

## ARIZONA

*The Arizona Court Improvement Project: Five Years Later. Final Report.* National Center for Juvenile Justice. January 2002.

### **Interventions and Methodology:**

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the outcomes of state-wide juvenile court reforms that were adopted in January 1999. Changes in statutes and court rules required Arizona's Juvenile courts to implement Model Court procedures. The reforms were to alter the role of juvenile courts in dependency matters by expediting initial dependency hearings, reducing mandated timelines for dependency findings, specifying time frames for permanency plans, and placing a greater emphasis on services for children and families. Cases were to be monitored more closely, more frequent hearings were to be held, and more information was to be provided to the court.

The study involved an examination of the effects of the reforms by comparing samples of dependency cases initiated in 1996, to cases initiated in 1999 after state-wide implementation. The evaluation team measured or examined timeliness of attorney appointments, early court proceedings, review and permanency hearings, specificity of hearings, permanency decisions, case outcomes, and differences in placement patterns.

Data was extracted from court files in four sample counties, two populous and two less populous. The two more populous counties involved using a matched pair sampling design. Most cases were reviewed in two stages, the first 12-15 months after the petition filing, and the final review at 16-24 months after the petition filing. A total of 629 children were included in the file reviews. A statewide survey was also conducted of key stakeholders in the four selected sites, as well as interviews. Hearing observations were also conducted to ascertain the length, substance, and timing of key proceedings, including who attends and participates at hearing events.

### **Outcomes Measures:**

#### ***Permanency:***

- Timeliness of the appointment of counsel, GALs, and CASAs.
- Length of time from petition to adjudication.
- Length of time to reach disposition and complete the first review hearing.
- Average time to completion of the first permanency hearing.
- Length of time for the courts to reach permanency decisions.
- Rate in which the courts made a permanency determination of reunification.
- Rate in which the courts determined that adoption was the appropriate permanency plan.
- Length of time for post-permanency reviews for children in an out-of-home placement for longer than 18 months after the permanency order.
- Length of time court cases were open before TPR motion was filed.
- Length of time for courts to complete TPR proceedings.
- Length of time in adoption cases for courts to file TPR motion.

- The rate in which the court was able to schedule an initial hearing on a TPR motion within the prescribed 30 days.
- The number of days between the filing of the guardianship petition and the first hearing.
- The rate of case closings within 18 months of petition filing.
- The percentage of cases closed because of adoption.
- The proportion of cases that closed due to reunification with custodial parents or placement with the non-custodial parent.
- Amount of time children spent in out-of-home-placement.

## COLORADO

### 1. *Case Management in Colorado's Juvenile Courts*

Center for Policy Research, Nancy Thoennes, Ph.D. October 2000

#### **Interventions and Methodology:**

This study was to provide an initial assessment of the degree to which court facilitators are helping Colorado courts expedite case processing, accurately track cases, increase the amount of information available to the court, improve communication between the court and social service agency, and improve communication with the families involved in the system. All court facilitators are involved in monitoring and tracking cases as they move through the system. Most also conduct case conferences for the more complex cases, which is the main focus of this report. Case conferences are similar to court-based dependency mediation.

Interviews were conducted with court facilitators in nine Colorado districts. Also, 36 open-ended interviews were conducted in each jurisdiction with judges, magistrates, Guardian ad litem (GALs), parents' attorneys, social service attorneys and social workers. Court facilitators were asked to keep daily logs of how their time was allocated across a variety of tasks, such as database entry and hearing attendance. Facilitators were also asked to complete a data collection form following each case conference. The evaluation compares the time for case processing for 85 cases with case management conferences in three judicial districts. For comparison, 100 cases were selected from the year prior to implementation that would have been appropriate for a conference if case management had been in place during this time. A mail survey was also conducted to elicit feedback about how child welfare professional perceive court facilitation to be affecting the system in general and their own job performance in general.

#### **Outcomes measures:**

**Permanency:** The impact of holding case conferences to reduce the amount of time that elapses between petition and permanency planning hearing.

### 2. *Dependency Mediation in Colorado's Fourth Judicial District, Center*

For Policy Research. Nancy Thoennes, Ph.D. October 1999

#### **Interventions and Methodology:**

Dependency mediation had been operating in the Fourth Judicial District since 1995. In its first year of operations, 12 mediations were completed. In 1999, 350 dependency mediations were projected to occur. This evaluation of dependency mediation in Colorado's fourth Judicial District drew on the following data sources:

- Interviews with professionals who participate in dependency mediation.
- Data on 146 cases provided by mediators following the mediation session.
- Data drawn from the court files of 97 cases approximately 15 months following their participation in mediation.

