

CONTINUING UPWARD FROM THE SUMMIT

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

Join Our Listserv

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KENTUCKY STATE-WIDE SUMMIT ON CHILDREN

At the March of 2007 National Summit on Children, various speakers challenged participants from across our nation to conduct similar events in their states to focus on how to best serve children in need.

While still in New York, members of the Kentucky delegation discussed the possibility of having a similar state event in their Commonwealth. They recognized that much of the necessary issue identification, planning, and organization had been done, and that the national event could serve as a template for a statewide and subsequent regional meetings in Kentucky. Discussions with child protection workers, foster parents, legislators, judges, prosecutors, and others involved in the child welfare system revealed a high level of enthusiasm for the idea of a summit.

The Kentucky statewide summit was held on August 27, 28 and 29 in Louisville. In attendance were 600 professionals who were focused on how Kentucky courts could improve their services to children. A stellar group of national and local speakers focused on problems inherent in the system and possible solutions. Among the leading topics discussed were overcoming barriers to justice for children, best practices to promote safety, permanency and well-being for children, and understanding the parameters and promoting accountability of courts. Other topics included at-risk juveniles and the juvenile justice system, combating truancy, and developing regional action plans.

At the conclusion of each program segment, participants completed surveys developed by the University of Kentucky School of Social Work. Survey results were compiled into a preliminary report on the summit. Among the findings were that miscommunication and lack of communication among professionals contributed to system breakdown and that various participants in the

juvenile justice system misunderstood their appropriate roles and failed to act in fulfillment of responsibilities. Systemic problems such as lack of resources, inadequate diversion programs, and failure of competent legal representation were identified.

A number of specific recommendations arose from the summit. There was widespread agreement that

truancy courts or programs and family and juvenile drug courts should be expanded. Representation of children and families by guardians ad litem and greater accountability of social workers were seen as needed changes. As a result of the Kentucky summit, legislation is now pending to expand the availability of guardians ad litem and improve tracking and reporting on complaints about child protection programs and services. Other legislation has been introduced to create a pilot project concerning limited opening of juvenile proceedings in court. Another proposed legislative change would clarify parameters for detention of status offenders. Finally, it was

recommended that administrative procedures regarding dependency, neglect and abuse cases be improved.

At the conclusion of the statewide summit, nine regional one-day summit events were also conducted. The regional events mirrored, in an abbreviated fashion, the statewide meeting. Attending the regional summits were 1300 persons. In all, nearly 2000 Kentucky participants and decision-makers attended the children's summit. The 2007 Kentucky Summits on Children was a rare, mountaintop experience that got the creative energies flowing. As powerful as it was, the Summit was just a start, an important beginning for things to come.

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MILESTONE TRACKING: MISSOURI'S COURT REFORMS TO IMPROVE TIMELINESS OF CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT HEARINGS

In 2002 the death of a child while in foster care created the impetus for a Senate Interim Committee on Children's Protective Services and Foster Care, a Supreme Court Commission on Children's Justice, a Child Welfare Reform Bill, and ultimately Court Operating Rule 23.01. This Rule holds Missouri's courts accountable for timely child abuse and neglect hearings.



Following the 2002 child fatality, the Senate Interim Committee found there were delays in the first court hearing when children are removed from their homes, there was no parental contact for days or weeks, and people were distrustful of the juvenile courts. The Commission recommended several reforms to enhance the processing of abuse and neglect cases, including:

- Mandatory 3-day removal hearings
- Specific requirements for content of hearings
- Requirements for notification of parents prior to hearings
- Time standards for scheduling all hearings
- Strong no-continuance policies and documentation of reasons for continuances
- A pilot project for open hearings
- Standardized procedures and forms to be developed by the Supreme Court.

In the spring 2004, Missouri passed the Child Welfare Reform Bill, which provided (a) mandatory protective custody hearings within three business days of the child entering care; (b) time standards for all child abuse/neglect hearings; (c) documented compelling reasons for a continuance of a hearing and; (d) open hearings for public accountability.

Reporting Requirements

Missouri's 114 counties and the City of St. Louis are organized into 45 judicial circuits. Court Operating Rule 23.01 requires the presiding judge of each circuit to submit a quarterly report to the Office of the State Court Administrator (OSCA). This Juvenile Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN) Quarterly Report provides detailed information on the required hearing date, the date the hearing was held (late), or the date the hearing is scheduled to be heard (overdue). The report also includes the reasons for delay and a plan for compliance in the following quarter.

OSCA compiles this information by circuit and prepares a report for the Supreme Court and Commission on Retirement, Removal and Discipline. This management report is an overview of all hearings due for a specific date range. Information from previous reports is included to demonstrate Missouri's progress toward achieving timely child abuse/neglect hearings. Summary data, by circuit, is published annually in the *Missouri Judicial Report Supplement* and is available to the public via the Supreme Court's web page.



