

MODEL COURTS
PROJECT

2002-2003 ANNUAL REPORT

**“AN OPPORTUNITY FOR
EXCELLENCE THROUGH COURT
IMPROVEMENT IN POLICY,
PROCEDURE AND MANAGEMENT”**

MAY 5, 2003

JUVENILE COURT JUDGES SPRING SEMINAR ST. SIMONS ISLAND

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MODEL COURTS PROJECT **2002-2003 ANNUAL REPORT**

MODEL COURTS PROJECT: OVERVIEW

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The purpose of the Model Courts Project (MCP) is to assist juvenile courts in developing model practices in deprivation cases in keeping with guidelines developed by both Georgia and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ). More specifically, but not limited to, the MCP will aide courts in developing practices and procedures to ensure representation of children and parents involved in deprivation and termination of parental rights cases, improved case flow management, and the promotion of the One Family/One Judge model. Enhancing these areas of a court's services will result in that court becoming more time and cost-efficient, as well as more user-friendly.

The MCP began by focusing strictly on Cobb and Fulton Counties. In August of 2001, the MCP realized a need to expand the project into other parts of Georgia. As of September 2001, the MCP expanded its coverage to a total of eight court jurisdictions. In addition to Cobb and Fulton, the following sites are now participating in the project: the Appalachian Judicial Circuit (Gilmer, Fannin and Pickens Counties), Bartow County, the Dublin Judicial Circuit (Johnson, Laurens, Treutlen, and Twiggs Counties), Houston County, the Southwestern Judicial Circuit (Lee, Macon, Schley, Stewart, Sumter and Webster Counties), and Troup County.

The project has built in three levels of accountability. Each court is responsible for implementing goals that they have set for themselves. These goals are develop by holding stakeholder meetings. At these meetings, either individuals and/or sub-committees are assigned responsibility for follow-up on certain goals to insure implementation. Stakeholders consist of representatives from the following agencies/departments: DFACS, SAAGS, GALs, CASAs, Judicial Citizen Panel Review, mediation, mental health, law enforcement, court staff, and others as needed. A second level of accountability is that each county is paired or "clustered" with another model court site that is close in location. These clusters can compare efforts and keep each other motivated. And finally, the third level of accountability relies on the Model Court Coordinator (MCC) to oversee the project. The MCC ensures that each court site is taking the necessary steps to achieve the goals it has set for itself.

The MCP is also making efforts to establish improved data tracking procedures to better relay project results. This topic will be further discussed in the *Statewide Activities Update* section of this report.

FUNDING AND BUDGET

The Permanency Planning Committee of the Council of Juvenile Court Judges of Georgia (CJCJ) developed Georgia's Model Courts Project. Twice a year at each of the juvenile court judge's spring and fall seminars, the permanency planning committee is updated on the progress of the Model Courts Project.

The Model Courts Project was originally funded by the CJCJ through grant funds received from the Georgia Supreme Court's Child Placement Project (CPP). In July of 2002, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) assumed funding of the project. While the MCC position now falls under the AOC, the intent of the project has not changed. The Coordinator works closely with CJCJ and its judges in a strong partnership to achieve model practices in juvenile courts across Georgia. Council staff members Robert Bassett, Lynn Brewer and Melinda Shepard have given a great deal of assistance to the project on an ongoing basis.

MCP funds are directed primarily towards paying the salary and benefits package of the Model Court Coordinator. The remainder of the budget is used towards mileage and expense reimbursements, membership dues to the NCJFCJ, and purchasing literature relating to model courts efforts. Funds are also used to send the project coordinator to the Council's judicial seminars twice a year and the NCJFCJ's National Conference each spring.

PROJECT DIRECTOR

Lori L. Bramlett is the Model Court Coordinator (MCC) for the State of Georgia. She has held this position since its creation in January 2000. The MCC is a full-time position with benefits. The duties of this position are: research model court issues; collect data; assist with and participate in stakeholder meetings; conduct site visits at designated model courts; facilitate training workshops; and promote the philosophy of the model courts initiative. The MCC reports to Michelle Barclay, Project Director of the Supreme Court of Georgia's Child Placement Project. Lori also takes direction from the Model Courts Advisory Committee, made up of member judges of the Council of Juvenile Court Judges of Georgia. She is always available to the model court sites for whatever assistance they need to implement improvement goals.

FUTURE GOALS

The NCJFCJ operates its own national model courts project. Georgia's MCP is on a waiting list to become part of this program. In the meanwhile, the NCJFCJ has agreed to provide technical assistance to Georgia's project.

The Council would also like to broaden the project by adding additional counties each year as possible. A long-term aspirational goal would be to eventually have all juvenile courts in the State of Georgia be part of the Model Courts Project.

PROJECT PARTICIPANTS/CONTACT INFORMATION

The Model Courts Project consists of the Coordinator, a 9-member advisory committee, and eight model court sites. Project participants are listed below along with their contact information. If you have a question or interest about something you read in this report, please feel free to contact the corresponding individual for more information.

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STATEWIDE ACTIVITIES UPDATE

STAKEHOLDERS MEETINGS

Stakeholder meetings are the backbone of the Model Courts Project. All lead court sites are urged to hold these meetings as frequently as possible. It also helps when the CPP is willing to pay for lunch. Thanks CPP! Many counties, such as Troup and Fulton hold monthly meetings. Others, such as the Appalachian Judicial Circuit and Cobb hold meetings when the need arises to discuss an important issue. It cannot be stressed enough – meet regularly, meet regularly, meet regularly!

During the past year, the MCP Coordinator had the opportunity to assist three juvenile courts that are not part of the Model Courts Project with stakeholder meetings. Judge Cliff Jolliff of Hall and Dawson Counties, and Judge Sandra Miller of Paulding County both saw the importance of starting the process of court improvement. You don't have to be an "official model court site" to implement best practices in your court. At these meetings, the MCC assisted the judges and their stakeholders in developing and prioritizing improvement goals for each respective court. Lori Bramlett is available at any time to come to your court and get you started on the right track. Please feel free to give her a call or send an e-mail.

MCP WORKSHOP

The very first MCP Workshop was held on December 5, 2001 at Red Top Mountain State Park. This was the first time that all of the model court site judges and select stakeholders were able to meet and discuss issues relevant to the overall project and their individual courts. The group was fortunate enough to have two representatives from the NCJFCJ to participate in the meeting, Judge Stephen Rideout, of Alexandria, Virginia and Dr. Sophia Gatowski, with the NCJFCJ. Both are involved with the national model courts project and provided a wealth of knowledge to the group.

At the next two MCP Workshops held in 2002, one hosted by Judge R. Michael Key in LaGrange and another by Judge William Tribble in Dublin (great b-b-q), judges and stakeholders became much more focused. The result of these two meetings is the *Best Practices Report in Adoption and Termination Cases* (Judge Key might have a fancier name for it by now).

This Best Practices Report is attached to this MCP Annual Report and will be made available at the Juvenile Court Judges Spring Seminar in May 2003.

