

**Texas Court Improvement Program (CIP)
FY2008 Assessment of the Basic,
Data Collection and Analysis,
and Training Grants**

December 30, 2008



**The Supreme Court of Texas
Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families
Court Improvement Program
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INTRODUCTION

Texas has made significant changes to its federal Court Improvement Program in the past 18 months. First, the legislature incorporated the funds into the state budget for the first time, setting new fiscal standards. And, the Supreme Court of Texas (Court) brought the administration of the CIP grants in-house for the first time since the grant program’s inception.

To oversee the administration of the CIP grants, the Court hired a director in May 2007, and in November 2007 established the Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families (Commission) by a court order. The Court subsequently hired an assistant director, grant administrator, executive assistant, and financial analyst who report to the executive director. While the Commission replaced two task forces that had been managing the CIP grants, many former members serve on the Commission, one of its committees, or on its official advisory group, the Collaborative Council.

The Commission’s inclusive, collaborative structure and broad, high-level membership has injected new energy into, and enhanced the visibility of, the state's court improvement efforts. In a manner consistent with federal guidelines, the Commission manages CIP funds and implements CIP goals through staff-directed projects, contracts for service, and grant awards. The Commission seeks to leverage all available resources to improve Texas courts that handle child abuse and neglect cases.

GRANT MANAGEMENT

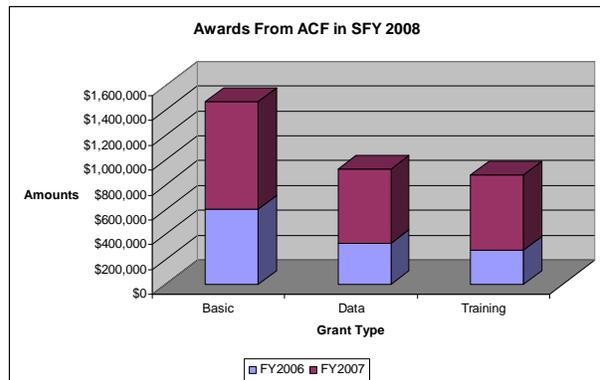
The Commission administers CIP funds with support from the Court, which provides infrastructure such as office space and utilities and services such as personnel administration, information technology, purchasing, budgeting, general accounting, janitorial and security.

During the grant period, the Court received \$2,060,159 in October 2007 and \$1,210,832 of unspent FY2006 funds from the prior grant administrator (see Table 1 and Chart 1 below) in March 2008. All FY2008 payments were made from unspent FY2006 funds first, then from FY2007 funds.

Table 1

| FY2008 Grant Awards | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| | (unspent balance) FY2006 | FY2007 |
| Basic | \$605,340 | \$861,716 |
| Data | \$329,349 | \$598,920 |
| Training | \$276,143 | \$599,523 |
| Total | \$1,210,832 | \$2,060,159 |

Chart 1



The Commission granted 13 CIP awards totaling \$1.4 million in FY2008 after receiving a total of 18 grant applications requesting about \$2 million. A list of funded projects with a brief description is shown below in Table 2.

Table 2

| FY2008 Grant Funded Projects | | | |
|---|--|--------------------|--------------|
| Project Name | Brief Description | Award | Grant |
| Brazos Valley National Adoption Day | National Adoption Day Activities. | \$1,200 | Basic |
| Travis County Drug Court Attorney Training | Training for attorneys serving drug courts. | \$3,896 | Basic |
| Travis County Peer-to-Peer Drug Court Training. | Training for drug court staff members. | \$4,527 | Basic |
| Texas Partnership for Family Recovery | State level coordination for courts, CPS and substance abuse treatment agency. | \$19,697 | Basic |
| Child Protection Court Program Support | Training and communication for traveling CPS judges. | \$26,700 | Basic |
| ChildSafe and the Family Drug Court | Assessment and coordination of child trauma services for drug court. | \$55,927 | Basic |
| Texas Foster Youth Justice Project | Foster youth hotline and legal representation. | \$80,000 | Basic |
| Tarrant County Challenge Family Drug Court | Case management services for drug courts that includes a research component. | \$100,000 | Basic |
| Texas Lawyers for Children Website | Web-based legal resource for attorneys. | \$156,000 | Basic |
| Texas CASA – Expansion and Development | Statewide training and expansion. | \$178,680 | Basic |
| Texas Data Enabled Courts for Kids (TexDECK) | Data management, software, and court services development and coordination. | \$256,010 | Data |
| Texas Center for the Judiciary | Judicial training, and national conference sponsorship | \$573,380 | Training |
| Total | | \$1,456,017 | |

