Agency:	State
Judges hearing dependency matters:	3 and one hearing officer who can hear matters with both parties in agreement, supplemented by senior judges
Cases assigned:	Randomly
GAL:	A pool of volunteers, with <i>pro bono</i> attorneys to assist, is referred cases which are taken on a priority basis; attorney for a child sometimes is appointed.
CASA:	Incorporated in the GAL program

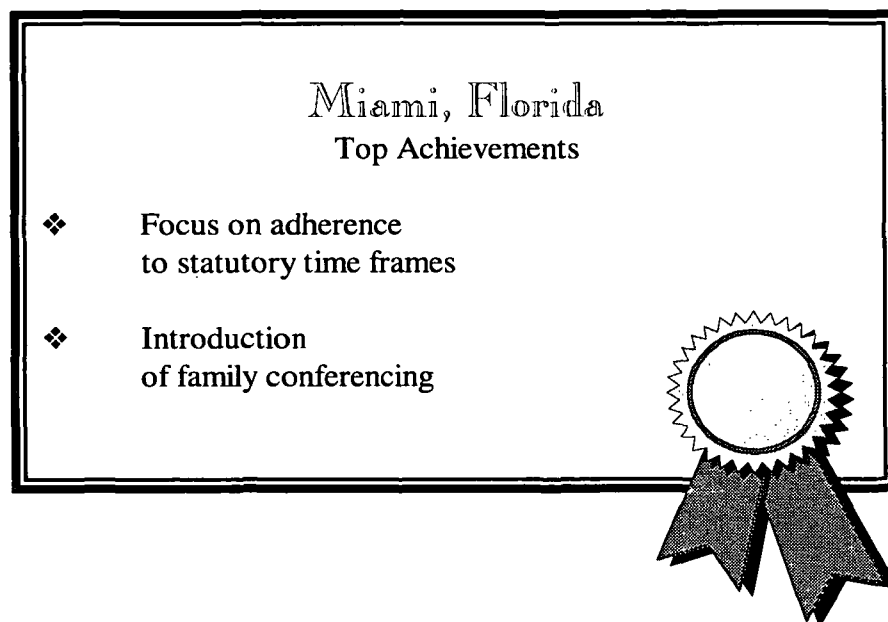
The Miami Model Court, a project of one of the three Dependency Divisions, is implementing changes in both how the court process works and how the Department of Children & Families provides social services. The changes being implemented focus on adhering to statutory time frames so that children are safely reunified with their families or provided with a new permanent placement

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\* The Hon. Steven Robinson assumed the position of Lead Judge as of November 1998.

in a timely manner. The *RESOURCE GUIDELINES*' emphasis on involving the family support system from the inception of the case, making court actions and orders clear and understandable, providing legal representation and services at the earliest possible time, and creating a less litigious and more respectful environment, are all part of this innovative program.

The Department of Children & Families has provided interagency training by nationally recognized experts and reorganized its staffing and procedures to introduce Family Conferencing. Preparation for conferences focuses on: identification of family strengths; involvement of all friends, relatives and professionals who can assist with planning and service delivery; and early assessment and service delivery. To accomplish this, child welfare agency staff members have crafted extensive changes in what they do and the way they do it. Immediately following the first hearing, family members talk with a Family Conference Coordinator to exchange information and initiate the conference plan. To involve all those concerned about the welfare of the children, Family Conferences are scheduled at "family friendly" times and locations. This intensive, in-depth work during the first 60 days of the case is being applied to minimize the need for contested hearings, increase the peaceful resolution of issues regarding care of the children, and shorten the time from removal to permanent placement.



Juvenile Court of Davidson County

# Nashville, Tennessee

Lead Judge – Hon. Andrew Shookhoff \*

Contact: Juvenile Court of Davidson County  
100 Woodland Street  
Nashville, Tennessee 37212  
(615) 862-8054  
(615) 862-7143 FAX

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## Demographics

Area served:	Davidson County
Estimated population:	511,000
Juvenile population:	116,000
Children in out-of home placement:	700
Agency:	County
Judges hearing dependency matters:	One judge, one full-time referee, one part-time referee

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Cases assigned:	Judge hears dependency matters, all petitions for termination of parental rights, and appeals from referee decisions; referees receive assigned cases
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GAL:	Appointed by the court on its own motion or on motion of a party
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CASA:	Referral made by the court
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Mediation in dependency cases is a primary focus of court improvement efforts in this jurisdiction. Two attorneys with extensive experience in mediation techniques have been assigned leadership roles by the court and are recruiting and training local mediators in special issues related to child abuse and neglect cases.

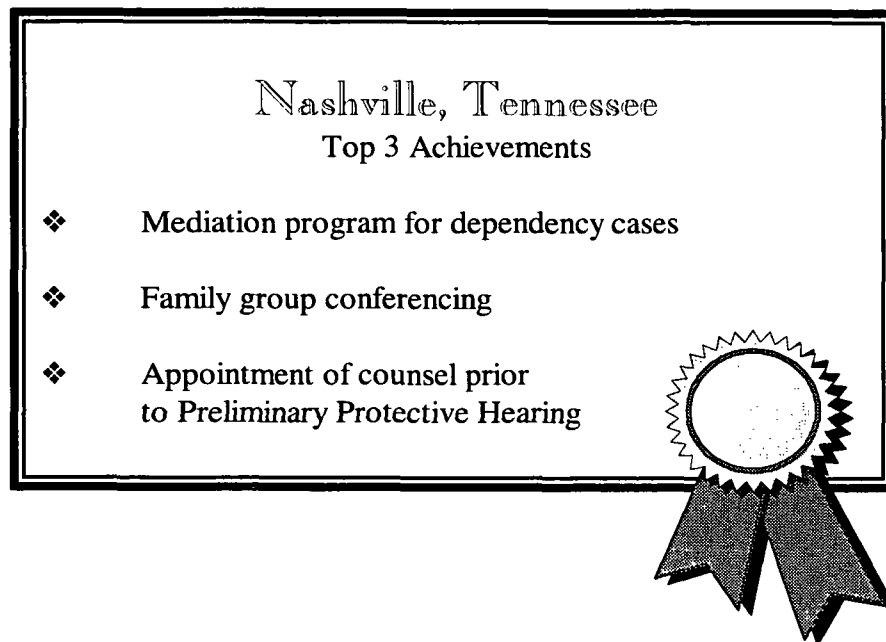
In May and June of 1998, these two lead attorneys made site visits to the Santa Clara County Superior Court in San Jose, Calif. Officials at this other Child Victims Model Court provided access to their own mediation processes and calendaring procedures. The two Nashville representatives were allowed to observe and collect information on the Santa Clara County Family Court Services' dependency mediation programs. Each attorney received on-site training and observed case mediation in progress. Policies and procedures with potential application in the Nashville courts will be transferred and replicated as a result of this site visit.