Coming up on Friday, May 16, 2003, the MCP will hold its fourth daylong workshop. Judge Sanford Jones is hosting the meeting at the new Romae T. Powell Juvenile Justice Center in Atlanta. The meeting will focus on developing best practices in placement options for children currently in foster care.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Each year the MCP Coordinator has been fortunate enough to travel the NCJFCJ's Juvenile Justice Conference. Lori has traveled to conferences in Tampa, Reno, Houston and this past March in Philadelphia. The conferences are always a learning experience. There are so many workshops to choose from and tons of knowledge is waiting to be gained. As much information as possible is brought home to share with the model court sites. There is even usually a little adventure mixed in, especially when Judge Key is around.

STATE SEMINARS

In addition to the national conferences, Lori attends many conferences right here in Georgia. The Juvenile Court Judges Seminar is at the top of the list. Brasstown Valley, Chattanooga, and St. Simons. This seminar is always very enlightening and it's always nice to see all the judges and old friends.

This past fall Lori attended her first CPP Conference. The workshops were great. Naomi Haynes Griffith, was there as guest speaker. She's great! She tells it like it is. This conference was good because it focused mainly on deprivation issues, which is the focus of the Model Courts Project as well.

CPRS TRAINING

All across the State of Georgia, juvenile court judges and the Department of Family and Children Services (DFACS) are learning about the new Online Case Plan Reporting System (CPRS). The Program is being updated continuously in effort to make it as helpful as possible to those using the system. CPRS will go a long way in improving the efficiency of the court. This past winter, the MCC aided the developers of the CPRS in training several of the North Georgia area judges.

SUMMER ASSESSMENT

The Model Courts Project partnered with the Child Placement Project and the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) in the summer of 2002 to conduct a "Summer Assessment". Ten juvenile courts were studied across the State via court observations, case file reviews, surveys, and judicial interviews. A detailed report of the "snapshot" study can be read on the Child Placement Project website (www2.state.ga.us/courts/supreme/cpp/).

The same groups, utilizing the assistance of interns courtesy of the Barton Law and Policy Clinic, will conduct a similar study this summer. Instruments used in last years study have been modified in hopes of better capturing pertinent data. This study will begin in June 2003 and will be lead by Lori Bramlett, MCC.

MODEL COURT SITE UPDATES

This section of the report highlights the goals of each model court site. They each have many successes, but they also experienced pitfalls. Each model court site is unique. What works in one county will not necessarily work in another without some adaptation. It is the hope of the Model Courts Project that you will be inspired by the work of the model court sites to try something new and improved in your own court. Take a look!

JUVENILE COURT OF THE APPALACHIAN JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

Counties served: Pickens, Gilmer and Fannin

Model Court Lead Judge: Honorable William L. Reilly

2002 Model Court Goals:

1. Improve communication between all parties working within the juvenile court system, and educate the general public by:

- Publishing a series of education handouts that will explain the court process to children and parents. **(Completed)**
- Develop and publish an operations/procedures manual. **(In progress)**
- Develop and publish a “timeline” for use by parents, DFACS, and the court for periodic judicial review. **(Completed)** A copy of this form is available upon request by contacting MCP Coordinator, Lori Bramlett.
- Develop and publish a “family tree” form that includes addresses and phone numbers of relatives for use in determining family placements. **(Completed)** A copy of this form is available upon request by contacting MCP Coordinator, Lori Bramlett. This form has helped the court greatly in making diligent searches for relatives.
- Periodic stakeholder meetings are held to discuss current issues pertaining to the three-county circuit. **(On-going)** Recently, Miss Georgia, Amy Mulkey, was our guest speaker at a stakeholder/volunteer recognition luncheon.

2. To increase the use of mediation in deprivation, termination and delinquency cases. Unfortunately, State funding of the court’s mediation project was cut and thus the program ended before it ever got off the ground. Approximately 2-3 cases were mediated prior to the loss of funding.

3. To better track the progress of children in 3rd party deprivation cases. This is a work in progress. A better job is being done, but there is always room for more improvement.
4. To decrease the number of continuances granted in deprivation and termination cases. This is an on-going goal. A marked improvement has been noticed.
5. To open an emergency shelter for children needing placement after being removed from their homes because of deprivation issues, as well as develop more placement options for children who are not suitable for foster care or YDC. **(No Progress)**

Model Court Goals for 2003:

1. To continue to work on on going and in progress goals listed above.
2. To establish visitation centers in each of the three counties served by this court. **(In Progress)**

BARTOW COUNTY JUVENILE COURT

County served: Bartow

Model Court Lead Judge: Honorable Velma C. Tilley

Bartow County joined the CJCJ Model Court Project in 2002. We had only three individuals at the initial meeting with the Statewide Project members and so our goals for 2002 were formulated without input from many of the stakeholders. Bartow County is fortunate in that its Juvenile Court was presided over for 30 years by a very proactive and innovative judge, the Honorable Herbert M. Crane, Jr. Also Bartow County has had one of the best, if not *the* best, Departments of Family and Children Services in the state. Although the staff stability it enjoyed for many years suffered a substantial upheaval in recent years, it continues to maintain a high level of professionalism in its work. Consequently, the initial goals set by the current judge, Velma Tilley, and her staff, were rather simplistic goals and dealt primarily with the functioning of the Court itself.

The goals for 2002 were as follows:

1. Decrease the number of continuances/recesses granted in deprivation/termination cases.
 - a. Evaluate reasons for delays
 - b. Designate Mondays as regular Deprivation days
 - c. Subpoena parents a half hour early
2. Improve communication between all parties working within the juvenile court system.

- a. Develop and utilize a form for change of address, etc.
 - b. Develop and utilize a form to obtain family tree information
 - c. DFACS to provide subpoena list to the juvenile court within 24 hours of filing the petition
 - d. Juvenile court paperwork to be completed within 48 hours of filing the petition
3. Publish a series of educational handouts
 - a. Review handouts prepared by other courts
 - b. Assign local staff to modify for local use
 4. Develop a policy and procedures manual.
 - a. List desired chapters
 - b. Assign chapters to local staff
 5. Fully utilize deprivation mediation. Mediate at least one case per month.
 6. Provide continuing education for all staff.
 - a. Utilize staff meetings for on going training
 - b. Utilize training offered by outside agencies

[Long term goal for Velma Tilley (not in 2002) - Prepare and distribute deprivation orders before parties leave the courthouse.]

Progress on Goals:

1. Decrease the number of continuances/recesses granted in deprivation/termination cases.
 - a. Evaluate reasons for delays
 - b. Designate Mondays as regular Deprivation days
 - c. Subpoena parents a half hour early

The designation of Mondays as our regular Deprivation day may have been the single most effective tool in reducing the continuances and recesses that had to be granted in these types of cases. Monday was chosen as the best day for deprivation matters as it was the day of the week that was most often the 10th day following the filing of Deprivation Petitions. By not scheduling our adjudicatory hearings on days that were usually designated as delinquency and unruly hearing days, we have avoided time crunches in both areas.

