

NEW YORK
STATE

Child Welfare

Unified Court System • Division of Court Operations
Office of Alternative Dispute Resolution and Court Improvement Programs

Court Improvement Project

THE CHILD WELFARE COURT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT (CIP) supports the Family Court's mandate to promote the safety, permanence and well being of children who are the subject of abuse, neglect, foster care, termination of parental rights and adoption proceedings.

Best Practices Bulletin

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Best Practices Bulletin, the quarterly newsletter of the New York State Child Welfare Court Improvement Project. This publication seeks to keep you informed of the accomplishments, activities and ongoing projects implemented by the New York State Unified Court System to support the court's mandate to ensure the safety, permanency and well being of children.

The continuous improvement of child welfare court operations is the result of the leadership provided by Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye (both in her role as Chief Judge and as Chair of the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children), Chief Administrative Judge Ann Pfau

and the contribution of time, talent and energy of judicial and non judicial staff of the family courts, the Office of Court Administration, the bar and our partners in government.

Future issues of this publication will focus on specific innovations and 'best practices' implemented by our family courts including frequent and in-depth court oversight of pending cases; the use of tools and checklists to enhance the court's inquiry into the safety, permanency, health and well-being of children, use of Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), and use of alternative dispute resolution processes such as mediation and case conferencing.

The inspiration for specific

projects often flows from the bottom up rather than from the top down. Much of the work of court reform is accomplished by local collaborative 'stakeholder' groups convened by family courts and their government partners. These groups provide a forum for discussions that lead to enhanced court operations and improvements in the child welfare and service delivery systems beyond the court. We welcome and encourage contributions of articles for future issues of this newsletter. ■



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CIP: A Strong Past; A Secure Future

New York State's Child Welfare Court Improvement Project (CIP) began in 1994 and was administered from its inception through the Fall of 2006 by the Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children (The Commission), chaired by Chief Judge Kaye. The Project is partially supported by a federal grant from the Administration for Children and Families of the US Department of Health and Human Services. Court

Improvement Project grants are awarded to the highest court in each state in recognition of the integral role state courts play in charting the course for abused and neglected children. The project, which focuses on proceedings involving abuse and neglect, foster care, termination of parental rights, and adoption, provides resources and technical assistance to enhance and promote innovation in court operations and practices.

Major initiatives include

interdisciplinary training programs such as the "Sharing Success" annual statewide conference, co-sponsored with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS); support of efforts to collect, share and distribute child welfare data to court managers and judicial decision makers; and initiatives to improve the quality of court proceedings, court operations, representation and advocacy.

During 2006, federal funding

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For more information visit: www.nycourts.gov/ip/cwcip

Teen Day in Queens Family Court

The first annual Teen Day was held in Queens Family Court in April, providing encouragement and information to youth preparing to live on their own. Six months in the planning, the event brought youth together with court and community agency personnel to inform the young adults of available programs, services, personal connections and jobs.

Invitations were extended to over 100 youth by law guardians, court referees and caseworkers.

Helen Muskus, Supervising Court Attorney in Queens, organized the effort, along with court attorney Tye Mosaku; Kim McLauren and Carolyn Silvers of Legal Aid; Lauren Meller and Dorien Gottlieb of ACS; Jennifer Goldstein and Samira Ali from CASA; Stephanie Pearl, Donna Erez and Regina Ritcey of the Permanency Mediation staff; and, of course, Referees Wanda Matthews, Amy Rood, Craig Ramseur and Kay Anixiadis, who every day hear the cases of adolescents about to age out of care. Together, they, as well as the practitioners, are concerned about whether these young adults will be able to cope with an uncertain future unless necessary services are put in place before they leave foster care.

The day began with welcoming remarks by Referee Matthews. Lauren Meller introduced Keema Davis and Richard Wilkerson from the (ACS) Administration for Children's Services Speaker's Bureau. Keema is also the coordinator for Wednesday's Child, the weekly series that highlights foster children looking for a home. These two young adults shared personal stories of their time in care, their struggles, and their eventual successful outcomes. Their most important lesson for the young adults in the audience was to try to connect with adults, to open themselves to the possibility of family.

Other speakers included Winsome McDermott; Donna Marie Antoine; Ronnel Walker-Johnson and Kim Dennis. Represented agencies included the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) Office of Youth

Development; ACS Housing; ACS Placement Services; You Gotta Believe; CUNY; The Door—A Center of Alternatives, Inc.; Child Permanency Mediation Program; Planned Parenthood of New York



“Teen Days are an excellent opportunity for us to come together as a community and engage youth in the Family Court process.”

—HON. JOSEPH LAURIA

City, Inc.; Queens Public Library; Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning; City Year; Brooklyn Job Corps Academy; The Child Center of New York, Inc.; Covenant House—Queens Community Resource Center; Goodwill; and Dress for Success.

