



TEXAS COURT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM (CIP)

2007 Progress Report

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By
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Court Improvement Program
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I. Administration

The Administration of Children and Families of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awards federal grants through the Court Improvement Program (CIP) to the highest court in each state to strengthen courts for the safety, permanency, and well-being of abused and neglected children. The Supreme Court of Texas (Court) receives approximately \$2.2 million annually to address the unique challenges faced by courts that serve to protect children and reunite families.

Since September 2005, the Court has designated the Texas Center for the Judiciary (Texas Center), a non-profit organization, as the entity responsible for the application, receipt, and accounting for the CIP grants. The 80th Legislature recently changed the Court's method of finance to include CIP in the Court's budget. The change in the Court's budget necessitates that the Court transfer the administrative duties for the CIP grants from the Texas Center to an in-house function.

Efforts are underway in Texas to create a Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families (Judicial Commission). In May 2007, the Court hired an Executive Director of the CIP Supreme Court Task Force on Foster Care who will serve as the Executive Director of the Judicial Commission once it is formed. The Court anticipates the Judicial Commission, which will be launched in September 2007, will be the Court-appointed body responsible for overseeing all three of the CIP grants. Many of the Task Force members will continue their highly valued, collaborative involvement in the new Judicial Commission.

A Transition Team appointed by the Chief Justice of the Court recommended that the Court hire CIP Staff and implement a transition plan that includes transitioning the CIP administrative duties from the Texas Center at the end of the fiscal year, September 30, 2007. The Court CIP will receive FY2007 grant funds on October 1, 2007, and the Texas Center will transfer the surplus FY 06 funds on January 01, 2008, to complete the transition. In addition to hiring an Executive Director, CIP will be staffed with a Grants Administrator, a Financial Officer, and an Executive Assistant under the direction of the Executive Director. The Court also relies on the Staff Attorney for Children and Families and the Court's General Counsel for advice about the CIP.

The Texas Center for the Judiciary submits this final performance report for CIP activities conducted during the period July 1, 2006 through July 31, 2007.

II. Permanent Judicial Commission on Children, Youth, and Families

In 2005, Texas judicial and executive branch leaders attended the National Summit on the Protection of Children in Minneapolis. The delegation made a number of recommendations,

including that the Supreme Court of Texas consider the creation of a statewide, multidisciplinary commission to specifically address the goals of ensuring safety, well being, and permanency of children in foster care. The Court solicited the input of community stakeholders and received overwhelming support for such a commission.

In December of 2006, the Court appointed the Foster Care Consultative Group to recommend an organizational structure, membership criteria, and a proposed plan and timeline for launching a statewide judicial commission for children and families. The Consultative Group recommended a plan with a broad range of goals and strategies. The cornerstone recommendation was that the Court should create a Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth, and Families (Commission) to serve as an umbrella organization for efforts to strengthen courts for participants in the Texas child protection system.

The Court expects to hold a public hearing on September 25, 2007, to solicit broad public input and support for the Commission. The Court anticipates the Commission will be operational no later than the end of 2007. The current Executive Director of the Supreme Court Task Force on Foster Care will become the Executive Director of the Commission upon its creation.

During this project period, CIP funds have been used to support the Foster Care Consultative Group's meeting expenses and travel costs and will continue to support the Commission's operations in the following project period.

III. Legislative Updates

The Texas Child Welfare System continued to receive attention from the 80th Legislature. During the 79th Legislature, **SB 6** proposed sweeping reforms across the child welfare system. The 80th Legislature passed **SB 758**, which revised parts of **SB 6** and implemented new reforms. Some significant changes from **SB 758** include:

- Removing the Independent Administrator and the mandate to privatize substitute care services from **SB 6**;
- Removing the mandate to privatize case management services from **SB 6** and instead opting for a case management pilot project involving 5% of the cases statewide by September 1, 2008;
- Redefining “case management,” “conservatorship services,” “permanency services,” “substitute care provider” and “substitute care services;”
- Establishing a program to provide in-home support for families in which poverty is the primary underlying cause of neglect if the support can prevent removal of the child from the home or quicken the child’s reunification with his or her family;
- Supporting the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) workforce by studying the impact of reimbursing caseworkers’ education expenses and focusing recruitment on those with a bachelor’s or advanced degree in a human services field;
- Creating a new process for child-placing agencies to report and check information on a foster or group home that has been closed through a searchable database, and requiring foster homes transferring to a new child placing agency to notify the child placing agency of prior licensing violations;
- Establishing a Committee on Pediatric Centers of Excellence;

- Directing DFPS to work with faith-based organizations and the OneStar Foundation, a statewide organization that promotes service and volunteerism, to increase the number of foster families;
- Increasing the adoption subsidy for youth who would otherwise be in long-term foster care;
- Establishing eligibility for free pre-kindergarten to any child who has ever been in DFPS conservatorship;
- Requiring DFPS to consult with the child's caseworker, attorney ad litem, guardian ad litem, or CASA volunteer whenever possible before making a placement decision; and
- Directing DFPS to develop a Child Protective Services Improvement Plan that address many areas still in need of improvement.

Other key bills affecting the child welfare climate are listed as follows:

- **SB 723** directs DFPS to collect data on kinship placements that fail for financial reasons so that it can identify what supports are necessary to help these placements succeed;
- **HB 662** directs DFPS to work with the Interagency Coordinating Council for Building Healthy Families to develop a strategic plan for child abuse and prevention services;
- **SB 156** established a competitive grant program to fund the establishment or expansion of nurse-family partnership programs by March 2008;
- **HB 3505** requires judges and other judicial officers to be instructed on handling cases of child abuse and neglect;
- **HB 3008** establishes a North Texas pilot program to connect foster care youth age 14 and over, with volunteer adult mentors to assist the youth's transition to adult living;
- **HB 723** allows DFPS access to reports of family violence for individuals applying for a foster home license and requires DFPS to create a database of all licensed foster care homes, identifying those currently providing services; and
- **SB 10** allows former foster youth to be covered by Medicaid until they turn 23.

Additionally, CIP staff and Task Force members were instrumental in the passage of **SB 759**, which addresses several mandates of two federal laws passed in 2006. The Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act encourages states to improve protections for children and holds them accountable for the safe and timely placement of children across state lines. It requires state courts to have in effect a rule insuring that foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of a child in foster care are notified of any proceedings held with respect to the child. The Child and Family Services Improvement Act requires courts to consult with a child in a developmentally appropriate manner regarding the child's permanency plan.

SB 759 amends the Texas Family Code to meet the notice requirements set out above. It also requires the court to consult with a child in a developmentally appropriate manner regarding the child's permanency plan, if the child is four years of age or older and if the court determines it is in the best interest of the child. The child shall attend each permanency hearing unless the court specifically excuses the child's attendance.

IV. Reassessment and Strategic Plan

Sue Desai Williams, a consultant with 20 years of experience focused on state, local and federal government and non-profit organizations, including seven years of experience with CIP, conducted the 2006 Reassessment. The methodology for the study included the following elements:

- Analysis of state reviews, the reorganization of Child Protective Services (CPS), and other factors and current demographics affecting Texas' environment for child welfare;
- Review of Texas statutes and court practices for conformance to relevant federal statutes and national guidelines;
- Analysis of case review data for overall compliance and conformance to statutes and guidelines;
- Analysis of qualitative information from case reviews, site visits, interviews and surveys; and
- Assessment of progress and strengths and suggestions for improvement.