In evaluating further reasons for delays, we determined that waiting until we came to Court to determine if attorneys represented parties was counterproductive. The vast majority of parents do not waive representation, did not call ahead to ask for attorneys, and were indigent. Therefore we developed the practice of appointing attorneys at the outset of a case and requesting their presence at the 72-hour hearing.

Subpoenaing parents a half hour early resulted in confusion and misunderstandings about when cases were actually scheduled for hearing. Instead, Court staff now writes on the summons or

subpoena that the parents should come to Court early if they have not contacted their attorney prior to the time set for the hearing.

2. Improve communication between all parties working within the juvenile court system.
 - a. Develop and utilize a form for change of address, etc.
 - b. Develop and utilize a form to obtain family tree information
 - c. DFACS to provide subpoena list to the juvenile court within 24 hours of filing the petition
 - d. Juvenile court paperwork to be completed within 48 hours of filing the petition

The change of address form was developed and is utilized and has been a big help in providing notice to parties who have changed addresses (a frequent occurrence in this Court).

The Court did not develop its own family tree information form in 2002 but relied on DFACS to obtain this information, primarily through the First Placement, Best Placement study.

DFACS for the most part successfully provides a witness list within 24 hours of the filing of the Petition. As could be expected, newer workers are not as good at this as the more experienced workers. Court staff puts a reminder of this on the subpoena that goes to the caseworker.

Court staff routinely completes court paperwork within 48 hours of the filing of the Petition for service to the parties.

3. Publish a series of educational handouts – Accomplished!
4. Develop a policy and procedures manual.
 - a. List desired chapters
 - b. Assign chapters to local staff

Some chapters have been designated as desirable and assigned to local staff. Little progress was made on this goal, as the Court was substantially short-staffed for the last half of 2002.

5. Fully utilize deprivation mediation. Mediate at least one case per month.

This goal was a miserable failure in Bartow County. When funding was lost for the statewide project, we did not seek funding elsewhere. One reason that deprivation mediation may have failed in Bartow County while it appeared successful in other counties is that Bartow County DFACS had good success in obtaining surrenders of parental rights in some cases that would otherwise have gone to termination without having to resort to mediation.

- Provide continuing education for all staff.
- a. Utilize staff meetings for on going training
 - b. Utilize training offered by outside agencies

This Court has always encouraged continuing education for all staff. We have not utilized staff meetings for this ongoing training as had been hoped. Being substantially short-staffed for half

of the year prevented us from taking time for staff meetings. We continued to utilize training offered by outside agencies and, in fact, sponsored a training which we offered to other juvenile courts, although not in the area of deprivation.

As to the long-term goal of preparing and distributing adjudication orders before the parties leave the courthouse, we made substantial progress on this goal, primarily in private deprivation matters. A form order has been developed which includes a case plan for reunification. This order is used in all private cases and has been used occasionally on relatively simple, primarily consent cases involving DFACS.

All things considered, we believe that we made real progress on our goals for 2002. To plan for 2003, we had a stakeholders meeting which was attended by: the judge, the deprivation clerk, the coordinator of the Citizens Review Panel, the CASA coordinator, the DFACS CPS supervisor, the DFACS placement supervisor, the DFACS SAAG, and an attorney who has served both as a GAL and as a parent attorney. After hearing a report from Michelle Barclay of the Child Placement Project on the results of her recent evaluation of ASFA compliance, we brainstormed ideas for improvements in our work. The following goals were reached by consensus of those present.

Model Court Goals for 2003:

COURT OR COURT STAFF:

1. Continue to make timeliness of hearings a high priority.
2. Improve notification of both parents for 72-Hour Hearing and Adjudication.
3. Utilize family tree document no later than Adjudication Hearing.
4. Reduce delay in preparation of TPR transcripts.
5. Court staff to notify CASA coordinator when Orders entered.
6. Develop "How To" Manual for Juvenile Court. (A modification of our policy and procedures manual.)
7. Utilize Internet access to approve case plans.

DFACS:

1. Improve notification of both parents for 72-Hour Hearing and Adjudication.
2. Utilize family tree document no later than Adjudication Hearing.

3. Provide FPBP evaluations and psychological evaluations to Panel Coordinator when received.

CITIZENS REVIEW PANEL MEMBERS: review materials prior to day of review.

SAAG/JUDGE: produce Orders in timely fashion (goal: within 1 week of non-TPR hearing).

ATTORNEYS: attempt to contact clients prior to hearings.

COBB COUNTY JUVENILE COURT

County served: Cobb

Model Court Lead Judge: Honorable J. Stephen Schuster

Local Model Court Coordinator: Lina Maxwell

Reaching for excellence:

1999

- The Juvenile Court of Cobb County was one of two Georgia juvenile courts to participate in the Council of Juvenile Court Judges of Georgia's Model Courts Project.
- A model court coordinator was appointed and stakeholders were identified.
- Numerous meetings were held to identify the project's opportunities, the court's needs and the goals for services.

2000-2001

- A Legal Aid Office was established at the Court.
- Trainings were held for Guardian Ad Litem Advocates at Juvenile Court.
- Drug testing capabilities were established at the court for requests by the judges, the judicial citizen review panels and others.
- DFACS was given access to the court calendar in advance of hearings.
- Cobb County's first visitation center was opened at the Marietta First Baptist Church. Four to six visits take place each week.
- Training began for court representatives – Judges, administrators, probation officers and therapists – to effect and establish a drug court in Cobb County.
- Educational handouts explaining court and DFACS processes were developed and distributed to DFACS, CASA, Judicial Citizen Review Panel, court waiting rooms. These brochures provide an alternate means of communicating information to parents. Cobb Juvenile Court has shared the handouts with other model court sites, which have in return produced and distributed them in their own respective courts. Copies of these brochures are available upon request by contacting MCP Coordinator, Lori Bramlett.

2002

- Judge Juanita Stedman began holding drug court on Wednesdays in September 2002. Juvenile Court is completing application for grant monies to expand this program.
- Stakeholder meetings were held with DFACS and representatives of other sites interested in establishing visitation center sites modeled after Cobb County's site.
- MacLand Road Presbyterian Church in Powder Springs and North Star Church of Acworth were identified as possible sites for additional visitation centers in Cobb County. These cities were chosen based on their proximity to the homes of foster parents serving Cobb County.
- Initial stakeholders meetings were held to study the possibility of expanding the court mediation program to include gang mediation.
- Representatives from the Probation Officers Gang Suppression Unit, Mediation representatives, model court and court administrators, Dr. Ansley Barton from Kennesaw State University Adult Dispute Resolution Department, Cobb County School social Worker, and Cobb County Law Enforcement were present at numerous meetings to determine needs and program possibilities.
- Due to loss of State funding, the court's Deprivation Mediation Project ended with the loss of the Coordinator's position. Since Juvenile Court is now under the umbrella of Superior Court, it is hoped that eventually additional funds will become available to reestablish this program.
- Increasing foster care resources and the role of the juvenile court in the community was addressed by developing a speaker bureau. A permanent Speakers Bureau is under advisement. Numerous opportunities have been available for the judges and court supervisors to educate the community concerning the various aspects of juvenile court. The Atlanta Journal Constitution did print a very positive article concerning the Visitation Center in May 2002.