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\* The Hon. Betty Adams Green assumed the position of Lead Judge as of Sept. 1, 1998.

Additional court improvement goals toward which this jurisdiction continues to work are:

- ❖ development and application of Family Group Conferencing techniques in appropriate cases;
- ❖ appointment of qualified counsel prior to preliminary protective hearings to improve advocacy for parents and children;
- ❖ guidelines for appointment of counsel;
- ❖ expedition of termination of parental rights cases;
- ❖ reorganization and expansion of court staff for foster care/permanency planning review hearings;
- ❖ increased court leadership in identification of prospective adoptive placements;
- ❖ improved computerized hearing scheduling and case tracking;
- ❖ targeted projects to improve drug and alcohol treatment programs and improved services for seriously emotionally disturbed children.





Superior Court of New Jersey

# Newark, New Jersey

Lead Judge – Hon. Thomas P. Zampino, Presiding Judge, Family Division

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(973) 693-6608

Celia Zalkind, Assistant Director, Association for Children of New Jersey  
35 Halsey Street, Newark, New Jersey 07102  
(973) 643-3876

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## Demographics

Area served:	Essex County, Newark, and other urban and suburban areas
Estimated population:	778,000
Juvenile population:	189,000
Children in out-of home placement:	2,126
Agency:	State
Judges hearing dependency matters:	Five judges
Cases assigned:	By District Office
GAL:	Appointed in all cases
CASA:	Referred by the court, cases accepted according to priority
Child Placement Review Boards:	Volunteers serve on 11 boards reviewing all out-of-home placements.

Three primary areas in which New Jersey's Superior Court continues to improve court handling of child abuse and neglect cases are improved technology, training, and mediation.

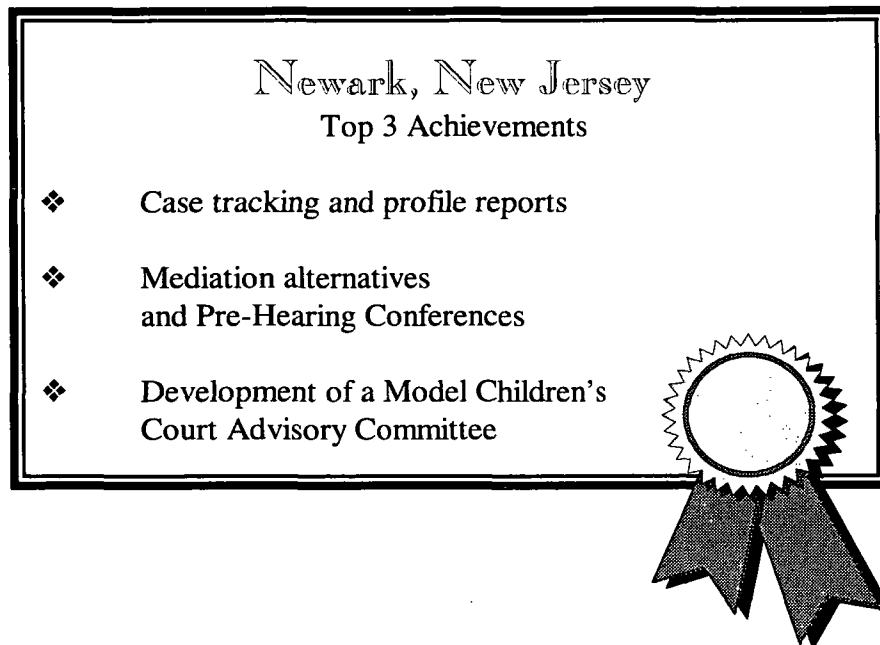
Data collection, case tracking and case profile reports on children in out-of-home care are being improved through implementation of new management information techniques. One simple but significant improvement is implementation of a Newark-based concept called, "Put a Face on a File." Five district offices of the Department of Human Services Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) have been supplied with Polaroid cameras to attach photos to the files of every child involved in out-of-home placement.

The jurisdiction's current abuse and neglect caseload is 2,126 children. Court authorities maintain ideal circumstances would provide for all children to be present at in-court hearings and case

reviews, but admit that their presence is precluded by transportation logistics and the potential for childhood trauma. The new filing procedure will ensure a photograph of every child is attached to each case file.

Additional Model Court activities include:

- ❖ A Model Children's Court Advisory Committee has been established and meets monthly to implement and monitor system re-design.
- ❖ Training programs for both DYFS caseworkers and volunteers are being expanded. Laptop computers are being provided to the Child Placement Review Board to enhance sharing of information.
- ❖ Mediation alternative and pre-hearing conferences are being established for abuse and neglect cases.
- ❖ Additional court days have been assigned to allow greater access for cases and to streamline the review process.
- ❖ Grant applications are being made at both the state and federal levels for staff for foster-adopt and concurrent planning programs.



Second Judicial District Court, Family Division

# Reno, Nevada

Lead Judges:

Hon. Charles M. McGee, District Judge, Family Division, Dept. Two  
Hon. Deborah Schumacher, District Judge, Family Division, Dept. Five

*"Participation in the Victims Model Court Project has led to numerous, valuable, concrete changes in the way our court handles dependency cases. In addition, the energy, compassion, and dedication of the fellow judges I have met through this project have been rejuvenating – a significant blessing in this difficult work we do!"*

-Judge Schumacher

Contacts: Michael Capello, Washoe County Social Services  
P.O. Box 11130  
Reno, Nevada 89520-0027

Tru-Vista Foundation  
P.O. Box 8199  
Reno, NV 89507

Family Group Conferencing  
& Alternative Dispute Resolution  
Contact Tru-Vista: Neal Bullis  
(702) 786-1049

