

# CONTINUING UPWARD FROM THE SUMMIT

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## An E-newsletter Highlighting Implementation Accomplishments & Events Throughout the Country

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### MONTANA LEADERSHIP SUMMIT ON THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN I AND II

The Supreme Court of Montana, the Attorney General's Office, the Montana Public Defender's Office and DPHHS Child and Family Services Division co-sponsored the second Montana State Leadership Summit on the Protection of Children, held August 22 & 23, 2007 in Helena. The Summit continued the mission of the first — to promote timely permanency for children and to improve the consistency, continuity, and uniformity of court practice statewide. Chief Justice Karla Gray of the Montana Supreme Court welcomed the participants and shared that since the first Summit, the state's appellate procedure has been examined and changes implemented to expedite a child's case through the appeal process.



Approximately 175 attendees including district court judges, court administrators, special masters, judicial assistants, law clerks, agency attorneys, public defenders, contracted attorneys, guardians ad litem, CASA directors and CFSD personnel heard moving stories by three Foster Club All Stars/Alumni. They also participated in a mock permanency hearing, with staff and training provided by the National Child Welfare Resource Centers on Legal and Judicial Issues, and Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning. Breakout sessions included workshops on:

- ◆ children in the courtroom,
- ◆ the evolving role of a child's attorney, and
- ◆ judicial oversight through data collection and analysis.

As with the first Summit, the two-day Summit allowed professional groups to brainstorm solutions to problems and to share best practices. Regional working groups, formed at the first Summit, consisting of members of the various disciplines from geographic areas in the state, shared their success stories with everyone at Thursday's luncheon, paving the way for updating and expanding actions plans during the afternoon.

Chief Justice Gray noted the success of the first Summit stating:

***“Frankly, the energy and commitment demonstrated by the attendees during those two days was one of the most inspiring things I have ever witnessed.”***

Even more inspiring, though, are the changes which have already occurred as a result. Successes from the first Summit include the following:

- ◆ A partnership between the court, the county attorney, public defender, social workers and advocates in the 11th Judicial District - to create an Accountability Court for abuse and neglect cases, in which extra court time and involvement are required. The special calendar has facilitated reuniting children with their parents in a safe home.
- ◆ Recent photos of children were added to their court files so judges are reminded that there are real children waiting for their futures - as are their parents - when they review these cases.
- ◆ More frequent reviews of parents' progress in meeting treatment requirements in the 1st Judicial District. That court also is actively encouraging the development of treatment plans more specifically tailored to address a family's particular problems so reunification can occur whenever possible.
- ◆ Setting times for hearings that are more family friendly in the 4th Judicial District Court.
- ◆ Family drug treatment courts in four Judicial District Courts

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## INTEGRATING STATE, REGIONAL, AND LOCAL COLLABORATION

Pennsylvania's "Roundtables for Children" Initiative commenced with the establishment of *Children's Roundtables* in each judicial district throughout the Commonwealth. These roundtables generally convened and led by a dependency judge, included children and youth authority personnel, county solicitors, child and parent advocates and academic experts.

The 10 intermediate levels of the infrastructure – called *Leadership Roundtables* – were formed by dividing Pennsylvania's 60 judicial districts into groups of approximately like size and population. Two representatives from each Children's Roundtable were present at the Leadership Roundtable meeting. Then, two members from each Leadership Roundtable were selected to participate on the State Roundtable.



Beginning on February 21, 2007 and culminating on May 18, 2007, all Leadership Roundtables met. On June 26, 2007, the State Roundtable held its first-ever meeting. In addition to the individuals

from the Leadership Roundtables, statewide leaders in child welfare attended and participated.