The study was completed and submitted to the ACF in September of 2006. The Task Force formally adopted the study for consideration in its strategic plan January 2007. Below is a summary of the Reassessment recommendations:

1. Monitor the initial implementation of DFPS' independent administrator program and the CPS reorganization to provide the state with feedback on the noticeable impact of those changes, including improvements, deteriorations, and potential modifications to improve outcomes; share information with courts across the state to help them work most effectively with the new CPS operating model.
2. Obtain data from courts and counties to determine how fully the new state statute providing an *ad litem* to indigent parents in opposition to a SAPCR is being implemented and the financial impact of that statute on county budgets.
3. Support research to determine why cases with multiple referrals are not brought before the courts sooner and what adjustments to CPS risk assessments and decision-making approaches and to CPS provision of FBSS could (1) reduce recidivism in families who receive CPS attention and (2) and bring families unlikely to ultimately improve the children's situations to the courts' attention sooner.
4. Work with TDCJ to identify better mechanisms for quickly locating incarcerated parents, for communicating with those parents, and for improving accessibility to required services.
5. Create an opportunity for those involved in the citation/notification process, including district clerks, sheriffs, associate judges, district attorneys, and the State Attorney General and their staff, to discuss and develop best practices for identifying, locating and citing/notifying parents and other who have a right to receive notification; create a vehicle (e.g., brochure) for communicating those best practices across the state.
6. Support an opportunity for district clerks to discuss and develop best practices for maintaining and making available both hardcopy case dockets and electronic versions of those dockets/case information.

7. Monitor the impact of the new state statute requiring a finding of extraordinary circumstances for cases to exceed 12 months, to identify and address any unintended consequences from that statute.
8. Continue to facilitate the use and improvement of case management tools.
9. Consider a study to analyze the timeliness of hearings and report submissions (and possibly the timeliness and fullness of discussions with parents about their family service plans) across counties, identify trouble spots and develop recommendations for addressing those trouble spots.
10. Develop a program that helps judges already actively training and experienced in child welfare cases to share their expertise with colleagues in their regions or from other similar counties.
11. Develop a web page that offers judges, prosecutors, attorneys ad litem, CASA and parents an overview of the many resources addressing different aspects of child welfare cases.
12. Work with the Texas Department of State Health Services (Substance Abuse Division) to develop approaches for more timely screening of parents, and priority placement in treatment programs.
13. Work with DFPS and State Health Services to map the geographic distribution of foster care and treatment resources against the state's geographic distribution of children/families needing those services and identify and where the greatest needs for more locally available facilities/services are.
14. Consider facilitating the establishment of a nonprofit organization whose mission is to mentor parents involved in child welfare cases towards successful completion of the requirements for reunification with their children (e.g., the family service plan).
15. Lead a statewide discussion with other stakeholders to identify/develop new tools, practices, etc. that shift workloads away from areas where limited resources create bottlenecks in the process.
16. Suggest the establishment of a 24-hour hotline for children in foster care.
17. Develop a stronger relationship with representatives of Native American tribes in Texas.

V. Family Drug Courts

Stakeholders across Texas have come to realize that the family drug court is an effective tool to safely reunify families, and in many cases even prevents removal. Nueces, Tarrant, Smith, Jefferson, Lubbock and Travis counties have family drug court projects at various stages of completion. CIP has supported efforts to create and expand drug courts by providing financial assistance to local pilot programs, by sending judges and drug court staff to trainings, and through its continued support of the Texas Partnership for Family Recovery project (described in section C. below).

A. Smith County Drug Court

During this reporting period, CIP funded a small grant to Smith County to assist their pilot family drug court program and to pay for some training. In the family drug court model, the

focus is on intervention and treatment of parents who abuse alcohol or drugs. The underlying philosophy in this model includes an understanding of the disease model of addiction and the importance of family education and support.

The grant funds were used to hire a part-time court coordinator, without whom the pilot program could not have functioned. In the family drug court pilot, one day each week District Judge Carole Clark hears only CPS cases where drugs and/or alcohol is involved. The program's goal is to reunite families by providing and mandating rehabilitation services to parents. A team of multi-disciplinary professionals, several of whom volunteer their time, meet weekly to screen new cases and to discuss the progress of current cases. At these meetings, the group determines what recommendations to make to the judge. The parents' progress in treatment and rehabilitation is closely monitored by the drug court team, comprised of CASA representatives, CPS case workers, attorneys, licensed counselors, and others.

The part-time coordinator coordinates all court activities, writes reports, arranges for client services, and presides over the drug court team meetings. She works to find mentors for clients, maintains data for statistics, and has written grant proposals.