- Data extracted from the court records of a group of 48 comparable cases in a similar jurisdiction that were never exposed to mediation.

**Outputs:**

- The rate in which mediated cases were able to resolve all of the issues during the mediation session.

**Outcome Measures:**

***Permanency:***

- The amount of time that that elapses between key events or hearings, i.e. amount of time to reach a permanency planning hearing.

3. *Report to the Commission on Families in the Colorado Courts. An Evaluation of the Family Court Program of the 17<sup>th</sup> District*; Center for Policy Research, Nancy Thoeness, Ph.D. October 2001.

The Family model court attempts to remedy the problems inherent in fragmented hearings by ensuring that multiple cases involving the same family are heard by the same court. The study involved the random assignment of 27 family court cases and 28 control cases, with dependency and neglect filings going to either the family court division or the traditional court processing (control group).

**Outcome Measures:**

***Permanency:***

- Length of placement for out-of-home placement cases

***Well-being:***

- The impact of one-judge one/family policy on judges' quality of decisions (more informed bench), family compliance, the court's ability to meet the needs of the family.

## CONNECTICUT

*Analysis of Case Management on Child Protection Proceedings for the State of Connecticut Superior Court for Juvenile Matters*; Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement; January 1999.

### **Interventions and Methodology:**

This report evaluates the performance of the Case Management Protocol Pilot that was designed and implemented in 1997 and based in the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters in Hartford. An evaluation of the project began in July 1998, and was conducted over a four months. The area of focus for this study was to assess the quality of court proceedings; the quality and timeliness of representation, and the impact of court procedures on key participants. Under the pilot, all cases are scheduled within 10 days of filing the petition. Three standby attorneys were made available to represent parents who need a court appointed attorney. The attorney meets with client, reviews paper work and participates in a case management conference, facilitated by a Court Services Officer (CSO). At the conference, parties work to identify and resolve issues, and set up any necessary evaluations or services. A judge was also made available to meet with parties and approve any reach settlements.

The research included qualitative and quantitative data collection and compared data from a limited number of cases filed in Hartford after 12/1/97 to cases filed in other courts in CT during the same time period as well as to cases filed in Hartford during a similar time period one year before implementation. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with key informants, data were collected from the automated case management system, and cases filed before and after the implementation of the pilot. Case management conferences and subsequent court proceedings were also observed. The analysis of cases concentrated on the comparing the performance of the Hartford court with the other juvenile courts in CT in terms of the time frames needed to resolve cases involving Orders of Temporary Custody (OTC).

### **Outputs:**

- Number of well-qualified staff (attorneys, CSOs, and judges) available to hear matters when they are scheduled.

### **Outcome measures:**

To assess the benefits of early appointment of counsel and early case management, the following were measured:

- Follow-through of decisions at case management conferences and whether an established protocol was in place for decision-making to assure that the needs of the families were being met.
- Stakeholder perceptions and assessment of the quality of representation, early appointment, training and compensation of attorneys through interviews and focus groups.

## **DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

*The Child Protection Mediation Program. Evaluation of the Pilot Project and Recommendation for Improvement.* B. Letiecq and M. Drewery, American Bar Association Center and the Law. June 1999.

### **Interventions and Methodology:**

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the effectiveness and utility of a mediation program that began implementation in 1998 within the Family Division of the District of Columbia Superior Court and ended in December 1998. Upon recommendation of the DC Court Improvement Advisory Committee, the pilot incorporated the guidelines of Child Protection Mediation Program Policies and Procedures Manual. Forty cases were randomly assigned to the mediation program and 48 cases were randomly assigned to the status control group that was assigned to status hearings. Data for the evaluation were generated from observations of mediation sessions and status hearings, social file and court jacket reviews, and court participant surveys. Focus groups were also conducted with representative professionals participating in mediation.

### **Outputs:**

- Rate that mediated cases reached some agreement regarding the treatment plan at the mediation session.

### **Outcome Measures:**

#### ***Permanency:***

- Length of time mediation cases from initial hearing to adjudication. Mediation cases took 136 days, from initial hearing to disposition. The control group took 170 days.