Of the \$1.4 million awarded, 43% was issued to 10 subgrantees under the basic grant, 18% was issued to one subgrantee under the data grant, and 39% was issued to one subgrantee for two different programs under the training grant (see Table 3 and Chart 3).

Chart 3

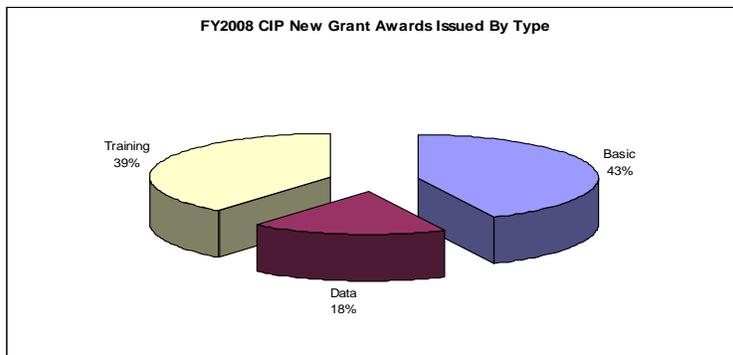


Table 3

| Number of FY2008 Grant Awards by Type | |
|--|----|
| Basic | 10 |
| Data | 1 |
| Training | 2 |

New Grant Application and Review Process

All FY2008 grant recipients applied for grants based on new forms and processes Commission staff developed in a manner consistent with OMB Circular A-86 (Texas Uniform Grant Management Standards). The standardized application process provided consistency in conducting program and fiscal monitoring, as well as clearly conveyed to subgrantees the level of accountability and responsibility associated with obtaining CIP funds prior to submitting an application. Eligible applicants included state agencies, local governments (including courts), nonprofit organizations, and educational institutions.

The grant application and instructions were posted on the Commission's website at www.supreme.courts.state.tx.us/children.asp. All CIP applicants were required to provide a judicial sponsor for their application. Commission staff also established new procedures that required recipient governing boards to guarantee the proper use of funds.

A two-step process was employed to help ensure consistency both with the strategic plan submitted September 2007 as part of the federal CIP grant application, and with the Commission's new strategic plan adopted October 2008. If an applicant's program met one or more of the three CIP strategies, the applicant was advised to proceed with a full application. In addition, the grant administrator often met in person or on the phone with applicants or others involved with the project to clarify the application and guide the project.

The review process began with an initial review by the grant administrator, who would then make a formal recommendation to one of three standing Commission committees – Basic Projects, Technology, or Training (see Appendix B). The committees reviewed each recommendation (and if requested, the application as well) and the Commission approved or denied committee recommendations at its quarterly meetings.

Site Visits and Program Monitoring

The grant administrator conducted numerous site visits and one program monitoring visit (see Table 4).

Table 4

| Site Visit Summary | | |
|---------------------------|---|---|
| Date | Location | Purpose |
| 10/08/07 | Bexar County Drug Court | Met about ChildSafe program. |
| 10/10/07 | Tarrant County Court | Met about functional requirements study. |
| 10/11/07 | Smith County Drug Court | Met about drug court application. |
| 10/16/07 | CPS Judges Conference | Observed registration and opening of conference. |
| 10/24/07 | Texas Center for the Judiciary | Discussed grant application. |
| 10/25/07 | Taylor CPS Court | Observed court proceedings. |
| 10/25/07 | Nolan County | Discussed local proceedings with judge. |
| 10/25/07 | Lubbock County | Discussed potential program and local procedures with judge and court administration. |
| 12/3-4/07 | Harris County Family Courts | Meet about functional requirements study. |
| 12/05/07 | Bexar County Child Protection Drug Courts | Observed pre-conservatorship and conservatorship drug courts. |
| 01/24/08 | Transition Center Meeting | Met with regional transition center partners and |