Family Drug Court  
Contact Tru-Vista: David Kaul  
(702) 786-1001

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## Demographics

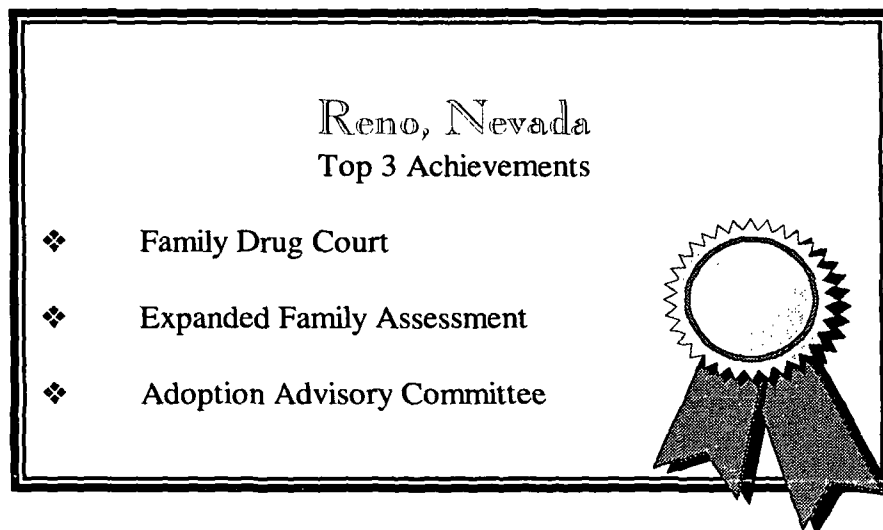
Area served:	Incorporated cities of Reno and Sparks and outlying areas of Washoe County
Estimated population:	300,000
Juvenile population:	79,000
Children in out-of home placement:	County supervised: 60 State supervised: 500
Agency:	County (short-term cases) State (long-term cases)
Judges hearing dependency matters:	Three judges and one master
Cases assigned:	By family if prior involvement; otherwise by date of filing
GAL:	Appointed; cases taken on a priority basis
CASA:	Yes, as resources allow

The Washoe County Family Drug Court program and the comprehensive rescheduling of child abuse and neglect cases before the District Court are two primary achievements of this jurisdiction. This Model Court also has established an expanded family assessment process for cases involving children younger than six years and an Adoption Advisory Committee to streamline termination of parental rights and speed adoptive placement.

The Family Drug Court program allows parents in danger of losing their children due to criminal prosecution for alcohol or drug abuse to participate in a court-sponsored, year-long recovery effort. Participants must show a desire to become sober and abstain from drug use, take parenting classes, and adhere to a strict court appearance schedule. Graduation is tied to participants' maintenance of a clean and sober record, improved lifestyle, successful reunification with their children, or voluntary relinquishment and adoption.

The court has assembled a multi-disciplinary team from throughout the community to assist in rehabilitation and reunification efforts directed at families affected by substance abuse. This strength-based approach is helping families capitalize on the skills necessary to develop responsible, drug-free and alcohol-free homes for their children. The cooperation of governmental agencies and professionals from throughout the community has produced a powerful synergy which works to identify appropriate families and move them to Family Drug Court services quickly. This collective community effort is helping parents provide healthy environments for children while stabilizing their own recovery process, an efficient and cost-effective response to substance abuse-affected families.

In addition to its Family Drug Court, the Family Division of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District has developed system-wide procedures to ensure that all children and families involved in abuse and neglect cases come to the court's attention as early as possible. Court scheduling of all dependency cases has been revamped in response to recommendations from a multi-disciplinary Technical Working Group studying court and social service agency operations. The working group also was responsible for appointment of a new integrated case manager to handle cases involving families with more than two children whose needs involve different agencies.



3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial District Juvenile Court

# Salt Lake City, Utah

Lead Judge – Hon. Sharon P. McCully

*"First, we decided that these changes **should** be made. Then we determined that these changes **could** be made. Now, the challenge is to assure that these improvements **are** being made in every child abuse and neglect case."*

-Judge McCully

Contact: 3<sup>rd</sup> Judicial District Juvenile Court  
P.O. Box 140431  
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-0431  
(801) 238-7767

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## Demographics

Area served:	Salt Lake, Tooele, and Summit Counties
Estimated population:	823,000
Juvenile population:	273,000
Children-in-out-of-home-placement:	2,300
Agency:	State-based
Judges hearing dependency matters:	8
Case assigned:	Individual calendaring, rotating cases
GAL:	Attorney appointed for every child
CASA:	Statewide program; volunteers appointed at court's discretion or may request case appointments.

Salt Lake City, Utah, became a Model Court during development of the NCJFCJ's *RESOURCE GUIDELINES* publication. Significant court and child welfare system improvements were implemented in conjunction with landmark Utah legislation in 1994. The new state legislation was largely prompted by a consent decree in a federal lawsuit challenging the duration, conditions, and services of foster care. The *RESOURCE GUIDELINES* provided much of the direction for the new legislation.

The legislation imposed short permanency time frames, as well as specific timelines for case processing. Most significant were the changes to "shelter" hearing procedures. The new law expanded shelter hearings into more substantive proceedings which are now preceded by a mandatory multi-disciplinary case screening. The legislation also enabled the hearing process to begin almost immediately upon the removal of a child from parents. This "front-loading" has resulted in far more expeditious case processing. The average length of stay for children in foster care in Utah is now approximately 10 months.

Another significant change in case processing occurred in the “permanency hearing.” Once a *pro forma* hearing lasting several minutes at most, with the usual outcome of extending foster care for another 12 months, the permanency hearing is now held within a maximum 12 months after removal, with a requirement that the child either be returned home at that time, or that a permanency goal other than reunification be established. The court must hold a hearing within 120 days of the permanency hearing to assure that the newly established permanency goal has been accomplished, or that all legal steps have been initiated to do so.

One of the most important “practice” changes that occurred in the Salt Lake City court was the assignment of “attorney teams” to each court room. The concept now allows the same Assistant Attorney General, Guardian *ad litem* attorney, and parent defense attorney to handle every case before an individual judge. In addition to giving continuity to each case, this practice has been immeasurably helpful in case scheduling to meet the required timelines, because attorney teams do not have conflicting court schedules in other courtrooms. The “team” approach also has the added benefit of collaboration which helps all parties, as well as the court.

With the enactment of massive reform legislation came the allocation of resources, most notably additional juvenile court judges, eight statewide since 1994, bringing the total number of juvenile court judges in Utah to 22, and the number in Salt Lake City from five to eight. The additional hearing officers enabled the court to meet the case processing time guidelines, and also increased the amount of time devoted to each hearing, as recommended by the *RESOURCE GUIDELINES*. Thus, the court is more able to manage each child protection case to hold all parties accountable and assure that the child reaches permanency in as short a time as possible.

Additional resources also were allocated to other parts of the system most affecting the courts. Legal representation of the Division of Child and Family Services was shifted from county attorneys to the State Attorney General, and an entirely new division of the Attorney General’s Office was created, with 16 attorneys initially assigned statewide. That number is now 30. These attorneys specialize in child protection cases, and have no other assignments. Counties were given the responsibility to fund adequate representation of indigent parents, and, at least in Salt Lake County, this has resulted in a contract for a law firm which exclusively provides defense for parents in child protection cases. These attorneys are available to meet with parents at the shelter hearing, which avoids the necessity for delaying or continuing hearings for purposes of obtaining or appointing counsel.