#### ***Well-being:***

- Number of children referred to participate in individual therapy.
- Number, timeliness, and type of services ordered for parents such as drug and alcohol treatment.
- Number of parents ordered to attend parenting classes.

## ILLINOIS

*Evaluation of the Parent Education Program.* Frank Holiwski, DePaul University, October 2000.

### **Interventions and Methodology:**

The parent education program started as a tool for informing parents about the court process and their rights and responsibilities regarding their efforts to be reunified with their children. The evaluation examined the 2,307 families served by the Parent Education Program (PEP), which was 48 percent of the parents who came through the Cook County Circuit. Information was gathered by examining the records of both PEP and the circuit court.

### **Outcome Measures:**

#### ***Permanency:***

- Length of time between the temporary custody (TC) hearing and the adjudicatory hearing, and between the TC hearing and dispositional hearing.
- Length of time between the first permanency hearing and the closing a case as well as the length of time between the first dispositional hearing and the closing of a case.

## MAINE

*The Evaluation of the Child Protection Case Management Procedure and the Lewiston Mediation Project.* Hornby Zeller Associates. September 2001.

### **Interventions and Methodology:**

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the effectiveness of the Case Management Procedure that was instituted in June 1999 by the Maine District Court for child protection cases. The intent of the Procedure was to have judges actively direct the court of child protection litigation through case management conferences. The new procedures included holding conferences of all parties in the judge's presence at marked intervals of the case, in order to cover essential elements of the case and order appropriate family services to be promptly delivered. The study was to also determine whether the use of mediation in Lewiston had been effective in helping parties reach satisfactory agreements that resulted in either partial or complete settlement of the cases.

Five areas across the state were selected as focus communities. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with court and social services personnel, mental health providers, and parent participants. Randomly selected court files were reviewed. Courts were divided into four categories, based upon the number of filings per year, as a way to determine whether compliance with the proceedings varied by size of court.

The mediation project was originally designed to randomly select cases, but was changed when it became clear that not all cases were conducive to this approach. In later design, only cases that the judge and/or parties believed might benefit from mediation were referred.

### **Outputs:**

#### ***For Well-Being and/or Permanency***

Rate in which mediation was helpful in addressing and resolving issues such as visitation and the number of sessions that resulted in partial or complete mediation agreements.

### **Outcome Measures for Case Management Procedure:**

#### ***Permanency:***

- Effectiveness of case management procedures in promoting early settlement of cases and other benefits to participants such as addressing paternity issues early on, and focusing on service needs and visitation plans.
- Rate of contested hearings.



## MARYLAND

1. *Evaluation of Legal Compliance, Maryland Juvenile Computer Systems*; Walter McDonald and Associates, Sacramento, CA. January 2001.

### **Interventions and Methodology**

In 2000, the MD Administrative Office of the Courts reviewed two existing automated information systems for their juvenile courts: the Uniform Court System (UCS) Juvenile Module and the MD Automated Judicial Information for Children (MAJIC). Both systems were designed to collect and use statistical data and other information in the processing and management of cases in order to assist courtroom and judge scheduling and to meet legal requirements. The study conducted a comparative analysis of both systems. The UCS system has been piloted in Montgomery County since 2000. The MAJIC system has been operational since 1999 in a number of jurisdictions including the site chosen for this review, Fredrick County. The purpose of the study was to review the extent to which the selected implementations of the two systems supported the local court in meeting the legal requirements for processing child welfare cases, and to support future decision-making regarding state-level implementation of a single system. The report addressed the extent that the computer systems were collecting and processing information relevant to legally mandated time lines and standards.

After review of system documentation, a half-day site visit was arranged to conduct interviews with key users of the system. The results of the time-based study were then translated into a summary comparison of the two systems. The study focused on outputs, or process measures. It assessed which legal standards and timelines were being tracked and documented.

In Frederick County, the following processes were assessed:

- When amendments can be made before the adjudicatory hearing ends.
- Timing of permanency hearing and whether they were held within 30 days if reasonable efforts to reunify are waived.
- Circumstances surrounding an order for emancipation, long-term foster care, or temporary foster care and whether a compelling reason was shown that returning home, guardianship, and adoption are not in child's best interest.
- Timing of a substantial review hearing with the goal of achieving permanency within 24 months of out-of-home placement.