Youth were encouraged to attend their own service plan reviews to become resources to themselves in planning for their own future. ACS youth-focused programs were discussed, including funding for education and special educational programs that allow youth to earn college credit at Bard College over the summer. Erick Hallgren of Bronx Community College discussed how important education is to their future and discussed the opportunities available throughout the CUNY system.

Paul Snellgrove of “You Gotta Believe” discussed the need for family. “You Gotta Believe” works with adolescents and foster families to create permanent families for adolescents in care.

After years of failed attempts at bonding with a family, many adolescents reach a point where they stop trying. Paul encouraged those in the audience to heed the words of Mr. Wilkerson, who told the group that he had to overcome negative advice from those around him to take a chance on

a family who seemed genuine about their interest in him.

The referees held hearings regarding the status of each adolescent and discussed their progress in school and with housing, counseling and relationships with their foster families. Each courtroom had the services of a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) who stood by, ready to be appointed in those cases where certain issues seemed to need further attention. Cases were adjourned to short dates so that ordered services could be reviewed prior to the youth's being discharged from care.

Lunch was provided by Ezekiel's Catering, a specialized training program developed by Covenant House to teach New York City youth culinary arts and the skills necessary to run a business.

Attendees found the program helpful and had useful suggestions on how more youth could be encouraged to come to court. The information tables with the most interest were ones that offered information about college, housing, youth programs and jobs. With the program such a success, plans are already underway for the next Queens Teen Day. ■

Excerpted from the New York City Family Court Chronicle

National Summit on Children's Welfare

Over 200 judges and child welfare experts from 46 jurisdictions convened in New York this past March for a summit aimed at devising ways to improve the care and protection of vulnerable children across the nation.

"A Summit on Children: It's Their Future— Ours Too!" was co-sponsored by the Conference of Chief Justices and the Conference of State Court Administrators in partnership with the National Center for State Courts and the New York State Unified Court System. The meeting is a follow-up to the first National Judicial Leadership Summit on the Protection of Children held two years ago in Minneapolis.

Each state represented at the summit was asked to participate as a team of three or more, a group to ideally include the chief judge, state court administrator and either the governor's director of human services or a senior administrator of the human services agency responsible for the state's child welfare system.

As you know, today and every single day, we have an enormous amount of work to do to improve the lives and the life chances of our nation's needy children, our children," said Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye, who welcomed partici-

pants to the summit.

"It is unethical and immoral for your life's circumstances to be predicated on your zip code," said keynote speaker Geoffrey Canada, executive director of Harlem Children's Zone, a non-profit, community-based organization that works to enhance the quality of life for children and families in some of New York City's most devastated neighborhoods. Some children are forced to live in horrible conditions and to attend schools where students have failed for years, he added.

Canada also said that though people question how much it costs to fund programs that enrich children's lives, they rarely if ever think about what we as a society are willing to spend down the line, when many of these broken youngsters wind up in prison. Canada's organization spends \$3,500 annually per family to provide educational and other support services, a fraction of the more than \$30,000 it costs per year to incarcerate an individual in New York state. The Harlem Children's Zone serves more than 12,500 children and adults through a variety of programs designed to rebuild the community.

Gov. Eliot Spitzer told the audience that refocusing state dollars to intervene



earlier in the life of a child to address education, health care and other issues is clearly where social policy should head, while Mayor Michael Bloomberg discussed steps that New York City is taking to provide better training and other support to its child protective agency personnel.

A group of young adults gave conference attendees a view of what it's like growing up in foster care. They told participants that every child deserves and needs caring adults and permanency in order to connect well with others and feel hopeful about the future.

Retired New York Family Court Judge Joan Cooney encouraged child welfare workers and others at the conference to do all they can to keep children transferred to a new foster home in their current schools. Foster children are more apt to become dropouts, she said, when they're constantly being moved from school to school. ■

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for the program increased to support additional training and data analysis efforts. The additional resources will support replication of successful activities more broadly across the state and with greater depth at the local level. The increased focus on court operational issues prompted the transition of the administration of the project to the Office of Court Administration's Division of Court Operations. The CIP continues to operate with the support, advice and counsel of the Commission whose interdisciplinary membership includes leaders from government and non-governmental systems that impact children and families.

Chief Judge Kaye appointed the Honorable Sharon Townsend, Administrative Judge of the 8th Judicial

District (and a former family court judge) to chair a CIP working group as a subcommittee of the Commission. This group will provide a "hands on" leadership team to steer the development of goals and objectives, monitor the implementation of CIP objectives, keep the full Commission membership informed of CIP activities and provide advice, counsel and support to CIP staff.