The grant also paid expenses for seven drug court staffers and team members to attend NADCP's annual training conference June 13-18, in Washington D.C. Participants gained invaluable knowledge to improve the pilot program.

The success of family drug courts has contributed to an increase in their numbers nationwide because they contribute to improved safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children.

B. 13th Annual Drug Court Training Conference

During the reporting period, CIP funds were used to send local drug court team members to the National Association of Drug Court Professionals' 13th Annual Drug Court Training Conference held June 13th – 16th in Washington D.C. 24 representatives from Smith, Jefferson, and Travis counties attended the conference with CIP support.

C. Texas Partnership for Family Recovery

During this reporting period, CIP funds supported the Advisory Committee of the Texas Partnership for Family Recovery (Partnership). The Partnership is an inter-agency effort led by the Texas Department of State Health Services to integrate and coordinate substance abuse and mental health services for children and families in the child-welfare system. By creating policies, protocols and tools to coordinate services, the Partnership's goal is to reduce the number of children in out of home placements, shorten time in care, and increase the number of children successfully reunited with families leading to improved safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children.

Technical Assistance for the Partnership is provided by the National Center for Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (NCSACW). Executive level representatives from DFPS, CIP, State Health Services (SHS), Office of Court Administration (OCA), and Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children (CASA), provide leadership, direction, and oversight to the project's Core Team. Various staff members from the participating entities comprise the Core Team, and

work directly with the Advisory Committee to develop and implement the products and plans endorsed by the Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee is composed of advocates, consumers and stakeholders and includes representatives from the judicial, substance abuse, child-welfare and legal systems, as well as consumers.

Meeting bi-monthly during FY 2007, the Advisory Committee accomplished the following objectives:

- Created an inter-agency Memorandum of Understanding that has been signed by the oversight agencies;
- Designed a Community Guide for the development of integrated services and Family Drug Treatment Courts;
- Developed an evaluation plan based upon utilization of state agency databases to track outcomes and impact for planning and policy development;
- Launched two pilot sites in Tarrant and Nueces counties;
- Provided and will continue to provide pilot sites with technical assistance and other support through 2008;
- Developed an implementation plan for 2007-2008 activities; and
- Submitted an application for continued technical assistance from NCSACW.

CIP funds were used for Texas Partnership meeting support expenses. CIP funds also enabled Core Team members to attend Children and Family Future's 2nd Annual National Conference on Substance Abuse, Child Welfare and the Courts, "Putting the Pieces Together for Children and Families"; and the National Association of Drug Court Professionals annual conference in Washington, D.C.

VI. National Adoption Day

To provide an incentive for bringing adoption cases to consummation, to inform the community about the need for foster and adoptive families, as a recruitment tool for increasing the number of licensed foster and adoptive families, and to reduce the psychological damage of the court experience on children, the Texas Court Improvement Project (CIP) funds local projects that culminate in multiple adoptions known as "Adoption Day." CIP has provided up to \$3,000 annually to assist local courts and bar associations in putting on an adoption day event.

During this reporting period, CIP provided funding for Adoption Day projects in Tarrant and Smith counties. Through these efforts, 78 children were adopted into forever families.

VII. Child Protection Court Support

CIP continues to work with OCA and the nine Administrative Regional Judges to ensure that Child Protection Courts (formerly known as "cluster courts") remain state of the art and capable of meeting the needs of the children and communities it serves. During this reporting period, CIP funds were used to provide voice and data telecommunication services to OCA employees

working on the Child Protection Court (CPC) project; to support substitute court reporters assigned to CPCs; and to train CPC employees.

CIP pays for wireless connection and cell phones services for CPCs and CPC support staff, respectively. CPC staff travels extensively within their regions, sometimes encompassing multiple counties, and the cell phones are often the only means for conducting business when not in court, and staying in contact with the designated headquarters of that court. Additionally, CIP supported wireless connection capabilities within the Child Protection Courts. In certain courts, wireless or 'air' cards have been absolutely essential in that they allow the court to synchronize case management system data with the OCA networks. Prior to the purchase of these wireless or air cards, this was not possible for these courts.