At this groundbreaking meeting, the members of the State Roundtable reached consensus that a paradigm shift was needed with regard to the way they presently work with children and families in Pennsylvania. The members agreed to adopt an overarching philosophy similar to the Balanced Approach to Restorative Justice (BARJ). Additionally, the members agreed to implement statewide of the following best practice/programs:

- ◆ Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)
- ◆ Family Finding
- ◆ Family Development Training and Credentialing

At the state level, a commitment was made to the development of a judicial bench book highlighting the law, rules, and, importantly, the science of child development; rules expediting appeals in child welfare cases and a formal progressive curriculum of CLE for dependency judges, modifiable for other stakeholders.

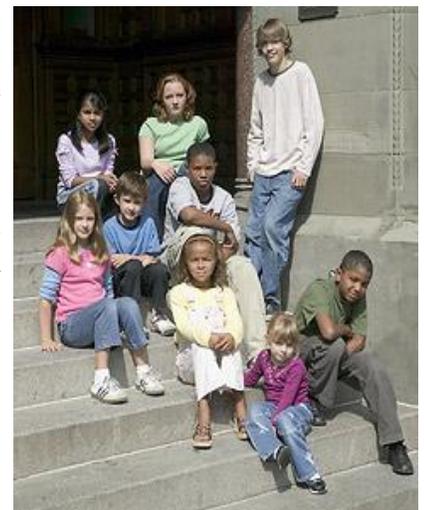
All involved agreed that the process of Children, Leadership, and Statewide Roundtables will continue.

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## MINNESOTA'S CHILDREN'S JUSTICE INITIATIVE

Implemented in 2000, under the leadership of former Chief Justice Kathleen Blatz, Minnesota's Children's Justice Initiative (CJI), is a collaboration between the Minnesota Judicial Branch and the Minnesota Department of Human Services. These two state entities work closely with the juvenile courts, social services departments, county attorneys, public defenders, court administrators, guardians ad litem, and other key stakeholders in each of Minnesota's 87 counties to improve the processing and outcomes of child protection cases.

The mission of the CJI and each of the 87 county teams is to ensure that, in a fair and timely manner, abused and neglected children involved in the juvenile protection court system have safe, stable, permanent families, first through reunification with parents if that is appropriate, or through some other permanent placement option. Using the CJI County Practice Guide each county team is identifying areas needing improvement and developing an action plan for making reforms in practices and procedures.



Each year the CJI holds an annual conference to which all Minnesota stakeholders are invited -- approximately 1,700 people attend the conference each year. The theme for the 2007 Conference (held May 23-24) was "Connections Matter."

The conference was designed to provide a unique cross-system opportunity for information sharing and collective learning regarding promising practices designed to improve outcomes for abused and neglected children.

Improvements are based upon connections – the connections between parents, children, social workers, judges, attorneys, tribes, foster parents, and other child protection system stakeholders. Participants enjoy a variety of ways to connect through networking opportunities, attending plenary sessions, and attending breakout sessions with topics relating to bridging research and practice, prevention and early intervention, and achieving permanency. CJI is now planning for it's 2008 Conference to be held next April and May—the CJI in Minnesota will hold one conference in each of it's 10 judicial districts.

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## EXPANDING THE TABLE IN ARIZONA

The success of children in the foster care system is largely dependent upon the ability of the courts and several executive branch agencies to work together to ensure that they have a safe, permanent home as quickly as possible. Accordingly, the Arizona Court Improvement Program (CI) is working closely with stakeholders like the Arizona Department of Economic Security (ADES) and the Arizona Department of Education (ADE) to help the state's foster children.

The Arizona courts are fortunate to have a history of substantial, ongoing, and meaningful collaboration with ADES, Division of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). Through their involvement on the Court Improvement Advisory Workgroup (the steering committee that helps to guide CI efforts), DCYF personnel have assisted with the development and implementation of key CI objectives. DCYF staff have recently spoken at educational forums for judges, court staff, attorneys, and other key stakeholders regarding changes in their risk assessment and case planning processes. On the local level, the Superior Court in each county has established a team to improve the handling of dependency cases. These "dependency caseflow" teams include at least one representative of Child Protective Services (CPS) from that district. Several significant efforts have grown from these collaborations.