The "Office of Alternative Dispute Resolution and Court Improvement Programs" was created by integrating the former Office of ADR Programs with staff from around the state engaged in CIP activities. Dan Weitz was appointed Deputy Director of the Division of Court Operations and continues in his role as Coordinator of the Office of Alternative Dispute Resolution and Court

Improvement Programs. Frank Woods was appointed Assistant Coordinator with direct programmatic responsibility for the operation of the CIP program. Christine Kiesel, formerly a court attorney referee in Oneida County where she presided over a child welfare "best practice" part, has joined the staff as Statewide Project Manager. Trista Borra, formerly of the Commission and Karen Carroll, formerly of the Erie County Court Improvement Project joined the staff as Deputy Statewide Project Managers. In addition, over the course of the next year, the CIP will create liaison positions, co-located in other additional family courts, to implement the goals of the statewide project at the local level. This administrative team will support the reform of family courts' efforts throughout the state. ■



Resources:

Kids Well-being Indicators Clearinghouse:
www.nyskwic.org

This site by the NY State Council on Children and Families presents data on children's health, education and well-being indicators.

Information on Legislation and Court Rules:
www.nycourts.gov/ip/judiciarylegislative/fcarcrep.007.pdf

This link to the Family Court Advisory and Rules Committee's Report to the Chief Administrative Judge of the Courts of New York (January 2007) provides information regarding legislation and court rules effecting child welfare proceedings.

Child Welfare Information Gateway:
www.childwelfare.gov

Formerly the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information and the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse, the Child Welfare Information Gateway provides access to information and resources to help protect children and strengthen families. The site is a service of the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Nassau Pilots 'Basic of Substance Abuse' Training

Substance abuse impacts the vast majority of families involved in the child welfare system. To assist judges, court and child welfare professionals in meeting the needs of those families, the NYS Child Welfare Court Improvement Project (CIP) and Nassau County Family Court conducted a pilot series of trainings on the basics of substance abuse and addiction. Begun in November 2006, the training was provided by the Center on Addiction and the Family, the policy and program development arm of Phoenix House. The goal of the pilot is to refine the training format and curriculum for possible replication statewide. The training is structured as seven 90-minute modules. This format allows the training to be delivered with minimal impact on court operations. Each session combines didactic instruction and conversation with a focus on practical information grounded in theory. The audience includes Judges, Court Attorneys, Referees, Law Guardians, respondent parents' counsel and CASAs. The Nassau pilot sessions conducted to date were attended by an average of 40 participants.

Modules include:

- **Session 1:** Basics on Drugs and Addiction. Motivations for drug involvement; the continuum of experimentation through addiction and into recovery; short- and long-term effects of alcohol and drugs on the body and brain; and drug testing protocols.
- **Session 2:** Treatment Options. Treatment options available to adolescent and adult substance abusers and the various modalities that make them appropriate for different clients.
- **Session 3:** Relapse. Description of relapse and triggers; relationship to brain chemistry; identification of relapse process and responses; impact on visitation, reunification efforts and permanency decision-making.
- **Session 4:** Family Perspective on Addiction, Treatment, and Recovery. How families are affected by addiction, treatment and recovery; family dynamics; options for post-treatment living arrangements; challenges of reunification; trust; second-generation prevention; and family recovery.
- **Session 5:** Child Perspective on Addiction and Recovery. The ways in which children of different ages are affected by a parent's substance abuse; the impact of treatment; the child's perspective on the reunification process; the impact of prenatal exposure on children and teens; and implications for parent-child visits and permanency planning.
- **Session 6:** Treatment Perspective. Concerns and perspectives of treatment providers; confidentiality; coping with multiple client mandates; challenges working with other systems; and how providers experience working with the courts.
- **Session 7:** Moving Towards Change. The Stages of Change theory; basics of motivational interviewing; techniques that can be used to help encourage clients to consider changing their behavior and seeking help for substance abuse; relapse – signs and symptoms, triggers, the actual relapse process and the conflicting timelines of child welfare and recovery (which anticipates relapse as part of recovery). ■

Planning for the Future

In May of 2007, the CIP hosted a two day Action Planning Meeting at the State Judicial Institute. The meeting, facilitated by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, brought together CIP staff; Kathleen DeCataldo, the new Executive Director of the Commission; Justice Sharon Townsend; New York City Family Court Administrative Judge Joseph Lauria; senior administrators and staff of the Office of Court Administration's Divisions of Court Operations and Technology and New York City Family Court; and representatives of the state Office of Children and Family Services. This meeting provided a forum for clarification of the mission and goals and development of concrete objectives and planned activities for the next four years and a discussion of how the selected activities will lead to tangible, measurable, and time-specific improved outcomes

for children and families in the child welfare system. A copy of the Mission, Goals and Objectives document is available on the Child Welfare Court Improvement Project web site: www.nycourts.gov/ip/cwcip.

The values at the heart of alternative dispute resolution processes – collaboration, inclusion, creativity, and respect for diverse views – are prerequisites for successful child welfare court reform efforts. The former Office of Alternative Dispute Resolution always strived to exemplify these values not only as theoretical unpinning of the processes it promotes as tools for case resolution, but also in its approach to program development. The new Office of Alternative Dispute Resolution and Court Improvement Programs will strive to continue that legacy and expand that approach into the child welfare court reform arena. ■