CIP supports costs associated with substitute or temporary court reporters assigned to assist the Child Protection Courts. At times, the child protection judges require the use of a court reporter and are unable to secure these services from the county. The grant money provided by CIP reimburses the OCA for the services provided by court reporters when needed.

CIP reimburses CPC employees and agents for expenses incurred to attend authorized trainings. CIP funds have allowed the CPC associate judges to attend and participate in training events both in and out of state, including the National Summit on Performance Management for the Judiciary and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. During the past fiscal year, approximately 10 individuals have received training that was partially or completely funded with CIP grant funds. Additionally, CIP funds have been used to support an annual CPC training sponsored by OCA and designed to meet the specific needs of the CPC judges and court personnel. This year's training focused specifically on child welfare issues and included presentations by DFPS and child-welfare experts. Thirty CPC employees attended the training. The training sessions sponsored by other parties, as well as the training designed by OCA, target issues specific to judges and staff involved in child protection cases. These training sessions also provide opportunities for the judges to meet the number of CLE hours required by the State Bar as well as the number of family violence training hours required by statute.

Well-trained court officials and staff contribute to improved safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children.

VIII. Cluster Prosecutor

The Cluster Prosecutor project completed its third and final year in February 2007. At its close, the project was handling approximately 226 cases covering Bailey, Carson, Castro, Childress, Collingsworth, Dallam, Deaf Smith, Donley, Gray, Hall, Hartley, Hemphill, Lipscomb, Oldham, Parmer, Roberts, Sherman, and Wheeler counties. This was an increase of 26 cases from the previous year. This increase in caseload mirrored a statewide trend, resulting in part, from increases in investigation staff. Of those cases, 105 involved permanent managing conservatorship, 120 were managing conservatorship, and one involved a motion to participate in services. Of the 120 cases pending in which DFPS had temporary managing conservatorship, 107 cases had been pending for less than a year; thirteen had been pending for more than a year as a result of an extension of the dismissal date; and five of the cases involved children who had

been returned to a parent, but with DFPS retaining temporary managing conservatorship to monitor the safety and welfare of the children. During this reporting period, while there was an increase in the number of temporary managing conservatorship cases, the project continued to see a fairly low percentage (13%) of these cases extended beyond the one-year dismissal date deadline, resulting in more children achieving permanency sooner.

Overall, the Cluster Prosecutor Project proved an effective way of providing DFPS legal representation in rural counties where district and county attorneys strain to find the time and resources to provide such representation. Due to the other demands of their positions, district and county attorneys find it difficult to devote adequate time and resource to DFPS cases. Not only do they lack time to handle the cases in court, they also have limited time to consult with DFPS program staff regarding their cases.

In contrast, the attorneys involved in this project had the time to focus solely on child protection cases, allowing them to develop child-protection expertise. They were also readily available to DFPS program staff for consultation to address issues requiring immediate legal advice, or to represent DFPS when emergency removals were required. This accessibility improved the immediate safety and well-being of children by removing them from an abusive environment. This, in turn, often resulted in the cases being resolved more quickly and with more favorable outcomes for children. Moreover, by obtaining final orders in a more timely fashion, children were eligible for adoption or relative placements sooner, thereby achieving more timely permanency for the children.

Thus, by providing specialized and effective legal representation in DFPS cases, the project contributed to improved safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children. In addition, children reached permanency sooner, satisfying the federal foster care funding requirements for timely resolution of cases.

While DFPS explored possible options for permanent funding of the project, as the third project year came to a close, no other sources were located and, as a result, the project was terminated as of the end of February 2007. DFPS representation in child-protection cases transitioned to county and district attorneys. DFPS may seek additional CIP funds in future fiscal years.

IX. Texas CASA, Inc.

During this reporting period, CIP supported the following Texas CASA initiatives: expansion; training; local program advisory council development; Heartbeat newsletter publication; and grant assistance.