In 1994, the state’s guardian *ad litem* program was redesigned and implemented statewide to assure that every child in a child protection case is represented by an attorney guardian *ad litem*. All guardian *ad litem* attorneys are part of a newly created statewide office under the auspices of the Administrative Office of the Courts. Their duties are thoroughly defined by statute. They are full-time attorneys who may not engage in any other legal practice. There were originally 22 attorneys assigned to the eight judicial districts in the state. That number has grown to 30 attorneys, with eight assigned to the Salt Lake court, as well as one who handles all appellate work. The attorney guardians *ad litem* are assigned to a case as soon as a child is removed from the home, and they participate in multi-disciplinary screenings prior to shelter hearings. The same guardian *ad litem*

stays with a case throughout all proceedings. Attorney guardians *ad litem* often are assisted by Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs).

In 1995, it was determined that the new legislation and additional resources were adequate to manage all newly filed child protection cases. However, there was a backlog of over 700 children who had been in foster care longer than 18 months. To eliminate this backlog, a special project was created and funded by the legislature, with the goal of assuring a safe, permanent placement for each of those children within one year. The Permanency Project "borrowed" four judges, contracted with special assistant attorneys general, attorneys to provide guardian *ad litem* services, and attorneys to provide defense to parents. The Division of Child and Family Services also created a special unit to work on Permanency Project cases. As a result, all children in that backlog group were either returned home, placed in permanent relative or other guardianship placements, or parental rights were terminated and the children were freed for adoption.

Through funding and direction from the Court Improvement Project, a court-annexed mediation program was initiated in November 1997. The mediation program has now provided mediation services in approximately 300 cases, with resolutions or partial resolutions in 80% of the cases. "Family meetings" are being facilitated by the Division of Child and Family Services, and a more formal family group conferencing program is in the offing.

The ongoing challenge is to continue to renew the spirit of reform, improvement, and collaboration. ~~Most helpful in that regard is the recent hiring of Adam Trupp as Deputy Juvenile Court Administrator, with responsibility for the child protection side of the juvenile courts in Utah. This is the first time there has been an administrative position with special training and responsibility for child protection cases. Juvenile Court administration previously has been devoted almost exclusively to delinquency matters. With the help of Mr. Trupp, renewed efforts are being made to collaborate with all significant players in the child protection system. Regularly scheduled meetings are planned with Lead Judge McCully, together with the agency director and supervising attorneys. The Court Improvement Committee has been designated as the steering committee for the Model Court Project and is "retreating" in October 1998 to discuss goals and long-term planning.~~

The biggest obstacle to expedited permanency in Utah at the present time is unacceptable delay in finalizing appropriate adoptive placements for children who are free for adoption. Efforts to improve recruitment, training, and support of adoptive parents, commitment by the Court of Appeals to prioritize termination of parental rights cases, and proposed legislative changes to "open" adoptions to varying degrees of parental involvement, are all directed toward shortening the wait for adoption.

Utah is very proud of the improvements made in case management, length of stay in foster care, and commitment of time and resources to improve the courts' handling of child protection cases. Judicial, legislative and executive leaders continue to work to improve these processes to meet the goal of safe, permanent homes for all children.

Salt Lake City, Utah  
Top 3 Achievements

- ❖ Court-annexed mediation
- ❖ Average length of foster care placements reduced to less than 10 months
- ❖ Hiring of Deputy Juvenile Court Administrator with responsibility for child protection cases





Santa Clara County Superior Court, Juvenile Dependency Division

# San Jose, California

Lead Judge – Hon. Leonard P. Edwards, Supervising Judge

*“For over a decade, the Santa Clara County juvenile dependency court has developed a series of model practices in order to improve the ways in which children are protected, families receive timely and appropriate services, and children reach permanency within statutory timelines. Employing such techniques as direct calendaring, regular meetings of all members of the court system, and extensive cross-training, Santa Clara County is committed to improving the ways children and families are served.”*

-Judge Edwards

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(408) 289-9250 FAX

Jean Pennypacker, Deputy Court  
Executive for Family Resources,  
Santa Clara County Superior Court  
191 N. First Street  
San Jose, California 95113  
(408) 299-3232 Ext. 215

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## Demographics

Area served:	Santa Clara County
Estimated population:	1,600,000
Juvenile population:	417,692
Children in out-of home placement:	3,200
Agency:	Santa Clara County Department of Family and Children's Services
Judges hearing dependency matters:	Judge Leonard P. Edwards Commissioner Kristine McCarthy Commissioner Ann Ollinger
Cases assigned:	Direct calendaring – from initial hearing through adoption
GAL:	Santa Clara County District Attorney's Office
CASA:	Child Advocates of Santa Clara and San Mateo Counties, 1731 N. First Street, No. 3, San Jose, California 95112

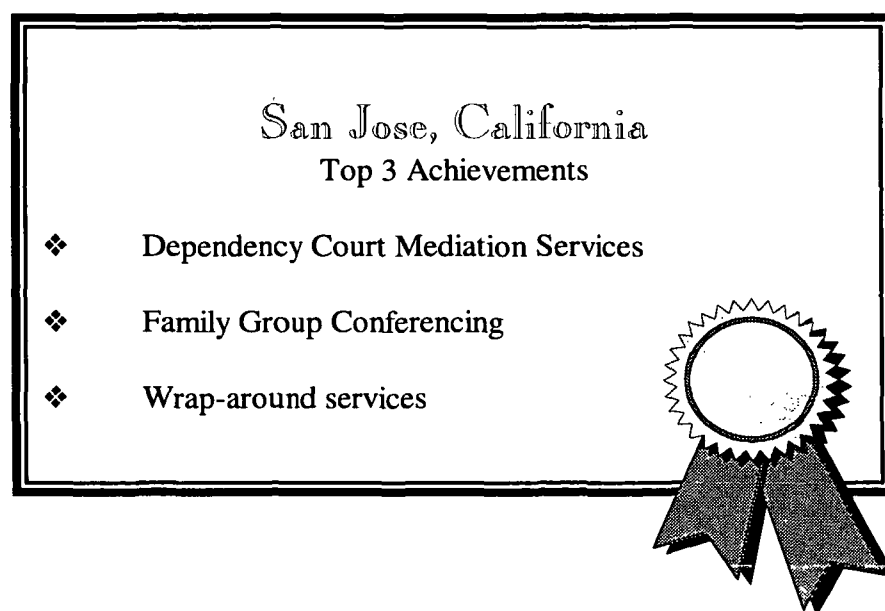
Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of the Santa Clara County juvenile dependency system has been its development and utilization of various forms of alternative dispute resolution techniques. One of the primary goals of the Santa Clara County Superior Court and its Social Services Agency has been to establish a child welfare system in which mediation services and family

group conferences are available and utilized by all families who come to governmental attention because of alleged child abuse or neglect. In order to achieve this, interdisciplinary training has been provided to a large number of judges, social workers, mediators, legal professionals and community members. Training has focused on the history, development, and appropriate application of mediation and family group conferencing techniques. Jurisdiction-wide emphasis has been placed on the use of mediation and family conferencing in all stages of the dependency process and ultimately in all settings in which the state attempts to intervene in family life on behalf of children.