For Montgomery County the following processes were in place, and deemed operational:

- Timing of permanency hearing and whether it was held within 30 days if reasonable efforts to reunify are waived.

2. *Final Report of the Evaluation of Automated Information Systems for Juvenile Court Project.* Richard Wheeler, Accenture, L.L.P., Annapolis MD. February 2001.

The Administration Office of the Courts (AOC) contracted with Accenture (formerly known as Anderson Consulting) to conduct an evaluation of USC and MAGIC. (See above). In January and February, they reviewed system documentation and court documents such as court orders, notices and statistical reports, conducted site visits at the fifth Circuit Court in Annapolis, and District 6 in Rockville. They conducted interviews with judges, court clerks and administrators, programmers, and users of both automated systems

Findings in this report only pertain to how well the evaluators felt each system operated and how the users felt about each system. The report does not address or try to evaluate the effectiveness of each system in tracking permanency or meeting timelines. However, it does recommend that statewide structures and data standards be established for court information systems as well as a standardized user interface.

## MASSACHUSETTS

In 1999, an evaluation of the Permanency Mediation Pilot was conducted by the Center for Adoption Research and Policy. Established in the juvenile court and probate and family court departments, the model utilized family group conferencing when the goal was reunification, and cooperative adoption planning when reunification was no longer a viable option. The evaluation included cases that were referred for mediation in both the probate and family court and the juvenile court. Participants were queried about the program to determine whether they would like to have it continued and expanded.

### **Outputs:**

#### *Permanency:*

- Settlement rate of those cases that completed family group conferencing.

## MINNESOTA

1. *Family Group Conferencing Pilot Project, Hennepin County, Minnesota, Final Report.* Stacey Mangni, Research and Evaluation Services, State Court Administration, Minnesota Supreme Court. September 2000.

### **Interventions and Methodology:**

Once a case is referred to the FGC process and informed consent is given by all parties, a trained coordinator works to bring together the families and professionals in a neutral location. A typical meeting consists of providing information, allowing for family private time to decide on a plan, and writing and presenting the plan to the social worker and coordinator, at which point any remaining safety concerns are answered before the plan is presented to the court.

The pilot was initially only to involve child protection cases but later opened up the process to other types of referrals. Research methods included four main sources: data from the FGC coordinator form, case reviews from an automated system, observation of the FGC process and interviews with key players. A total of 66 cases were referred to the pilot beginning in the summer of 1999 and ending in spring 2000. Forty-two of those cases participated.

### **Output:**

- Rate in which family group cases had their plans accepted or ordered by the court.

### **Outcome Measures:**

#### ***Permanency***

- Proportion of the referrals that resulted in a conference whose cases were subsequently closed—indicating a more permanent placement solution.
- Number of closed cases that went through the FGC process and the number of children from those cases who were placed with their parents or relatives.
- Rate of participation of fathers and paternal relatives.

## 2. *Children's Justice Initiative*

MN is in the process of evaluating their CIP program through the *Children's Justice Initiative*, in conjunction with MN Department of Human Services. They are assessing all 87 counties in how well they are processing child protection cases and whether they are improving outcomes for abused and neglected children. The CIP has developed a five-step evaluation process that begins with a baseline evaluation of each county's existing juvenile court practices and procedures set forth in the Resource Guidelines. Two years after the baseline evaluation is completed, the State Court Administration will conduct a follow-up evaluation and identify any remaining areas needing improvement. Each county will also conduct a self-assessment.

## MISSOURI

1. *Juvenile Court Improvement Project Evaluation, Two-Year Final Report*. Institute of Applied Research, St. Louis MO. November 1999.

### **Interventions and Methodology:**

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess two pilots in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 23<sup>rd</sup> Missouri Judicial Circuits. The pilots were designed to accelerate and reform the juvenile court process for child abuse and neglect cases. The interventions included holding protective custody hearings in all protective custody cases; appointing a GAL for each child removed from the home; and adhering to set timeframes of hearings within a 12 month period. There was also a component requiring specific issues and items be explicitly addressed in each case to improve the thoroughness of the hearing. Key personnel were to receive joint training and a family centered out-of-home-placement program (FCOH) was to be instituted as well.