A. Expansion

Texas CASA, Inc. currently has 67 programs serving 201 counties. Five new programs, serving a total of eight counties were formed during this reporting period: CASA of Deep East Texas (Nacogdoches), CASA of Parker County (Weatherford), CASA for Kids of Austin, Waller, and Washington Counties (Brenham), CASA of Liberty and Chambers Counties (Dayton), and CASA of Harrison County (Marshall).

Since the last reporting period, Texas CASA has assisted in the formation of the above programs by providing consultation and resources to Steering Committees and the Boards of Directors, arranging for background checks for board members, developing nonprofit formation documents, advising the boards on various start-up issues, including the hiring of executive directors, volunteer recruitment, and fundraising. In addition, the Expansion Specialist traveled to Steering Committee meetings, Board meetings and trainings, and community outreach events. Texas CASA has utilized its collaborative partnership with Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas to form CASA of Liberty and Chambers Counties.

In addition, Texas CASA and CASA of the Coastal Bend (Corpus Christi) worked in the summer and fall of 2006 to reorganize Brush Country CASA (Kingsville), forming a new board of directors and hiring new staff. In July 2006, the Brush Country CASA program notified Texas CASA that it was on the verge of closing its doors and the Executive Director resigned. In July and August, the Program Operations Director met with the board to formulate a re-development plan including an interim program director and new board. Beginning in August 2006, Texas CASA held meetings and trainings in Kingsville and Alice on a weekly basis through the first of October. In October, a new board was sworn in, and in November, a new Executive Director was hired. Texas CASA has continued to assist this program with board training, strategic planning and fund development training.

Texas CASA is now working to develop new programs in Webb, Harrison, Williamson, and Taylor counties. To serve the children of Webb County, Texas CASA had several meetings in Laredo with stakeholders and community leaders about starting a new CASA program there, secured judicial and CPS endorsements, and developed a Steering Committee. They are currently working with the Steering Committee to develop a board of directors, raise funds, incorporate, and apply for Texas CASA membership. They expect this program to be formed in June 2007.

Texas CASA is working with the Longview CASA program (East Texas CASA) and other stakeholders to develop an independent CASA program – CASA of Harrison County – to serve children in Harrison County. Harrison County is currently being served by East Texas CASA, but an independent program is needed to more effectively serve more children. There are plans to expand this new program's service area to include at least one other county served by East Texas CASA. The Texas CASA Expansion Specialist attended a January 23rd steering committee meeting, participated in a second steering committee meeting by conference call on February 21st, and has been providing technical assistance and materials to the Steering Committee.

Texas CASA is continuing its work toward obtaining judicial endorsements in Williamson County. Staff members met with four family law judges, and also met with the Williamson County Children's Advocacy Center Board Chair and Executive Director to continue to develop grassroots support for a CASA program through individual contacts and presentations. They hope to begin forming a program there in 2009.

At former State Representative Bob Hunter's request, Texas CASA made a presentation about developing a CASA program to Taylor County judges, CPS personnel, and attorneys who handle CPS cases on December 8th. They also met with Rep. Susan King's staff about a CASA program

in Taylor County and coordinated a board member's participation in a community presentation about CASA.

Texas CASA staff have continued development efforts through steering committee meetings and meetings with local judges in Laredo to develop a new program in that city by the summer of 2007.

Community meetings were held in Bryan, Texas, to assist Voices for Children Inc. to incorporate Burleson County into their current program by fall 2007.

B. Training

In addition to aiding in the expansion of Texas CASA, CIP funds support its ability to provide a full menu of training events to help improve the quality of service to children in the child welfare system. Texas CASA trained a total of 716 participants during this reporting period in the training events listed below:

- New Director Trainings trained 25 Executive Directors on Working with Boards, Human Resources, Fund Raising and Financial Management.
- Facilitator Training brought in National CASA trainers to teach Texas CASA staff how to facilitate volunteer training using adult learning principles and methods and the National CASA curriculum.
- Basic Case Supervisor Trainings teach staff the basics of case supervision in CASA. A Basic Case Supervisor training held April 25-27, 2007, in Austin incorporated information and training needs and issues identified by the Texas Partnership for Family Recovery initiative.
- Texas CASA's 17th Annual Conference, It's All About Kids, captured the attendance of over 400 volunteers, board members, staff and other child welfare professionals.
- Executive Director Workshop included tracks for both directors and staff members.
- The Outreach and Recruitment Team provided Diversity Training to three local programs, recognizing the problem of disproportionate representation of African American and Native American children in the foster care system.
- Local board trainings were provided to CASA programs in Paris, Rockwall, Brenham, San Marcos, and Dalhart.
- Advanced Case Supervisor training was held May 21-23, 2007, in Austin for the first time. It also incorporated information about the Texas Partnership for Family Recovery initiative. It was extremely well received by participating staff.

Answering the national call for collaboration in dealing with child welfare issues, Texas CASA sought to utilize its role as an independent voice to lead collaborations with entities working to impact issues affecting children in foster care by:

- Providing cross-training with relevant groups (attorneys ad litem, foster parents, service providers, etc.), including groups organized for populations underrepresented in the CASA network.

- Hosting a Case Supervisor training that provided, for the first time, a session encouraging development of cross-training opportunities in local communities.
- Collaborating with Child Protective Services and Casey Family Programs to provide cross-training on Educational Advocacy using a curriculum developed by Casey Family Programs.
- Participating in the multi-disciplinary *Beyond the Bench* conferences.
- Sponsoring routine “Take Your Legislator/Principal/Community Leader to Court” activities, particularly as a means of collaborating with groups not traditionally represented in the CASA network, and bringing key local and state leaders to events as an opportunity to familiarize them with CASA’s role.

C. Development of Local Program Advisory Councils

The Program Policy Advisory Group that first convened in January 2007 continued its work to review and revise CASA policies and standards in a two-day meeting May 9-10, 2007. The work resulted in a recommendation that the Texas CASA board develop a new set of standards for local programs. The Program Policy Advisory Group is continuing its work to develop and recommended new practices and protocols for quality assurance assistance and for monitoring the new standards.

A Volunteer Advisory Group to assist Texas CASA and local programs to address volunteer training needs and services and advocacy for children, is scheduled to convene August 2007.

D. Heartbeat

The Heartbeat was published in April 2007 and distributed to approximately 10,000 people across the state. This professional publication provides local communities with information about CASA programs, and the CASA volunteers who make advocacy work in their communities.

E. Grant Assistance

Providing assistance to local programs to help them acquire grants is a strategy for Texas CASA and it has significantly increased its services to local programs in this area. During this reporting period, Texas CASA was able to assist the following counties in receiving grant awards, helping to ensure their continued existence and effectiveness:

- CASA of Central Texas (San Marcos) received a \$200,000 capital grant from the Kosky Foundation.
- CASA of Parker County (Weatherford) received a \$10,000 grant from the United Way to provide operational support and volunteer training for the new program. The Rayfield Wright Foundation awarded the program \$40,000 for operational start-up expenses such as office space and personnel.

Additionally, Texas CASA staff worked with local programs in the cities of Nacogdoches and Gainesville to identify a number of private foundations for potential grant funds. Finally, Texas CASA sent local programs various announcements on grant opportunities, including a few opportunities specific to urban programs.

X. ChildSafe

Childsafe continues to be a crucial resource to CPS caseworkers in Bexar County by providing timely, accurate and clear medical information in child abuse and neglect cases. CIP funding allows Bexar County Child Abuse and Neglect Court to utilize a medical consultant to evaluate the quality of medical information available to CPS and the court prior to and during removal hearings. Data was available for the period of February 2006 through June 2007. During this period, Dr. Kellogg, medical consultant for the Bexar County Child Abuse and Neglect Court, provided consultation for 357 child abuse and neglect cases; and 263 provided sufficient information for analysis. Following review, Dr. Kellogg prepared a written statement addressing the probability of neglect or abuse for the court, CPS, and attorneys involved in the case. The following is a report of the results of the project:

Of the cases reviewed, some had symptoms/indications that fit into more than one category. The assessment results of these reviews are as follows:

1. Total number of cases reviewed and analyzed – 263
 - a. Physical Abuse – 177
 - b. Sexual Abuse – 18
 - c. Neglect – 59
 - d. Other – 8
 - e. Undetermined - 26
2. Number of cases that were indicative for abuse – 75 (28.5%)
3. Number of cases that did not indicate abuse – 41 (15.5%)
4. Number of cases that were non-specific for abuse (could be abuse but could also be non-trauma related) – 65 (24.7%)
5. Number of cases that were non-determinate due to a lack of information – 44 (16.7%)

Because it is not always possible to gather enough information to conduct an analysis of each case for this project, only those cases with sufficient information were subject to analysis. However, all cases brought for review were tracked to the fullest extent possible.

The data shows that a large majority of the cases were reviewed for physical abuse. Neglect cases were the second most frequently reviewed. This is consistent with the year-end results reported in 2005. Caseworkers investigating physical abuse need clear, accurate medical information to assist them in making a determination of whether or not abuse occurred. 28.5% of the cases assessed indicated abuse, which again is consistent with the results from the previous year-end report (31%). However, this year the number of cases not indicative of abuse decreased from 20% in 2005 to 15.5%. Caseworkers that have consulted with Dr. Kellogg in the past may have increased their knowledge base concerning trauma related injuries and have become able to better identify cases in which abuse did not occur. Another 24.7% were non-specific for abuse. These cases show an injury that could be consistent with intentional trauma; however, it was also possible that the explanation provided by the caregivers was consistent with the injury, and therefore, non-trauma related. This compares to 13% which were non-specific in 2005. Again, these results may indicate that workers are better able to identify cases that are unclear as to the cause of the injury and bring them to Dr. Kellogg for consultation. The consultations with Dr.

Kellogg clearly benefit the caseworkers' ability to distinguish between intentional and accidental trauma and to apply that knowledge in their determination of whether or not abuse occurred. Having easy and reliable access to someone with Dr. Kellogg's level of expertise is invaluable in helping caseworkers make the difficult decisions necessary to the improve safety outcomes of the children with which they come into contact.

XI. Judicial Training

A. National Conference on Juvenile Justice and National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Annual Conference

The Texas Center for the Judiciary used CIP funding to send 27 judges to the 34th National Conference on Juvenile Justice held in San Diego in March; and 47 judges to the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges 70th annual conference held in San Francisco in July.

B. CPS Judicial Conference

In response to a request for guidance on best practices in CPS cases, the Texas Center, in collaboration with DFPS and CIP Staff, will conduct a statewide training, September 5-7, 2007. The training is open to all judges who hear CPS cases and will address many cross-disciplinary issues, such as psychoactive medications in children, Texas' new healthcare delivery model, Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs), and how to use data collected by the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS) to improve courts' ability to make informed and timely decisions.

This training will be held in a forum where judges gain knowledge and tools for making decisions that adequately address specific needs of children and families. It will also foster candid discussion and allow them to share their experiences with other judges who hear the same kinds of cases. Judges who attend this training will gain a better understanding of the importance of the CFSR, AFCARS, and the Title IV-E Review as well.

CIP will use Training Grant funds to support the conference in subsequent fiscal years.

XII. New York Summit

CIP funds sent five representatives from the Texas Center, OCA, the Court, and DFPS to the National Judicial Leadership Summit in New York, March 8-9, 2007. Texas representatives used the conference as an opportunity to reconnect on upcoming events, and brainstorm ways in which they could collaborate in the future. Additionally, the Texas convoy discussed additional partners they needed to engage in their collaborative efforts. Finally, there were several strategies presented by other states that seemed worth implementing in Texas, in particular:

- Arkansas pursued a statewide system for appointment and compensation of ad litem.
- Arkansas developed "best practices" laminated handouts for each of the participants in the child-protection court system.

- The family drug court program in Sacramento provided a particularly good example of data-driven program implementation.