Families are selected for mediation efforts through comprehensive risk assessment, voluntary commitment by parents and case staffing. Risk assessment is employed to ensure the safety of children in accord with the California Welfare Services/Case Management system. The Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) utilizes the principles of family mediation as a gateway to Information Supervision, Voluntary Family Maintenance Services, and continuing cases. There is also a DFCS practice guide in the area of Domestic Violence and ongoing agency-wide training on domestic violence.

The Santa Clara County court system has now fully implemented dependency court mediation services which are available in any case in which a need is identified. Sessions are conducted by trained co-mediators, and all parties to the dependency process recognize and support the value of mediation services. More than 200 cases involving family group conferences conducted by the DFCS within the past 18 months now are being comprehensively evaluated. All conference participants expressed support for the inclusion of family group conferencing in case processing procedures.

The Santa Clara County court also is working with community-based agencies to utilize wrap-around services to permit emotionally abused or disturbed children to remain in community-based placements rather than in congregate care. This effort has been successfully expanded to also include children in the mental health and delinquency systems.



Pima County Juvenile Court

# Tucson, Arizona

Lead Judge – Hon. Nanette M. Warner, Superior Court Judge, Juvenile Court \*

*“Our court system must make children who have suffered abuse and neglect its first priority. Through early and active court intervention, children are returning home or getting permanent homes sooner, having more contact with family members, and experiencing fewer placement changes.”*

-Judge Warner

Contacts:

Hon. Patricia Escher, Superior Court Judge (520) 740-2976  
Hon. Nanette M. Warner (520) 740-2075  
Maggie Allen, Dependency Coordinator (520) 740-4780  
Pima County Juvenile Court  
2225 E. Ajo Way  
Tucson, Arizona 85713-6295

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## Demographics

Area served:	Pima County, Arizona
Estimated population:	600,000
Juvenile population:	200,000
Children in out-of home placement:	1,933 – (1,240 in licensed placements; 693 in unlicensed relative or non-relative placements)
Agency:	State
Judges hearing dependency matters:	8 judges and hearing officers hearing dependency cases half-time
Cases assigned:	Rotating calendar
GAL:	Attorney appointed for every child
CASA:	Statewide program; volunteers appointed based on availability. Inadequate number of volunteers to cover all cases.

Major areas in which this Model Court is working toward improvement are:

❶ Implementation of the Preliminary Protective Hearing and Pre-Hearing Conference

This unique process is a combined 90-minute conference/mediation and court hearing, held approximately one week after a child is removed from the home. Attorneys are appointed to

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\* The Hon. John Davis will assume the position of Lead Judge as of Jan. 1, 1999.

represent children and parents at the time the dependency petition is filed. Prior to the Pre-Hearing Conference, the attorneys meet their clients and discuss the case. Participation at the Pre-Hearing Conference not only includes the attorneys, parents and caseworker, but also extended family members who have interest in the child or who may be able to provide a placement, as well as other people concerned about the child's welfare, including but not limited to school officials, tribal officials and close family friends. The issues of placement, services and visitation are discussed and, in most cases, agreements are reached. The agreements are presented to the judge at the Preliminary Protective Hearing, and any unresolved issues are addressed in the hearing. This process has resulted in "jump-starting" the case, resulting in quicker returns when appropriate, and earlier placement with relatives or kin. Also, cases move to a permanency planning hearing sooner, if the parent is not progressing in accord with the case plan.

#### ② Formation of a multi-disciplinary inter-agency work group

As a result of the Model Court process, a work group consisting of judges, court administrators, Child Protective Services (CPS) workers and administrators, private attorneys, Behavioral Health representatives and assistant attorneys general have been meeting on a bi-weekly basis to work out day-to-day issues and to improve the processing of child abuse and neglect cases. This increased and enhanced communication and collaboration have moved the process of handling abuse and neglect cases away from a "crisis" mentality to a planned process where problems are discussed and solutions are reached before the problems become out of control. Remarkably, all participants have agreed to be flexible and adjust, where appropriate, while keeping in mind the ultimate goal of early permanency for children. The work group is being expanded to include law enforcement, tribal attorneys and the deputy county attorney who prosecutes criminal charges in child abuse and neglect cases.

#### ③ Attorney training

The Pima County Juvenile Court contracts with private attorneys to represent parents and children in dependency and severance cases. Lawyers who apply to undertake such representation are carefully interviewed and screened. The lawyers are required to undergo training programs consisting of a full day of training provided by the court, with monthly lunchtime sessions thereafter. It is important to have adequately trained counsel if the cases are to move forward efficiently, productively and in the best interest of the child.

#### ④ Implementation of the "one-judge/one-family" system

A 1996 study of dependency cases indicated the average case was touched by more than five judges, for approximately one year. Now all dependency cases are permanently assigned to a judicial officer at the first hearing. Thus, there is greater judicial control over the cases and accountability for all involved.

⑤ Implementation of a new calendar system

In this new system, which has been in effect since last year, a judge hears primarily dependency cases one week and the next week the same judge hears delinquency cases. This has resulted in more control of the calendar and has made it easier on attorneys who practice at Juvenile Court to manage their schedules.

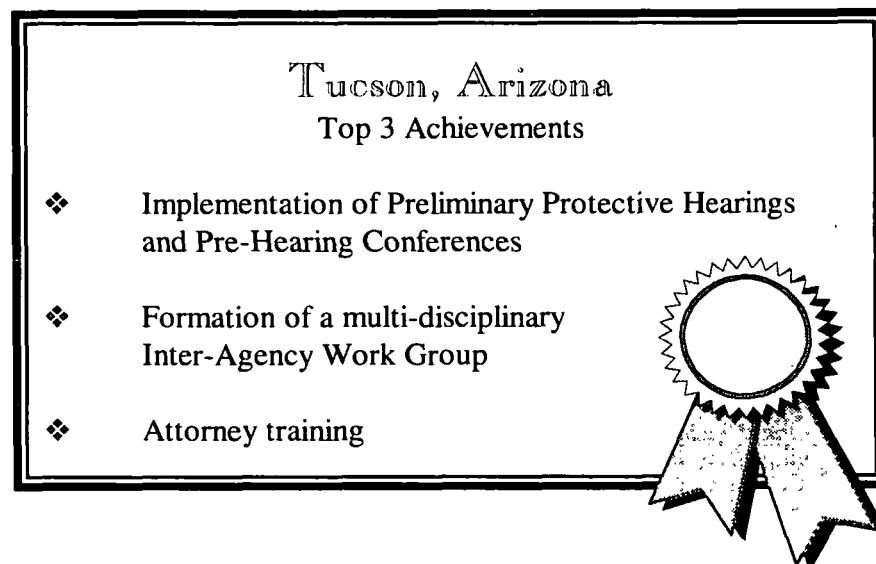
⑥ Mediation program

Mediation services provided through the Attorney General's Office are used to assist in dependency cases. However, with the Model Court process, the need for mediation has expanded. Therefore, through grant funding received from the Arizona Governor's Division for Children, a full-time mediator has been employed to mediate some of the Pre-Hearing Conferences, facilitate mediation conferences in lieu of judges conducting settlement conferences, and to mediate any other issues that arise in cases, including permanency issues.