A total of 395 cases from Circuit 23 and 99 cases from Circuit 2 were tracked for frequency of hearings and timeframes. However, these cases were continually assigned at various stages of development, so the number of cases reported varied. Comparison groups of juvenile cases were assembled from within the same circuits that had been opened and in many cases closed two years before the pilot began. Baseline cases were also matched with pilot cases. The evaluators reviewed court and social service agency case files, as well as conducted interviews with court and DSS personnel.

### **Outputs:**

- The number of children exiting care from DSS.
- Number of calls received through the child abuse/neglect hotlines.

### **Outcome Measures**

#### ***Permanency:***

- Time frames within in the court process such as the amount of time to permanency hearing.
- Number of protective hearings held in all cases.
- Number of TPRs.

#### ***Safety:***

- Rate of out-of-home placement after closure of cases.

2. *Juvenile Court Improvement Project Evaluation, St. Louis Family Court. First Interim Report* Institute of Applied Research, St. Louis MO. July 2001.

This is a pilot project with a study design similar to the one described above. They are planning to measure outcomes relating to safety by tracking the number of CA/N reports, types of abuse and neglect, new CA/N reports with an action finding (substantiation,

preventive services, or family assessment with services needed), and new removal and placements outside the home.

## NEBRASKA

1. *Family Group Conference Outcome and Process Evaluation Plan*, Victoria Weisz, University of Nebraska. January 2001

This is an evaluation plan to study the effectiveness of Family Group Conferencing defined as a facilitated process through which an extended family works to develop safety plans that protect their children. The project will involve a comparison of up to 50 Nebraska children between the ages of 6 and 16 who have had a Family Group Conference and a matched group of children who have not had a conference. Children who have had a FGC will be assessed at six months post-FGC and again at 12 months. The assessments will include the Child Behavioral Checklist and the Child Depression Inventory, structured interviews with the child, the child's caretaker and a court file review. Caregivers and teachers will complete the Acenback Child Behavior Checklist on children from both groups.

2. *The Court-Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Program: Bringing Information to Child Abuse and Neglect Cases*. Victoria Weisz, 8/16/01.

### **Interventions and Methodology:**

This study compared 21 judicial hearings involving children who had a CASA with 20 hearings for children who were on a waiting list for a CASA. Judges, CASAs, and GALs provided data for this study. They examined whether CASA involvement improves the breadth and quality of information provided to the courts.

## NEW MEXICO

1. *The Status of Court Proceedings in Child Abuse and Neglect. A Research Project of the New Mexico Court Improvement Project.* Shaening and Associates, February 2001.

### **Interventions and Methodology**

The purpose of this evaluation was to perform a follow-up assessment of CIP strategies to expedite permanency outcomes which were adopted following the original assessment in 1995. The comprehensive reforms and strategies that were put in place included:

- Conducting permanency hearings.
- Streamlining the review process.
- Shortening time frames for adjudication and judicial review.
- Improving case management processes.
- Providing training to court staff.
- Performing psychological evaluations.
- Improving the quality of representation.
- Improving tribal relationships.

Additional strategies were also adopted relating to issues of confidentiality, the impact of managed care of foster care children and local responses to child abuse and neglect.

The methodology used site visits to six courts and the administration of questionnaires to key players, interviews with judges and the review of case files. Where applicable and when available, rates of improvement were compared to those found in the 1995 assessment.

### **Outcome Measures:**

#### ***Permanency:***

- Rates of compliance with judicial determination requirements.
- Rates of timeliness
- Disposition of dismissed cases, including the proportion of children who returned home, and the median length of custody.

2. *Family Group Decision Making. A Pilot Project of the Protective Services Division of the New Mexico Children, Youth, and Families Department.* Shaening and Associates, October 2001.

### **Interventions and Methodology:**

The FGDM model consisted of three components: the referral stage, the preparation and planning stage, and the meeting stage. In the referral stage, social services identified families who seemed appropriate for the pilot. The families signed participation agreements and identified other family members to participate. In the preparation and



planning stage, the facilitator explained the process and the roles of all participants. In the third stage, the families developed a service plan that was then approved by the protective services agency. Data was collected through the use of tracking forms for each meeting and participant feedback forms.

**Outcome measures:**

The evaluation tracked the number of FGDM meetings held, type of participant, and the type of issues addressed in the family plans. They also collected data on how participants felt about the process and conducted a preliminary cost benefit analysis.