2003

- Training held in February 2003 for volunteers at MacLand Road Presbyterian Church in Powder Springs. DFACS and court personnel were available to discuss the parameters of the visitation center. 30 volunteers were present and the site began operation in March 2003 as Cobb County's second Visitation Center.
- Proposed training for the North Star Church of Acworth will begin in late spring or early summer to establish the county's third visitation center site.
- Five probation officers attended the State-Certified Mediation Training in April 2003 to initiate the "Conflict Solutions Mediation Project" involving gang mediations and the juvenile court.
- Advance gang mediation training will be developed in the summer of 2003 by Kennesaw State University, National Gang Mediation Programs and Cobb County Juvenile Court.
- Terry Watson, of the Osborne Project, has submitted a grant proposal to the Walton Communities Grants for monies to support the initial phase of the "Conflict Solutions Mediation Project". Beginning efforts have identified gangs at Osborne High School.
- Plans for producing additional educational handouts are underway including a booklet for Judicial Citizen Panel Review volunteers representing the court at the DFACS 30-day

case plan development meeting and a parent's Handbook for Navigating through the Court System.

FULTON COUNTY JUVENILE COURT

County served: Fulton

Model Court Lead Judge(s): Honorable Sanford Jones and Honorable Sharon Hill

- On March 12, 2003, we celebrated the grand opening of the Judge Romae T. Powell Juvenile Justice Center located at 395 Pryor Street, S.W., Atlanta, GA 30312-2713.
- The Court now has space for DFACS case managers to work, away from the waiting area. Case managers can meet with parents to work on case plans or can work on any other matters in this specially designed work area.
- The Child Placement Project is providing computers and a printer to be placed in the DFACS work area to facilitate the use of CPRS (web-based case plans) while waiting at court for a hearing to be called.
- The Court now has four offices for SAAGS where they may work while waiting on their cases to be called.
- The Family Visitation Center is adding new locations. The Barton Child Law and Policy Clinic has put the Visitation Center manual on line. See www.childwelfare.net/resources/VisitationCenterManual/VisitationCenterManual.pdf.
- More than 200 volunteers are now doing Citizen Panel Reviews on site in our new building. Panels run every weekday; sometimes two panels run simultaneously.
- Our new building has supervised visitation rooms for supervised visitation on site.
- The new building has a fully equipped child playroom, complements of the Atlanta Junior League. The playroom boasts a 52-inch color TV, juice, snacks, books from the adjacent public library (also located in the new building) and a full time day care provider. Children may wait in this room if they are in the building to attend court, meet with the child advocate or participate in the Citizen Panel Review.

- We are now conducting a pilot to see if setting a 30 day hearing in every removal case will increase the timely receipt of case plans. The hearing is set at the time of the 72-hour hearing. Parents who are stipulating to probable cause are asked if they will waive time limits on the adjudication so that the adjudication and the 30 day hearing can be held together; otherwise, the adjudication goes forward and the disposition can be continued to coincide with the 30 day hearing (or, if the case plan is ready and approved early, the 30 day hearing can be taken off the calendar or used to confirm that referrals have been made.) The 30-day hearing will be held even if the case is a publication case to allow the Department to submit the case plan (or the written statement that reunification is not appropriate) even though adjudication has not yet been held.
- We have two forms for use in the 30-day hearing. One is a “good work” letter to the Director of Fulton DFACS to be used when the case manager presents a timely, complete case plan. The other is a “No Reasonable Efforts To Finalize Permanency” Order, with a copy to the Director, if no case plan is submitted.
- We hope to do more form orders from the bench, either fill in the blank or generated on the computer and printed in the courtroom.
- We are now holding reviews of cases in which TPRs have been granted every six months (sometimes more frequently if the situation warrants such frequency).
- We are providing more services to children who are found to be delinquent or unruly so as to stop or reduce the deprivation that may be coexisting in the case: parenting classes, Multisystemic Therapy, Special Education Advocate.
- On November 23rd, 2003, Fulton County Juvenile Court Judges Nina Hickson and Sammy Jones were granted authority by Superior Court to participate in a National Adoption Day. 21 adoptions were completed during the event.

TROUP COUNTY JUVENILE COURT

County served: Troup

Model Court Lead Judge: Honorable R. Michael Key

In 2001, as part of the Model Court Project of the Georgia Council of Juvenile Court Judges (hereinafter referred to as “CJCJ”), Troup County was selected as one of six new counties to become a model court, bringing the total number of model courts to eight. Although we were already holding regular stakeholder meetings and making a number of changes in the way we do business, becoming a model court brought focus to what we were doing and brought more accountability to the process. Just preparing this report requires us to take a critical look at the progress of the project. Before beginning a review of our goals, it might be worthwhile to take a look at how we set out goals in the first place.

We thought that, before actually setting our goals, we should determine and clearly identify what it is that we ultimately want to accomplish. We adopted what may be called a mission statement. The idea is that we should measure each of our prospective goals against the mission statement to make certain that the selected goals further the mission of the court. Following is the mission statement for our project:

- To ensure that every child that should be in care is in care, but not a single child more; and
- To ensure that every child that is in care is in a safe, nurturing placement that is supportive of the permanency plan for the child.

After adopting our mission statement, over the course of a couple of our stakeholders meetings, we identified the following potential goals for our court:

1. Work on the front end of the system to make sure we have procedures and resources that allow us to keep more children out of the system from the outset, i.e. alternative placements, foster nanny program, etc.
2. Improve the representation of children through training, additional resources, and better coordination between attorney guardians ad litem and CASAs.
3. Develop a protocol for more effectively serving children who have been adjudicated both deprived and delinquent or unruly.
4. Develop a protocol, policies and procedures relative to third party deprivation petitions, guardianships and legitimations.
5. Focus on children who have been in care for 15 of the last 22 months to make sure that we are making and documenting good decisions relative to their permanency plan.
6. Start a visitation center and visitation standards.
7. Develop an information system capable of tracking compliance with the Aspirational Guidelines.
8. Identify and track outcome measures that are indicative of the success or failure of the Project.
9. Start a mediation program for deprivation cases.
10. Adopt and implement the use of the model forms recommended by CJCJ.
11. Make changes to the citizens panel review process to incorporate the recommended form of CJCJ.

Although all of the foregoing goals are worthwhile, and are in keeping with our mission

statement, we knew that we could not do all of those things at one time. Working from the foregoing list, and expanding the list as we discussed what we wanted to accomplish in our first year, we adopted the following goals for 2002:

Reasonable Efforts

Ensure that reasonable efforts are made on the front end to prevent removal from the home and/or to expedite the child's return to the home.

1. Develop a common working understanding of reasonable efforts among the court, DFCS, attorneys representing parents and children, SAAGs, attorneys guardian ad litem, and CASAs through multi-disciplinary workshops and curriculum development. Within the next six months, identify and disseminate resource materials and plan a workshop to refine the curriculum. Within the next nine months, begin training case managers, law enforcement officers, attorneys, CASAs, citizen's review panel members and others on reasonable efforts.
2. Identify and/or develop appropriate resources necessary for the agency to make case-specific reasonable efforts to prevent removal from the home and/or to expedite the child's return to the home. Take a subjective inventory of needs and resources within the next three months. Within the next six months, develop a systematic way to inventory needs and resources on an ongoing basis.