⑦ Mandatory Settlement Conferences

In all cases, a settlement conference is required prior to a matter being set for trial. This has resulted in better management of the court calendar, fewer trials, and earlier adjudications.

The Pima County Juvenile Court is most proud of its substantive **Preliminary Protective Hearing** and its preceding **Pre-Hearing Conference**. As a result of expanded hearing processes, within 60 days of petition in 58 % of cases having a Preliminary Protective Hearing ("Model" cases), children are placed with parents or with relatives, compared to 31% of other cases. The time necessary to reach adjudication and disposition in model cases is cut in half, and the number of continuances is reduced by a third.





## **Model Court Goals for 1998-1999**

### **Learning Adaptability to Change**

As courts model a change process in child abuse and neglect cases, the Child Victims Project Model Courts have gained success as their capacity to change has increased. While some inherent ability for change is found in all effective organizations, these courts have taken on the task of maximizing their ability to deal with change appropriately. The Model Courts are demonstrating key components for change:

#### **Judicial Leadership**

Effective courts which influence the agencies and communities around them have strong judicial leadership. In successful courts, a judge has made a personal commitment to lend her or his energy, vision, and office to the task of improving court practice. That commitment has been translated into a definable vision which has become the catalyst for mobilizing others to the task. (See *Judicial Leadership and Judicial Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases*, NCJFCJ, Technical Assistance Bulletin Vol. II [5], July 1998).

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#### **Team as Leadership Core**

Beginning from the point of a committed judge, the effective court quickly assembles key system and community members into a team with capacity to implement improvements. These additional participants form a core of expertise and authority with a system-wide perspective that is essential for translating the vision for improved practice into a unified mission with measurable goals. (See *Diversion Project Matrix – A Report from Four Sites Examining the Court's Role in Diverting Families From Traditional Child Welfare Services into Community-Based Programs*, NCJFCJ, 1998.)

#### **Embracing the "Hard" Learning**

The judge and leadership core in successful improvement efforts understand the importance of learning from experiences and sources which might not have been given full attention in the past. Court users and communities served by the system are invited to join with system insiders as partners for effective change. They become active participants in implementing and disseminating information regarding new approaches.

#### **Accepting Change as Inevitable in Learning**

Model Courts have embraced the knowledge that learning is, in effect, a change process; its goal is to incrementally improve or completely change the way in which business is done.

Project participants understand that an improved ability to learn provides an improved ability to change in positive, meaningful ways. This realization calls for increased information capacities and greater circles of involvement; “learning” becomes a primary, ongoing task within the improvement agenda.

### **Directing Improvement Activities Toward Better Outcomes for Children and Families**

Ultimately, the vision, learning and changes must result in definable improvements for children and families. Successful courts recognize that improvement must be measured in terms of: system capacity to meet needs; processes that are responsive and respectful; results in the handling of cases that meet standards of good practice; and long-term benefit to children and families for having come in contact with the court and the child protection system.

At an “All Sites” meeting in New Orleans, La., in October 1998, Model Court Lead Judges and their teams began the process of developing their 1998-1999 court improvement goals. The resultant goals reveal the stages at which court improvement efforts stand. Some courts are emphasizing building of the leadership core; others are looking to increase capacities for learning through information systems and connections with others. All Model Courts are focused on implementing goals to produce better outcomes for children and families. This section presents an overview of the improvement goals that resulted from these efforts.

## **Alexandria, Virginia**

### **Goals for 1998-1999**

- ❖ **Implement cross-training of dependency participants**
  - ❖ Including guardians *ad litem*, clerks, Court Appointed Special Advocates, Department of Social Services, attorneys, foster parents
- ❖ **Increase public awareness of child abuse and neglect and the role the court plays in child abuse and neglect cases**
  - ❖ Develop a script and video on a “Day in the Life of a Dependency Case”
  - ❖ Obtain cooperation of cable network and use public access time
  - ❖ Hold a Town Meeting
  - ❖ Energize and include faith community
- ❖ **Explore method of better data collection**



# Buffalo, New York

## Goals for 1998-1999 \*

### SYSTEM GOALS

- ❖ Create a data system which is child specific
- ❖ Enhance court's ability to monitor compliance with court orders
- ❖ Expand the use of non-judicial personnel

### MODEL COURT GOALS

- ❖ Establish time lines and protocols for abuse neglect and/or custody cases for kinship care
  - training and implementation
  - concurrent planning
- ❖ Evaluation of project by University of Buffalo in first phase
- ❖ Completion of "Spring Into Permanency" Adoption Project
- ❖ Establishment of inter-agency working groups to address systems change
  - home-finding/adoption process
  - paternity establishment
  - relative search
  - substance abuse/mental health treatment records and referrals
- ❖ Mediation Project
  - training
  - pilot program
- ❖ Family Group Conferencing
  - collaboration with Department of Social Services and community

\* Model Court established July 1998.

# Charlotte, North Carolina

## Goals for 1998-1999 \*

- ❖ **Formation of Model Court Advisory Committee**
- ❖ **Develop Mission Statement for project**
- ❖ **Select substantive court improvement goals from among the following possibilities:**
  - Mediation
  - Automation
  - Kinship Care
  - Project Manager
  - Drug Court
  - Early identification of absent parents
  - Service of process on absent parent
  - Collection of child support
  - Scripts for judges at initial hearing
  - Orders to parties at end of hearings
  - Division of case plan into small components
  - Concurrent planning
  - Family Group Conferencing
  - Move children to adoption sooner

\* Model Court established October 1998.