***Permanency:***

In custody cases, the study examined the number of families that resolved permanency options and the number of families who complied with treatment plans. They also assessed whether time in custody had been shortened.

## NORTH CAROLINA

*Final Report on the Evaluation of the North Carolina Court Improvement Project.* Ray Kirk, Jordan Institute for Families School of Social Work, March 2001.

Court practices were monitored in Judicial Districts 20 and 25 for 2 ½ years to test the efficacy of new rules intended to improve the manner in which the courts processed juvenile cases. The new rules governing these cases affected judicial procedures, court administrative procedures, prioritization of cases, and expectations of attorneys representing all parties. (The new rules are listed on pages 5-7 of the report). Also, new types of conferences and hearings were implemented to expedite progress towards case closure. The intended results of the new rules were to:

- Reduce the frequency and number of out-of home placements of children.
- Reduce the duration of out-of-home placements.
- Reduce the length of time necessary to achieve a mandated form of permanency for the children.

This evaluation was designed to measure the effectiveness of the new rules in achieving the intended case outcomes, and also to test the courts' ability to implement the new rules to a sufficient degree so that the court model had a reasonable chance of success. More than 1,250 cases were reviewed, including 455 cases from the 2 districts to obtain a baseline sample against which to compare the cases processed under the new CIP rules. Specifically the study examined:

- Time related measures on the filing of petitions, adjudications, and dispositions;
- Frequency-related measures relating to hearings, continuances, reviews, placements, and mandated case outcomes.

### **Outcome Measures:**

#### ***Permanency:***

- Reduction in time to achieve critical junctures in juvenile cases.
- Reduction in overall duration of cases.
- Reduction in the number of out-of-home placements of children.
- An accelerated time to permanency.
- Reductions in cases heard by multiple judges.
- Reductions in continuances granted.

## OHIO

*Ohio Family Court Feasibility Study, Phase II Final Report.* Hunter Hurst, Jr., Gregg Halemba, National Center for Juvenile Justice. January 2002

### **Interventions and Methodology:**

In June 1999, the Supreme Court of Ohio and the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services funded four family court pilots in Clermont, Lorain, Fayette and Mercer Counties. The pilots were a formal test for Ohio to examine the feasibility of transferring family court principles, procedures and programs to additional jurisdictions. NCJJ was contracted to assist in site selection, provide technical assistance, monitor and report on progress, and gather data to assess the performance of programs started by the pilots. The pilots implemented interventions relating to intake coordination, information linkage and integration, family services coordination, family services, and mediation expansion such as counseling and assessment, and custody investigation expansion. One county began screening at intake for related family cases and consolidating related cases across court divisions.

It should be noted that data were collected on many different types of cases by NCJJ in addition to child protection cases, making it difficult to determine what type of cases received what kind of services/interventions. There is also a focus on tracking cases relating to divorce, child support enforcement and juvenile delinquency. The NCJJ study basically summarized the services of each pilot citing a few findings relating to divorce and custody cases. They also assessed client satisfaction with mediation services across sites through the use of uniform client satisfaction questionnaires. The key findings however, pertained to their assessing the percentage of families with prior court involvement. Over 1600 family-type cases were included in the study. All four pilots contributed to the related cases study.

### **Output:**

- Progress of parent participants in reaching a mediation agreement.

### **Outcome Measures:**

#### ***Safety:***

- Rate of related cases (involving the same family) five years prior to the filing of the selected family case.

## PENNSYLVANIA

*Pennsylvania Court Improvement Project. First Year Assessment of the Philadelphia Model Dependency Court.* Hunter Hurst, Jr., Gregory Halemba. July 2000.

The assessment examines the first 15 months of model court operations in the Philadelphia Model Dependency Court and the degree to which model court practices have improved the quality and timeliness of court proceedings and have resulted in more timely outcomes for victimized and maltreated children. It is a comparative analysis of court case records that tracked the court's handling of dependency cases in both the model court and non-model or "core" dependency courtrooms. The model court was created to test procedures for front-loading the court process (as described in *Resource Guidelines*) the key features of the model court to front load the Court Process:

- Expedited Notice to Parties prior to initial hearing.
- Early appointment of counsel for custodial parents or guardian prior to initial appearance in court.
- Children's attorney requirement to meet with clients prior to initial hearing and contact DHS social worker and parent's attorney.
- Parent's Attorneys requirement to meet before adjudicatory hearing, and contact DHS and child's attorney.
- One family/one judge case assignment.
- Time specific scheduling.
- One hour time blocks for each conference/hearing.
- Formal pre-hearing conference before a facilitator.
- On-site substance abuse and mental health assessments and referrals.
- Detailed court orders distributed at the end of every hearing.
- Three month review cycle.
- Distinct permanency hearing.
- Facility designed to engage families in the process.
- Six months after implementation, an Accelerated Adoption Review Court was created as part of the model court to expedite the cases of about 1000 children legally free for adoption and in pre-adoption homes.