Forms and Process

1. Implement the model forms recommended by the Georgia Council of Juvenile Court Judges ("CJCJ"). Implement and refine the model forms over the next six months, continuing to have orders filed not later than two weeks following the date of the hearing. Develop the technological capacity within nine months to generate the model orders at the hearing, and any revisions or addendums to the order within five working days.
2. Within three months, revise the Citizens Panel Review Process to incorporate the new Findings and Recommendations Form and the web-based Case Plan Reporting System ("CPRS").
3. Within the next twelve months, as part of the work on reasonable efforts, develop procedures and checklists to guide the agencies in the delivery of services to avoid removal and to reunify the family.

Measurement and Accountability

1. Comply with the core outcome measurement requirements of the Georgia Model Courts Project.
2. Identify and track outcome measurements that are indicative of the level of success of the Troup County goals.

Although we experienced significant case manager turnover in 2002 for the first time, and we were the subject of a Title IV-E audit, we made substantial progress on our goals, and we set the stage for some productive work in 2003. Following is a summary of the work that we did on each individual goal.

REASONABLE EFFORTS.

We focused on the front-end requirement to make reasonable efforts to avoid the removal of a child from the home, and extended that a little bit to include making reasonable efforts to reunite the family at, or prior to, the shelter care hearing. Although we believed that law enforcement and DFCS were, for the most part, doing all that they could to avoid removal of children from their homes, we formed a work group, which we called the Reasonable Efforts Workgroup, to look at the current decision making process used by law enforcement and DFCS in making removal decisions, and to see what we could do to improve the process.

The first thing we discovered in our workgroup was that DFCS had a defined decision making process, but law enforcement did not. Not only that, but the standards and processes involved in making removal decisions varied among the four law enforcement agencies within our court's jurisdiction. We recognized right away that one big issue we had to deal with was uniformity and training, not just of DFCS case managers and law enforcement officers who do child abuse investigations, but of all law enforcement personnel.

During one of our work sessions we listed on the wall all of the circumstances that precipitated removal of children from their homes based on our collective experience. Then, we listed on the wall resources that we believed could have avoided a number of those removals had some of those resources been available. We left that meeting knowing that we could find a way to avoid removing children in some of the circumstances that had previously precipitated removal, but we really did not know how to get there. At the next meeting it began to come together.

When we took a good look at the circumstances precipitating removal that we had put up on the wall, we realized that most of those fit within the circumstances described on DFCS Form 455A. We then decided to center our discussions and develop program improvements around those circumstances. DFCS policy is summarized on a wallet-sized card referred to as the "Georgia Department of Human Resources SAFETY ASSESSMENT CARD". The front of the card reads,

"Identify the presence or absence of each factor to any child in the household prior to your leaving the home. Safety factors that are identified required the immediate determination of reasonable efforts and the completion of a safety plan. If there are no controlling interventions that can be immediately taken to protect a child, legal action must be initiated to place the child(ren) outside the home".

On the back of the card are the following risk factors, which are essentially the same ones set out on the DFCS Form 455A:

- A. Caretaker's behavior toward child is violent.
- B. Caretaker describes child in negative terms.
- C. Caretaker caused serious harm to child/has made threat.
- D. Caretaker's explanation for injury is inconsistent.
- E. Caretaker refuses access to child/may flee.
- F. Caretaker will not provide necessary supervision.
- G. Caretaker unwilling to meet child's basic needs.
- H. Caretaker has previously seriously maltreated a child.
- I. Caretaker's drug/alcohol use affects ability to care for the child.
- J. Child is fearful.
- K. Child's physical living conditions are hazardous.
- L. Child sexual abuse suspected.
- M. Other.

We reviewed the language in the Georgia Code, which authorizes removal in the following circumstances:

- When the conduct, condition, or surroundings of the child are endangering the child's health or welfare. O.C.G.A. Section 15-11-49.1
- The child cannot be adequately protected at home. O.C.G.A. Section 15-11-58(c)
- The child is in a circumstance or condition that presents an imminent danger to the child's life or health as a result of suspected abuse or neglect. O.C.G.A. Section 15-11-15.

(Emphasis added)

When all of the code sections are pulled together, a child should be removed from the home when the child is found to be in a circumstance or condition that presents an imminent danger to the child's life, health or welfare. It should be noted also that a child should be removed only when those circumstances exist and the risk cannot be managed in order to allow the child to remain in the home. We concluded that we are doing an adequate job of identifying the risk factors that are set out on one side of the Safety Assessment Card, but that maybe we can do a

better job of flipping the card over and focusing on controlling interventions. This is the side of the card that involves the most risk and takes the most work. It is fairly easy to determine the presence of one or more of the risk factors, but life for a case manager or law enforcement officer gets more complicated when there are known risk factors and the case manager or law enforcement officer makes the decision that the child can remain in the home safely because of the presence of controlling resources that can make the risk manageable, at least until further action by the agency or the court.

We decided that we should group the risk factors into the logical groups that called for substantially the same resources to manage the risk. As we reviewed the circumstances that we had identified that can result in removal, the risk factors set out in DFCS policy, and the applicable code sections, we found that most removals involved the following issues:

1. Substance abuse.
2. Mental health.
3. Unsanitary or unsafe homes.
4. Sexual abuse.
5. Physical violence.
6. The child feeling fearful or threatened in the home.

We concluded that we could accomplish all of the first part of our reasonable efforts goals and most of the second part if we could do more training on the Safety Assessment and include law enforcement on the training, and develop resources to meet the needs in each of the foregoing circumstances in which we may find children. We decided that, in order to do this, we needed to mobilize the community to provide resources to meet the needs of these families. A major part of our goals for 2003 will be centered on this initiative, which we call "Operation Home Team". We have taken each of the six predominate circumstances listed above, and identified specific resources that we believe will allow us to avoid removal of children from the home. When a case manager or law enforcement officer identifies one or more of the risk factors, he or she should first try to identify controlling interventions already in the home that will allow the child to remain in the home safely. If there are not adequate controlling interventions in the home to allow the child to remain at home safely until further agency or court action, then we must look to outside controlling interventions. Following is a list of those interventions for each of the risk predominate factors:

A. Outside Controlling Interventions in Cases of Substance Abuse:

In substance abuse cases, the following controlling interventions may be implemented in order to avoid removal of the children from the home, or to allow the children to return within seventy-two hours:

1. Placement of someone in the home to supervise the children. This can be a relative, a trained foster nanny, or a trained unpaid volunteer, both of which are referred to herein as foster nannies.
2. An emergency assessment of the parent to be performed by a team of substance abuse professional available at all times.
3. Day care to support the foster nanny program.