# Chicago, Illinois

## Goals for 1998-1999

- ❖ **Teen/Independent living call**
- ❖ **Geographic alignment of calendars**
- ❖ **Open Family Resource Center**
- ❖ **Centralize in-house services and programs within court building**
  - Drug Assessments and Referrals
  - Paternity Testing
  - Chicago Public Schools Board of Education
  - Adoption Information Center for Illinois
  - Parent Education Project
  - Family Resource Center
  - Caseworker Help-Desk and Resources
  - Head Start Program
- ❖ **Implementation of Juvenile Enterprise Management System (JEMS)**
- ❖ **"Children Can't Wait" Conference**
  - Theme: Education

# Cincinnati, Ohio

## Goals for 1998-1999

- ❖ **Adoption and mediation**
  - Prepare Request for Proposals
  - Solicit proposals
  - Select provider
  - Implement mediation program
- ❖ **Adoption Task Force - Recommendations in the areas of:**
  - matching/selection
  - permanency decision-making
  - foster parent and relative recruitment
  - expediting litigation
- ❖ **Tri-State Adoption Coalition**
  - Implementation and funding of projects promoting adoption
  - Continued fund-raising efforts

# El Paso, Texas

## Goals for 1998-1999

- ❖ **Training: giving and getting**
  - provide training for parents' attorneys and caseworkers
  - provide training in concurrent planning and opportunities for site visits
- ❖ **Ensure the acceptance and sharing of the vision at both the local and state levels**
- ❖ **Reunification efforts**
  - diversion
  - permanency
  - foster parent mentoring
  - foster grandparent mentoring
- ❖ **Court improvement**
  - domestic violence
  - criminal/family
- ❖ **Improved data analysis and reporting**
- ❖ **Celebration and recognition of accomplishments**

# Honolulu, Hawaii

## Goals for 1998-1999

- ❖ **Adoption Fair**
  - Funding
  - Phase I: education seminar
  - Phase II: matching/profiling children
- ❖ **Implementation of Drug Court**
- ❖ **Continue Big 5 meetings**
  - implement recommendations
  - funding for guardians *ad litem*
  - streamline department's "Safe Family Home" reports
- ❖ **Ongoing recruitment of foster and adoptive parents**
  - PRIDE program

# Louisville, Kentucky

## Goals for 1998-1999

- ❖ **Ensure that entire bench is involved in the Model Court Project**
  - Develop goals at upcoming judicial retreat
  - Facilitate buy-in from committee
- ❖ **Contact new family courts in Kentucky and share goals and guidelines**

# Miami, Florida

## Goals for 1998-1999

- ❖ Increase front-end loading and family conferencing of more serious cases
- ❖ Start studying and developing criteria for concurrent planning
- ❖ Involve school system to develop programs for transitioning of children
- ❖ Increase child presence at proceedings

# Nashville, Tennessee

## Goals for 1998-1999

- ❖ Collaborate with Department of Children's Services to implement a kinship care program
  - define eligibility
  - define regulations
  - community implementation
- ❖ Develop guidelines and criteria for concurrent planning in all cases (not just state cases)
  - plans of care/plans for action
- ❖ Expand Mediation Project
  - staff training
  - family conferencing vs. adversarial hearings

# Newark, New Jersey

## Goals for 1998-1999

- ❖ Reduce time in placement for a child from 3.4 years to 24 months
- ❖ Limit all voluntary placements to six months
- ❖ Post-termination management to achieve adoption
- ❖ Notice of opportunity to be heard
- ❖ Mediation and family group conferencing

### ONGOING EFFORTS:

- ❖ Creation of termination of parental rights order
- ❖ Increase staff positions
- ❖ Satisfy Adoption and Safe Families Act time goals
- ❖ Judicial training

# New York City, New York

## Goals for 1998-1999 \*

### SYSTEM GOALS

- ❖ Create a data system which is child specific
- ❖ Enhance court's ability to monitor compliance with court orders
- ❖ Expand the use of non-judicial personnel
- ❖ Increase the number of adoptions by 1,000 to reach 5,000 annually

### MODEL COURT GOALS

- ❖ Implement model court for children in foster care
- ❖ Increase time in reviewing each case and decrease time to process each case
- ❖ Use court attorney referees for conferencing
- ❖ Improve post-termination management

\* Model Court established October 1998.

# Portland, Oregon

## Goals for 1998-1999 \*

- ❖ **Develop an Information System**
  - Goal: to measure success of court processes and to track permanency outcomes
  - Obtain staff dedicated to collecting and analyzing information
- ❖ **Successfully implement preliminary hearing process**
- ❖ **Production of Detailed Court Orders**
  - Orders to include specific time frames for action by parents and caseworkers
- ❖ **Interdisciplinary training and collaboration**
  - Includes the bench, bar, agency (i.e., supervisors and caseworkers) and CASAs under circumstances where all players can and should attend
- ❖ **Resolve remaining problems resulting from the merging of domestic relations, juvenile and probate matters into a unified Family Court**
- ❖ **Develop system for coordinating adult probation requirements and Juvenile Court dispositional requirements for parents**
- ❖ **Expedite finalization of adoptions**
- ❖ **Learn from other Model Courts – what works and what does not work**
- ❖ **Review treatment programs for parents for effectiveness**
- ❖ **Review visitation resources for children in care**

\* Model Court established August 1998.

# Reno, Nevada

## Goals for 1998-1999

- ❖ **Develop a Model Court Advisory Committee to meet bi-monthly**
  - to develop broad based support
  - to encourage ownership of responsibility
  - to facilitate pooling of resources
  - committee members:

judicial officers	county administrator
district attorneys	social services
public defenders	private bar
attorneys general	<i>pro-bono</i> leaders
court administrator	Model Court liaison (first meeting)
- ❖ **Assignment of a Model Court Coordinator: Neal Bullis**
  - Assigned ½ time to Model Court
  - Allocation of office space in court
  - Role of Model Court Coordinator
    - liaison with Permanency Planning for Children Department (PPCD)
    - uniform allocation and coordination of information/projects
    - uniform reporting of progress to PPCD
- ❖ **Family Group Conferencing**
- ❖ **Foster Care Review Board**
- ❖ **Concurrent Planning Project**
- ❖ **Expedited Adoption Project**
- ❖ **Parent Representation Project**

### ONGOING EFFORTS

- ❖ **Drug Court**
- ❖ **Address bifurcated system**
- ❖ **Court administration**



# **Salt Lake City, Utah**

## **Goals for 1998-1999**

- ❖ **Coordinate the goals of the Model Court and the Board of Juvenile Judges**
- ❖ **Institutionalize concurrent planning as a case goal**
- ❖ **Data Synchrony**
  - assessment of current data availability and data needs
  - improved coordination between court and agency
  - ensure common understanding and presentation of data
- ❖ **Establish a follow-up calendar for post-termination of parental rights**
- ❖ **Standardize and coordinate family group conferencing and mediation approaches**

# **San Jose, California**

## **Goals for 1998-1999**

- ❖ **Implement protocol for initial hearings**
  - site visit to Tucson
- ❖ **Drug Court**
  - education
  - training
- ❖ **Data base for permanency**
  - site visits to Cincinnati, El Paso, and Chicago
- ❖ **Improve court report distribution**