To help ensure that the educational needs of children in foster care are being addressed, an official from Arizona Department of Education has been appointed to the CI Advisory Workgroup. Regional summits are being sponsored by the

Arizona Supreme Court that include representatives from the courts, ADES, ADE, behavioral health providers, Tribal governments, and volunteer organizations.

The agenda for each of the regional summits is developed by a multi-disciplinary group from each region and include panels with speakers from the courts and multiple agencies. For example, a regional workshop on the educational needs of foster children was presented by a Juvenile Court Judge, a Deputy Superintendent from ADE, an Assistant Attorney General, and a CPS educational specialist. The workshop addressed several areas including enrollment, responsibilities and processes regarding selecting special education parents (as well as surrogate parents), education liaisons, and available educational resources.



Whether sharing important statistical information or ensuring a better understanding of the needs of a foster child, the Court, ADES and ADE will need to continue to collaborate to make important strides in their efforts to provide for the safety, permanency and well being of children involved in the Arizona foster care process.

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## COLORADO'S BEST PRACTICE COURTS PROGRAM

Through the Continuing Upward Expert Technical Assistance Grant, Colorado's Court Improvement Program purchased the following best practice publications from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges:



- ◆ *Building a Better Collaboration: Facilitating Change in the Court and Child Welfare System*, Technical Assistance Bulletin, Volume VIII, Number 2, PPCD/NCJFCJ (April 2004);
- ◆ Joy Osofsky, PhD., Candice Maze, J.D. *Questions Every Judge and Lawyer Should Ask About Infants and Toddlers in the Child Welfare System*, Technical Assistance Brief, PPCD/NCJFCJ (December 2005);
- ◆ *Indian Child Welfare Act Checklists for Juvenile and Family Court Judges*, Technical Assistance Brief, PPCD/NCJFCJ (June 2003).

The publications will be distributed to each of Colorado's twenty-two judicial districts and utilized as resources for the Best Practice Courts Program. The Best Practice Courts Program is designed to develop and foster permanent collaborative court structures in each judicial district. This program is based on the National Council of Juvenile and Family Courts (NCJFCJ) Model Court Project. Similar to the Model Courts Project, Best Practice Courts are designed to identify key stakeholders; include them in the strategic planning processes; begin assessing systems' functioning; target specific, attainable goals; provide the information, materials, faculty, and mentors necessary to reach these goals; and support ongoing efforts to effect substantive, sustainable change.

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## EXPERT ASSISTANCE SERVICES

The National Center for State Courts (NCSC), with support from The Pew Charitable Trusts, is pleased to announce the availability of statewide child protection expert assistance services.

This expert assistance is intended to help state court systems to (1) strengthen collaboration between courts and state child welfare agencies; (2) enhance strategic planning to improve the child protection process and outcomes; (3) develop and implement performance measures; (4) collect and analyze data regarding the child protection process and outcomes; (5) increase timeliness of child protection proceedings and appeals; (6) develop effective means for better informing judges, court and agency staff, and attorneys regarding the needs of neglected and abused children and the means for addressing those needs; or (7) otherwise address unique issues affecting state efforts to ensure timeliness of permanent dispositions in child protection cases, the fairness of the process, and the safety and well-being of children who require protection. The experts assigned to provide the needed support may be NCSC or NCJFCJ staff, practitioners from other jurisdictions, or independent consultants.

Selection of states to receive assistance will be based on a set of established criteria and subject to approval by the Trusts. To request expert assistance please complete the online application at:

[http://www.ncsonline.org/d\\_consult/ChildProtection/form1.asp](http://www.ncsonline.org/d_consult/ChildProtection/form1.asp)

For further information, please contact Mary Beth Kirven at [mkirven@ncsc.dni.us](mailto:mkirven@ncsc.dni.us) or (303) 308-4307.

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