B. Outside Controlling Interventions in Mental Health Cases:

In mental health cases, the following controlling interventions can be implemented in order to avoid removal of the children from the home, or to allow the children to return within seventy-two hours:

1. Placement of someone in the home to supervise the children. This can be a relative, a trained foster nanny, or a trained unpaid volunteer, both of which are referred to herein as foster nannies.
2. An emergency assessment of the parent to be performed by a team of mental health professional available at all times.
3. Day care to support the foster nanny program.

C. Outside Controlling Interventions in Cases of Unsanitary or Unsafe Homes:

In cases of unsanitary or unsafe homes, the following interventions can be implemented in order to avoid removal of the children from the home, or to allow the children to return within seventy-two hours:

1. Pest control by a professional company.
2. A cleaning crew comprised by professionals, volunteers or some combination of the two.
3. Short-term living arrangements such as a motel, relatives, volunteers, etc.
4. Utilities. Arrangements with the City of LaGrange, Diverse Power, etc., for utilities for up to ninety days at no cost and with no deposit.
5. Constructions crews to correct defects in the housing only to the level where the children can be maintained at home safely.
6. Foster nannies in certain cases.

D. Outside Controlling Interventions in Cases Involving Sexual Abuse:

In cases of sexual abuse, the following interventions can be implemented in order to avoid removal of the children from the home, or to allow the children to return within seventy-two hours:

1. Medical teams, who are members of the child abuse protocol and who are available at all times.
 2. Countywide law enforcement team of child abuse and neglect professionals who are available at all times to investigate the cases.
 3. Foster nannies in certain cases.
 4. Coordination with law enforcement and judicial officers to ensure that perpetrators are out of the home.
 5. Short-term living arrangements such as a motel, relatives, volunteers, etc.
 6. Emergency mental health intervention with the child and with the parent in a failure to protect situation.
- E. Outside Controlling Interventions in Cases Involving Physical Abuse:

In cases of physical abuse, the following interventions can be implemented in order to avoid removal of the children from the home, or to allow the children to return within seventy-two hours:

1. Medical teams, who are members of the child abuse protocol and who are available at all times.
 2. Countywide law enforcement team of child abuse and neglect professionals who are available at all times to investigate the cases.
 3. Foster nannies in certain cases.
 4. Coordination with law enforcement and judicial officers to ensure that perpetrators are out of the home.
 5. Short-term living arrangements such as a motel, relatives, volunteers, etc.
 6. Emergency mental health intervention with the child and with the parent in a failure to protect situation.
- F. Outside Controlling Interventions in Cases Where the Child Feels Threatened or is Fearful of Going Home:

In cases of where the child feels threatened or is fearful of going home, the following interventions can be implemented in order to avoid removal of the children from the home, or to allow the children to return within seventy-two hours:

1. Emergency mental health team to assess and stabilize the situation.
2. Intensive investigation by agency and by law enforcement.
3. Coordination with law enforcement and judicial officers to ensure that the person creating the threat is removed from the house.
4. Short-term living arrangements such as a motel, relatives, volunteers, etc.
5. Foster nannies in certain situations.
6. In-home services.

There are several “teams” that will need to be developed in order to implement Operation Home Team, including, but not necessarily limited to the following:

1. Foster Nanny Program.
2. Medical Team.
3. Law Enforcement Team.
4. Mental Health Team.
5. Substance Abuse Team.
6. Construction Team.
7. Cleaning Team.
8. Pest Eradication Team.
9. Domestic Violence Crisis Intervention Team.
10. Day Care Team.
11. Short Term Housing Team.
12. Utilities Team.

Most of these resources are already available. In fact, we are utilizing many of these resources later in the case as part of a reunification plan, often days, weeks, or months after the

child has been removed from the home. We believe that we can avoid removal altogether if we can bring these resources to bear on the risk factors at the time the risk factors are identified, and keep the family together at least until there can be court involvement. Even in some of these child may have to be removed for a brief period of time, but possibly returned before the hearing.

Operation Home Team is not intended to be used in child protective services cases, but rather only in cases where the child is facing imminent risk but for these resources. In each of these cases, a complaint will be filed, the parent will agree to the provision of services as a condition of not removing the child from the home, and the court will still conduct a hearing within seventy-two hours of the removal. Operation Home Team is intended just to stabilize the family until the case can be managed by child protective services or until the child has to be removed and the case takes its normal course.

We believe that, through training of all the participants in the removal process, mobilization of community resources, and an appropriate level of judicial oversight, we can keep more families together while we work on the problems that threaten the dissolution of the family.

The only remaining parts of our reasonable efforts goals for 2002 relate to inventorying needs and resources, and disseminating resource materials. We did pull together a number of good resources materials that are available to be checkout. To some extent, we have completed the subjective inventory of needs and resources as part of the development of Operation Home Team. We have concluded that there will be no substantial benefit derived from doing a more detailed inventory at this time given the work that we are doing with Operation Home Team and given the accountability that we are going to build into the process as set out in the following paragraph.

In order to have an ongoing systematic review of needs and resources, DFCS has agreed to do an internal review of reasonable in every case by the appropriate supervisor. In addition to helping to ensure that the agency has made reasonable efforts, the review will make it more likely that the case manager will be prepared to present a case for such a determination by the court at the seventy-two hour hearing. Following are the issues that will be addressed in the internal review:

- What are the circumstances or conditions that caused the child to have to be removed? That is to say, what was the specific reason that the child could not be adequately protected at home and the specific harm that may have occurred if the child remained at home?
- What services were offered to avoid removal?
- What services were in fact provided to avoid removal?
- What services, if any, could have avoided the removal?
- To the extent that there were services that could have prevented the removal, why were

they not offered?

- To the extent that services were not available, has the agency made reasonable efforts to identify needed resources to avoid removal of children from their homes? (See following discussion about Tier 2 reasonable efforts)
- Has there been any prior referrals or agency involvement?
- If there have been prior referrals or agency involvement, were the attendant circumstances or conditions sufficient to put the agency on notice of underlying issues that would likely result in a later removal, but for the provision of appropriate services?
- If the answer to the previous question is in the affirmative, did the agency provide services at that time that were reasonably calculated to remedy the underlying issues that made a later removal likely?

Most of the foregoing issues are dealt with on the Safety Assessment. Basically the way the Safety Assessment is used is that certain risk factors are identified, though not perhaps in as much detail as should be documented. Then, as to each risk factor that is identified, the case manager is required to consider the resources available in the family and the community that might help to keep the child safe. The case manager is then required to, "Check each response taken to protect the child. Describe all safety interventions taken or immediately planned and explain how each intervention protects (or protected) each child...". A real key part to the form follows. Where the child is, in fact, removed, the case manager is required to explain why the interventions set out on the form could not be used to keep the children safe. That, in a nutshell, is tier one reasonable efforts. The part that we are going to add to the process relates to services that are not available that could have avoided removal had they been available.

We believe that with the internal review and the court review of reasonable efforts when the agency cannot avoid removal, we will have an effective system for inventorying needs and resources on an ongoing basis.

Although we have not met our time frames on our reasonable efforts goals, and we did not do exactly what we had intended when we set the goals, we believe that we have substantially completed our goals, and we are excited about taking the next step in this area. Our goals for 2003 are set out later in this report.