# Tucson, Arizona

## Goals for 1998-1999

- ❖ **Full implementation of the Mediation Program**
  - Assess the current mediation program and implement the best use of mediation in dependency cases
- ❖ **Full implementation and evaluation of data and use of data**
  - Implement dependency JOLTS computer system
  - Re-tool the calendar in JOLTS
  - Address the clerk's office problems, including the timeliness of minute entries, which affects the accuracy of data
  - Effectively use the data, specifically, ensure a clear understanding of what information we can get back, and how it can be used by judges and court staff in order to obtain our goals
- ❖ **Multi-disciplinary training**
  - Conduct multi-disciplinary training with Child Protection Service Agency employees, judges, attorneys and behavioral health personnel in areas of mutual interest
  - Assist the agency in developing and implementing an inter-agency program to educate relative and kinship placements regarding the dependency process, their role and services to support the placement
- ❖ **Collaborate with the agency to enhance services**
  - Expand the availability of visitation services, including exploring the establishment of one or more visitation centers
  - Increased urinalysis testing sites
  - Facilitate quicker substance abuse evaluations, including doing the evaluations at Juvenile Court
  - Develop a Resource Information Center for parents in dependency cases at Juvenile Court
  - Provide a calendar to all dependency parents, for them to write down important dates and deadlines of tasks they are to accomplish in connection as a part of the case plan

## ***Common Model Court Goals***

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ◆ Concurrent planning                     | ◆ Post-termination management                   |
| ◆ Mediation and family group conferencing | ◆ Data collection systems                       |
| ◆ Expedited adoption                      | ◆ Multi-disciplinary training and collaboration |

The goals set by each individual Model Court reflect the unique challenges faced as Model Court participants continue to work towards systemic improvement in dependency policy and practice. The courts of Chicago and New York City have many resources, yet face almost overwhelming caseloads. While the judges of Alexandria have smaller caseloads, they must work within the structure of their wealthy, rural setting where issues of abuse and neglect may appear minimal to the community. Some jurisdictions such as Louisville have teams of up to seven family court judges who share responsibility for court improvement while other courts, such as El Paso and Nashville, have only one or two family court judges to tackle those tasks.

Despite unique challenges, however, a number of common court improvement goals emerge. Many of the Model Courts have set improvement goals in the areas of concurrent planning, mediation and family group conferencing, expedited adoption, and post-termination management. Rather than copy a successful program, the Model Courts are examining the essential processes of various programs. The goals of the Model Courts indicate that these teams are continuing to adapt and integrate programs which “fit” within their particular communities and professional environments.

In addition, many of the Model Courts have set goals with respect to their data collection systems – whether realizing full implementation of a data system or improvement to an already existing system. Such technology greatly enhances a court’s ability to track case information, identify how cases move through court and agency systems, provide information on court practice, provide performance statistics, and provide case documents – thereby enhancing court and agency accountability. Implementation and use of various technologies in a manner that respects children’s and families’ rights, while enhancing the goals of permanency for children in safe family environments, is a challenge facing courts across the United States.

Multi-disciplinary training and collaborative efforts also continue to be common goals of the Model Courts. As state court improvement assessment reports from across the United States have indicated, communication between and among judges, court staff, agency personnel, community leaders, and national organizations concerning court improvement efforts in abuse and neglect cases is an overarching challenge faced by courts nationwide. As Judge Richard J. FitzGerald of Louisville, Kentucky states, “This collaboration is providing better outcomes for the children and families of Jefferson County.”

## Resources

States are facing increasing challenges in improving court practice in child abuse and neglect cases and in bringing about safe and permanent homes for children. Court Improvement Projects across the country have implemented many unique programs designed to improve dependency practice. As a result, there is a growing need for information to assist state efforts to meet these challenges. It is the aim of the PPCD to provide this needed information. The PPCD's formal departmental Mission Statement reads, "To provide an environment for change by supporting and facilitating dependency court teams and by providing education and technical assistance to enable courts nationwide to meet their goals to improve practice in child abuse and neglect cases."

### ***Research and Technical Assistance Resource Division***

With support from the Child Victims Grant, the PPCD has developed a specialized Research and Technical Assistance Resource Division. This newly formed division has two primary purposes: (1) developing and implementing research initiatives designed to gather, analyze, and publish cutting-edge permanency planning information relating to court processes and outcomes; and (2) providing ongoing technical and resource support to courts across the nation, as well as responding to continuing requests for project information. This division also supports the work of the department's Model Courts and provides valuable resource information to state-based court improvement programs, judicial educators, appellate courts, and court administrators nationwide. This division is staffed by two Ph.D's, project attorneys, a licensed clinical social worker, and other professional staff who are able to bring diverse expertise to further project goals. This professional expertise makes the division well-positioned to generate new knowledge, disseminate this knowledge in a meaningful way, and to serve as a national resource for existing knowledge about permanency planning issues.

The most recent *Technical Assistance Bulletins* available from the PPCD's Research and Technical Assistance Resource Division are:

- ◆ *Child Abuse and Neglect Cases: A National Analysis of State Statutes*
- ◆ *Child Abuse and Neglect Cases: Examining State Statutes in Everyday Practice*
- ◆ *Child Abuse and Neglect Cases: Representation as a Critical Component of Effective Practice*
- ◆ *Summaries of Twenty-five State Court Improvement Assessment Reports*
- ◆ *Thinking About Program Evaluation: What Is it and Why Should You Do It?*
- ◆ *Judicial Leadership and Judicial Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases*
- ◆ *Adoption Roundtable: A Summary of Judicial Concerns About Permanent Placement of Children in the United States & the United Kingdom*

Additional department materials requested from the Research and Technical Assistance Resource Division by judges and multi-disciplinary professionals on a daily basis include:

- ◆ *RESOURCE GUIDELINES: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse & Neglect Cases;*
- ◆ *Protocol for Making Reasonable Efforts to Preserve Families in Drug-Related Dependency Cases;*
- ◆ *Reasonable Efforts Training Video Notebook;*
- ◆ *Juvenile and Family Court JOURNAL: Permanency Planning Issue;*
- ◆ *Child Victims Project Model Courts Status Report;*
- ◆ *Diversion Project MATRIX: A Report from Four Sites Examining The Court's Role in Diverting Families from Traditional Child Welfare Services into Community-Based Programs.*

## **Website on the Internet**

The Research and Technical Assistance Resource Division also maintains a PPCD Website. Active e-mail discussion groups allow faculty, staff, advisory committee members and allied agency representatives to exchange permanency planning news and ideas. Information on all National Council permanency planning programs and activities is available at <http://www.pppncjfcj.org>

For more information about these publications and others, please contact the Technical Assistance Group at the PPCD: Telephone (702) 327-5300; Fax (702) 327-5306; e-mail: [tadesk@pppncjfcj.org](mailto:tadesk@pppncjfcj.org).

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**National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges**  
**CHILD VICTIMS MODEL COURTS PROJECT STAFF**

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