Interviews of court staff were conducted as well as field observations. Two sets of data were used for comparative analysis—data extracted from an automation system and data manually collected from randomly selected court files. The automated data set contained information on key events such as petition filing, hearing results, petition disposition, and case closure.

### **Outcome Measures:**

- Rate of dispositional decisions on petition allegations. Court orders stemming from model court hearings were also considerably more detailed and specific regarding placement, visitation and services.
- Rate of case closures.

## WISCONSIN

1. *Evaluation of the Unified Family Court in LaCrosse and Monroe Counties*. Center for Public Policy Studies, Undated.

### **Interventions and Methodology**

The major features for both pilots included:

- Using a mediated child protection conference model that included participation by the accused, other family members, foster parents, and children, as well as caseworkers, service providers, attorneys for all parties and the state, and guardian ad litem for appropriate parties.
- Referring to child protection conferencing all civil and misdemeanor child abuse and neglect cases filed in the court.
- Attempting to resolve companion felony cases for those families that were involved in both felony and non-felony child abuse and neglect cases.
- Using the mediation conference to resolve TPR matters as well as CAN matters.
- Training mediators to encompass being an educator of the court process and a facilitator of information exchange.
- Combining into one conference all cases involving more than one child in a family.
- Emphasizing regular and frequent expedited reviews by the judges.

Both counties selected the filing of a Child in Need of Protection or Services (CHIPS) case to trigger eligibility for the pilot. The pilot counties provided the option of a mediated child protection case conference to resolve: 1) the CHIPS case 2) a concurrent criminal child abuse allegation arising out of the same incident, and 3) any other companion case that might affect the resolution of the CHIPS case, such as divorce, child custody or domestic violence. Information about the conference process and any problems encountered was obtained through interviews with mediators and other actors in the justice system.

The evaluation team analyzed the results of the conferences that came from case file data, such as the rate of success in reaching an agreement, time to resolution, type of CHIPS dispositions, the resolutions in companion cases (criminal abuse cases), and the compliance of the parties with agreements reached through the conferences.

### **Outputs:**

- Rate of resolution in a single conference session.
- Number of agreements that were reached among parents, family members, court and social service personnel in CHIPS cases.
- Rate of complete mediation plans with few revisions.

**Outcome Measures that relate to the CHIPS cases:**

***Permanency:***

- The difference between the average case processing time for civil CHIPS cases resolved through the mediated child protection conference, to the average case processing time for cases resolving using the traditional civil process.
- Quality of case preparation by justice and social service system representatives.

***Safety:***

- Quality of treatment plans that could better meet their needs and increased the chances for better protecting children;
- Assessment of whether mediation conference provided a safe forum for children to confront parents.

2. *Vernon County Evaluation of the Expedited Review Pilot Program.* American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law. Undated

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine if sufficient progress was being made to return the child to the home, to justify keeping the child in foster care, or to terminate parental rights and place the child for adoption. The pilot project increased the number of review hearings in CHIPS cases, which were to be reviewed every 60 days. The evaluation was conducted after 18 months of implementation. Interviews were conducted during a site visit with court and social services personnel. Sixteen CHIPS case files were reviewed to assess the progress of the cases over a period of 15 months. Because all CHIPS cases were included in the pilot, there was no comparison group.

**Outcome Measures:**

***Permanency:***

Anecdotal evidence was measured through interviews to assess participants' perception of effectiveness regarding expedited review:

- Stakeholder perceptions of whether the expedited review process had moved children to permanency any faster and whether they attribute those cases that have moved faster with the expedited process.
- Usefulness of expedited reviews in helping the court keep abreast of CHIPS cases to insure services and placements were appropriate.
- Assessment of whether oral presentations given by social workers helped to foster communication between parties and the benefits of the added flexibility the court had with review hearing scheduling.