Justice Information System/Milestone Tracking

Missouri's Justice Information System (JIS) utilizes case management software which is person specific. A child receives a unique person number composed of a partial name, birth date and the last four digits of the child's social security number. This ID may be used to look up all cases for a child in the JIS system. Siblings are linked, but the data and tracking remains separate for each child. All juvenile divisions enter data into this statewide database. However, Missouri's automated system did not have adequate tracking capabilities to allow for the type of reporting required by COR 23. As such, the state developed and piloted the Juvenile Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN) Milestone tracking system in 2004.

Milestones is a tool within the automated information system which assists the courts in tracking and reporting on timeliness of child abuse/neglect hearings. The tracking module interfaces with the JIS case management system and enables courts to meet the reporting requirements that would be very difficult and time consuming using manual methods. The standard milestone schedule is entered into a table in JIS. A case is initiated in JIS and the standard milestones for that case type attach automatically to the case. The docket code for a child taken into protective custody turns on the milestone tracking and sets due dates as specified in the schedule of dates for that case type.

When docket entries are made, the clerks can add notes to indicate the actions taken. The Custom Milestone Maintenance screen displays the current milestone schedule for a case based on the date the child was taken into custody, subsequent

events, and any changes that have been made in the schedule. Dates adjust automatically based on the date the previous hearing was held.

To meet the requirement for a documented explanation when a hearing can not be held, the system allows the user to enter predetermined reason codes when rescheduling a hearing outside of the permissible time frame. Reasons for delay include: unavailable court date, unavailable judicial officer, GAL, attorney, lay witness, professional witness, medical evidence etc.



The Juvenile CAN Milestone tracking system is helping Missouri better serve the children that come into state care. The court system is better able to manage its caseload and ensure that all mandated timeframes are met. In addition, all information necessary for the courts to complete and submit the CAN Quarterly report is accessed from the milestone track.

The CAN milestone tracking and reporting has resulted in accountability at the circuit and judicial officer level. This type of accountability is producing improved outcomes. For

state fiscal year 2006 (July 2005 through June 2006) 92 percent of all hearings were held within the required timeframes. This compares to 95 percent for state fiscal 2007 (July 2006 through June 2007). Eight circuits met 100 percent of all required timeframes in FY 2007. This compares to three circuits in FY 2006. Finally, 31 circuits held at least 95 percent of the hearings that were due within required timeframes in FY 2007, compared to 15 circuits in FY 2006.

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To better respond to the increased queries about state commissions for child protection, the NCSC would like to hear what other commissions are doing. Please share with your colleagues, through NCSC, what issues your commission is addressing/has addressed, what publications have been produced and whether they are available electronically (please include the URL); and what advice and valuable lessons you have for new commissions. Please send the information to Mary Beth Kirven at mkirven@ncsc.dni.us We welcome you to write an article about your state's commission for inclusion in our newsletter. Thank you in advance for your help.



PARTNERS PLANNING FOR PERMANENCY INDIANA SUMMIT ON CHILDREN

On December 14, 2007, teams of child welfare stakeholders gathered at the Indianapolis Convention Center for the Indiana Summit on Children. More than 300 court officials, judges, legislators, mental health professionals, foster parents, educators, service providers, and state caseworkers serving abused and neglected children attended the Summit which was titled "Partners Planning for Permanency." Michigan Supreme Court Justice Maura Corrigan, a noted national expert on child protection, foster care, and adoption, delivered the keynote speech.

The Indiana Summit on Children was sponsored by the Indiana Supreme Court's Court Improvement Program. The Summit brought together judges with jurisdiction over child abuse and neglect cases and their staff, officials and staff from the Indiana Department of Child Services and other community stakeholders to collaborate and explore ways to improve outcomes for children and families in the child welfare system.

In addition to Justice Corrigan, speakers at the event included Chief Justice Randall Shepard,

Indiana Department of Child Services Director James Payne, and Bill Stanczykiewicz, president and CEO of the Indiana Youth Institute. Of particular interest to those in attendance was a panel of youth who had been in foster care. They shared with the participants some of their first hand observations, experiences and suggestions for improvement to the Indiana foster care system.

The Summit provided an opportunity for child welfare stakeholders from across the state and from various disciplines to network and share ideas. During a working lunch, participants were asked to leave their teams and join attendees from other parts of the state to discuss specific topics. Later in the day, county teams were provided with time and the chance to begin to talk about and begin to plan for ways to improve the child welfare process in their own counties.

Those who attended the Summit had a very positive response and asked that there be future Summits scheduled.

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EXPERT ASSISTANCE SERVICES

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

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

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

http://www.ncsonline.org/d_consult/ChildProtection/form1.asp

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

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