FORMS AND PROCESS.

We started out with three specific goals in this area. However, after doing the work on reasonable efforts, we decided that there are already adequate checklists to guide agencies in the delivery of services to avoid removal and to reunify the family at, or prior to, the seventy-two hour hearing. We have therefore deleted that goal as written. The part of the goal about developing procedures to deliver those services will be developed as part of Operation Home Team.

Minimal progress has been made on the goal of implementing the model forms recommended by CJCJ. A primary reason is that the SAAG in Troup County has always done a great job of preparing orders, and the judge is having difficulty of letting go of that. However, recognizing the need to generate the orders from the bench in many situations, we have started issuing the orders from the seventy-two hour hearing from the bench immediately following the hearing.

We have as our goal for 2003 to continue to implement the use of the model forms and to enter the orders from the bench or, in any event, to enter the orders within five business days following the hearing.

We have made substantial progress on the second goal under Forms and Process. We revised the new Findings and Recommendations Form slightly to bring more focus to the education, placement and reunification portions of the form. We trained out panel members and some case managers and supervisors, and then we did a mock panel review. Based on what we saw at the mock review, we revised the form some more. When we implemented the use of the form in June, we discovered that the form tended to drive the process too much, so we let the panels conduct their reviews in the order and the manner they usually conduct them, but made certain that all of the issues addressed in the form were, in fact, addressed in the review. What we changed was more than just a form. We changed the process and began to demand more information out of the case manager. We believe that the panel review process has improved dramatically as the result of this initiative.

One area where we have made the most improvement is in reviewing each and every step of each and every goal, and making findings relative to each step. We also create historical findings as to each step so that we can see, in a single glance, the finding of the panel in prior reviews. The same is true for other significant parts of the form.

Although we are pleased with the progress we are making in improving the quality of the reviews, we are continuing to refine the process. We are still not where we want to be in terms of capturing all of the important data on the form, we are making progress. There is a lot of information on the form and it is sometimes to reconcile the competing interest of the panel members, who want a fairly free flowing exchange of information, and the person capturing the data on the form, who would like a little more order and structure in the process. We will continue to revise the form in the coming year as we try to make it more user friendly, but still capable of capturing all of the necessary data. We are using the form in concert with the CPRS

MEASUREMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

We did not make any progress really in this area. The Model Court Project has not finalized the core outcome measurements, and we have not identified outcome measurements for our local court. We will build those into our Operation Home Team initiative in the coming year.

GOALS FOR 2003.

Some of our goals have already been discussed in the report on our 2002 activities. Following is a complete list of our 2003 Goals:

Front-End Reasonable Efforts

Ensure that reasonable efforts are made on the front end to prevent removal from the home and/or to expedite the child's return to the home.

1. Develop a Workable Model for "Operation Home Team". Develop a workable model for Operation Home Team by forming a study committee to look at what other communities do on the front end, develop a conceptional model, do a feasibility study, and refine the model to be workable in our community. The initial focus will be on the foster nanny program, temporary family housing resources, and mental health/substance abuse emergency interventions.
2. Improve Training. Train all of the applicable agencies on removal standards and related issues.
3. Implement the Internal Review Process for Reasonable Efforts within DFCS. Implement an internal review process in every case of removal of children from their homes, to ensure that reasonable efforts are being made to avoid removal in each individual case, and to make sure on an ongoing basis that appropriate resources are being developed to match the needs of the families so as to avoid removal.

Reasonable Efforts to Achieve Permanency Through Adoptions.

1. Implement the Best Practices developed by the Georgia Model Courts Project as set out in BEST PRACTICES IN TERMINATION AND ADOPTION CASES: A Report from the Best Practices in Adoptions Workshop, A Project of the Georgia Model Courts Project.
2. Gather baseline data and develop a system to measure outcomes of the project.

Forms and Process

1. Continue to implement the model forms recommended by the Georgia Council of Juvenile Court Judges ("CJ CJ"). Implement and refine the model forms over the next six months, continuing to have orders filed not later than two weeks following the date of the hearing. Develop the technological capacity within nine months to generate the model orders at the hearing, and any revisions or addendums to the order within five working days.
2. Continue to implement the revised Citizens Panel Review Findings and Recommendations Form, and staff and train an additional panel to allow for more time to be spent reviewing each case.

Measurement and Accountability

1. Comply with the core outcome measurement requirements of the Georgia Model Courts Project.
2. Identify and track outcome measurements that are indicative of the level of success of the Troup County goals. Specifically, but not by way of limitation, track compliance with the internal review process for front-end reasonable efforts and use of model orders, and build a measurement and accountability piece into Operation Home Team.

OVERALL PROGRAM.

Although we did not accomplish everything that we had hoped during 2002, we are pleased with the work that we did, particularly given the difficult year DFCS has had as the result of the massive turnover. We believe that we have good supervisors in place at DFCS, a core of good veteran case managers, and a lot of young case managers with loads of potential. We believe that we have some momentum as we move into 2003, and we look forward to the challenges ahead.

JUVENILE COURT OF THE SOUTHWESTERN JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

Counties served: Lee, Macon, Schley, Stewart, Sumter, and Webster

Model Court Lead Judge: Honorable Lisa Jones

Model Court Goals for 2002:

1. Hire a full-time circuit-wide clerk. **(Completed)**
2. Create a circuit-wide juvenile court office building to be centrally located to the judge, the clerk, deputy clerk, and CASA coordinator with a hearing room, attorney/client meeting rooms, waiting rooms, etc... **(Completed)**
3. Implement a CASA program. **(Completed)**
4. Increase usage of mediation program for delinquency cases. **(Completed)**
5. Begin using mediation for deprivation cases. **(Completed)**

Model Court Goals for 2003:

1. Development of mediation program-We have received a grant from the Georgia Office of Dispute Resolution that has enabled the court to develop a mediation program for deprivation cases. We have also increased the number of delinquency cases referred to mediation.

2. Truancy Intervention Project-We are in the process of coordinating with school officials in all six counties to develop the first truancy project ever attempted in the circuit.
3. Development of Public Defender's Office-Due to a grant received from the Children and Youth Coordinating Council, we have created a circuit-wide public defender's office, which serves the youth of all six counties of the circuit.

HOUSTON COUNTY JUVENILE COURT

County served: Houston

Model Court Lead Judge: Honorable Deborah E. Edwards

Houston County joined the Model Courts program in 2002. Until we began looking at our court procedures carefully, we didn't realize how many areas needed improvement. At our first stakeholders meeting, Lori helped us narrow down the long list of goals and focus on five. These were the goals:

- 1) To decrease the length of time it takes to process appeals of Termination of Parental Rights cases (almost all of which are appealed in our county).
- 2) To better track the progress of children who are placed with relatives and improve the tracking of three-year reviews of those cases.
- 3) To publish a series of educational handouts that will explain the court process to children and parents.
- 4) To develop more placement options for children who are or should be in the care of both DFCS and DJJ, as well as a shelter for children who are not suitable for RYDC or foster care.
- 5) To make DFCS case plans available on line and compatible with panel review forms.

Progress on Goals:

- 1) Appeals processing: Several things have been done to address this problem. First, the judge is giving court reporters two weeks to get transcripts to the court, with extensions granted in cases of extreme necessity. Also, the clerk who handles the DFCS work is attaching a form to the inside cover of each DFCS file folder on which she lists each document as it is received and filed. This helps us keep the file straight and it is easier for the clerk to prepare the record to be sent to the Court of Appeals.
- 2) Relative placement reviews: The clerk is keeping a list of children placed with relatives and a calendar indicating when each case needs to be reviewed or extended. We are also putting that date on each order, so that the relative has the information as well. We have asked different people to actually do the report, including a CASA volunteer and a private attorney. Both approaches worked well.

- 3) Educational handouts: This was the easy one. We used the samples Lori gave us and modified them where necessary.
- 4) Development of alternate placements: This is an ongoing goal and probably will be for some time. The judge has spoken to the County Commissioners (aka: penny-pinchers) and to our local legislators about the need. State Representatives Larry O'Neal and Robert Ray have agreed to go with the judge and other court personnel to counties which have shelters to begin getting ideas for Houston County.
- 5) Case plans online: This has been done, but a meeting is scheduled with DFCS and court personnel to set up a protocol for accessing and approving them prior to court when possible. Our panel review coordinator has decided that having something compatible with panel review forms is not feasible, so we have abandoned that part of the goal.

While we have not accomplished everything we set out to do, we have made substantial progress. Perhaps the most important thing to come out of this effort is a heightened awareness by all of us that we DON'T have to keep doing things the old way, and we can make changes that benefit the kids, the parents, the programs and the court.

Model Court Goals for 2003:

1. Prepare court orders in court and deliver to all parties before they leave.
2. Utilize the family tree document.
3. Get up to speed with the Internet case plans (CPRS).
4. Set up a visitation center for parents to visit their children after hours and on Saturday when necessary.
5. Decrease or eliminate continuances in deprivation cases so that parents can begin working on case plans as soon as possible where appropriate.

JUVENILE COURT OF THE DUBLIN JUDICIAL CIRCUIT

Counties served: Johnson, Laurens, Treutlen and Twiggs

Model Court Lead Judge: Honorable William L. Tribble, Sr.

Mission Statement

Our mission is to ensure the protection of every child in our judicial circuit; to provide temporary, safe, nurturing foster homes for those children in care, and to work quickly and diligently to assure each of those children a safe and permanent home.

Our Goals

1. To improve the court's case flow management
2. To improve the amount of contact between parties and their appointed attorneys, GAL's, etc.
3. To provide a waiting area in the court for children to stay while waiting on their case to be called
4. To publish a series of educational handouts that will explain the court process to children and parents.

5. To provide an emergency shelter to house children placed in DFACS and DJJ custody while waiting on suitable placement.
6. To establish a supervised visitation center for low risk families and their children.
7. To provide a copy of completed, signed court orders to all parties before they leave the courtroom.

Our Accomplishments (In sequence with the goal number)

1. The circuit's case flow has greatly improved, due in large part to having a full-time Juvenile Court Judge. Judge Tribble has held SAAGS, GAL's and Attorneys to a higher standard over the past 12 months which has decreased the numbers and frequency of continuances. We have held court later in the day and evening in order to proceed with cases rather than hold them over to another day. This goal, however, is an ongoing one.
2. If taken as written this goal has been accomplished. Contact has increased between attorney and client in that our Public Defender does make an effort to meet and talk to the client, but the failing comes on the part of the client maintaining contact with the Public Defender. This was addressed in our last Stakeholders Meeting and the suggestion was made to have as part of the court ordered case plan that the client be required to make contact on a frequency set by the court.
3. A space for a waiting area has not been achieved at this point. This was also an issue discussed at our Stakeholders Meeting. The suggestion was made to look into the availability of a recently vacated city school building and the feasibility of renovating it into a Juvenile Court Center.
4. Educational handouts have been published and are on display in the hallway outside the Courtroom.
5. We are still waiting on construction to begin on The Area Residency for Kids (ARK). They have recently been awarded a \$300,000 grant from the Women's Ministry Department of the Presbyterian Church, and have applied for a block grant through the City of Dublin for \$500,000. We all anxiously await construction. Community Mental Health has established The Crisis Home for Boys, which has had temporary facilities for the past year, but is soon to move to a permanent facility in June.
6. CASA has established a visitation center; it is The Playhouse and is located at Stepping Stone Child Advocacy Center in Dublin. The Playhouse has been received well by DFCS, parents and children. We have seen marked improvement in the attitudes of parents when they get to visit with their children regularly and at a time that is adjustable to their work and transportation schedules.
7. Although the hardware and technology is in place we have not achieved the logistical barriers to this goal.

Where We Are Headed

A Stakeholders Meeting was held in the early part of May. Our attendance was very good and the attitude of all in attendance was proactive. We extended our invitation to include representatives from Dublin City Schools in an effort to help them control the truancy problem in our schools. We plan to include the Laurens County Schools in our next meeting in August.

Looking back on the last year we have made progress and are looking toward continuing and expanding the Model Court Project in our circuit.

CONCLUSION

Remember if you are interested in receiving additional information on anything you read in this report, please contact Lori Bramlett, MCP Coordinator, or the appropriate lead judge. Contact information can be located in the *Project Participants/Contact Information* section of this report. Our model court sites and lead judges are always willing to “share” with you the secrets of their success or warn you about pitfalls you may encounter. Judges have even been known to “steal” an idea or two from a fellow court, so let us know about the innovative things you are doing in your court system. We are looking forward to hearing from you.

A PERSONAL NOTE FROM LORI

Being a model court site is not an easy task. It is a lot of hard work and is not something that is accomplished in a day, a week, a year or ever. Judge Key likes to stress a statement made by Judge Robin Nash, “It is a journey, not a destination.” Each of the lead judges, as well as members of the advisory committee and all the stakeholders working in our juvenile courts across the State of Georgia have taken the opportunity to improve policy, procedures and management and ran with it. This in turn makes our juvenile courts a better work environment for those working in the court and more user-friendly for the families that it serves. But, keep in mind that a model court will forever be a work in progress.

I am grateful for the opportunity that I have been given to be part of such a worthwhile project. I would like to thank the AOC for being instrumental in allowing this project to continue. A strong partnership between the AOC, the CPP and the CJCJ has been crucial to the success of the Model Courts Project. I look forward to continuing that partnership.

Of course, my biggest thanks must go to Judge R. Michael Key, Chair of the MCP Advisory Committee. Thanks Judge Key for all of the time and support you have given to the Model Courts Project. Without his dedication to the children of Georgia, this project would have never gotten off the ground. He is the man behind the curtain at OZ using his knowledge and bravery, while wearing his heart on his sleeve to find Georgia’s children a safe, permanent home.

*Prepared by Lori Bramlett, Model Courts Project Coordinator.

*Contributions made by each model court site.