| | | |
|----------|-------------------------------|--|
| | | funding agencies. |
| 03/13/08 | Harris County Juvenile Courts | Observed court proceedings. |
| 04/02/08 | Webb County Courts | Discussed public defender office for children. |
| 04/17/08 | Travis County Courts | Discussed public defender office for children and parents. |
| 06/11/08 | El Paso Dug Court | Observed FBSS and conservatorship drug courts. |
| 08/19/08 | Dallas County Juvenile Courts | Observed courts proceeding and met with CASA. |

The grant administrator completed one program monitoring visit in FY2008 at a training event on July 8, 2008, and issued his draft report on October 7, 2008. The report concluded that the CIP-funded event was appropriately operated and included suggestions to improve local processes. More program and financial monitoring will take place in FY2009.

IMPACT SUMMARY

The Commission’s strategy is to support projects that:

- Are data-informed, evidence-based, and can be replicated.
- Inform judges and policy makers about CIP-funded activities that have resulted in positive outcomes for children and families.

To help meet this strategy, subgrantees were required to develop and include in their grant application a set of evaluation measures that would best track project accomplishments. Data collected from subgrantees thus far indicates that CIP funds have impacted a large number of people through direct services or program involvement (see Table 5).

Table 5

| FY2008 Summary of Numbers Served | |
|--|-------------|
| Total number of people served by or involved with grant funded activities | 2646 |
| Number of children served | 119 |
| Number of families served | 246 |
| Number of judges served | 622 |
| Number of attorneys served | 1144 |
| Number of guardian <i>ad litem</i> s (CASA) served | 564 |
| Number of collaborative agencies participating with subgrantees | 151 |
| Number of county or court personnel served | 120 |
| Number of training events held | 18 |
| Number that attended training events | 709 |
| Number of hours provided that met statutory obligations for judges, attorneys, or GALs* | 135.5 |
| Number of hours provided that met licensure standards or policies for judges, attorneys, or GALs | 55 |
| *GAL – Guardian ad litem in this context is CASA volunteers | |

In addition to overseeing grant-related administrative and fiscal duties, Commission staff spent substantial time and effort on many other court improvement efforts and projects, such as:

- Developed and adopted the **Commission’s strategic plan.**
- Developed **administrative and fiscal policies and procedures.**

- Developed and maintained a **website** devoted to the Commission and its strategies, projects, and grant and contracting opportunities.
- Developed and periodically published a **Commission newsletter** called "*Better Courts for Kids.*" (See Appendix B)
- Developed a **jurist in residence** position to support Commission projects.
- Supported **Model Court** status for certain Texas courts and participated with the local Model Court Collaboration Council. Staff consulted with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) and Texas applicants about the Model Court application process, reviewed applications from several Texas courts, and provided letters of support. Travis County was selected.
- Began creating an **informational video** to highlight the Commission's existence, promote ways to strengthen courts that hear child abuse and neglect cases, and encourage support for the mission to improve outcomes of safety, permanency and well being for foster youth.
- Procured a contract for statewide **attorney training**.
- Researched and published a report on the federal **Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) Act** as part of the annual CIP application process.

ONGOING, MEANINGFUL COLLABORATION

The Commission's creation and activities have increased the visibility of child protection issues at state and local levels and its collaborative structure has encouraged greater stakeholder participation in court improvement initiatives. The Commission has also begun creating a new culture of collaboration in Texas between the judiciary and DFPS through routine and scheduled interaction and joint projects. During FY2008, Commission staff was active in many collaborative projects, including:

- Sponsored and participated in regular and meaningful **collaborative meetings** with child welfare stakeholders, including the executive management of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). Commission staff organized and held 26 collaborative meetings from October 1, 2007 to September 30, 2008. Collaborative partners in attendance included the Child Protective Services (CPS) assistant commissioner and other high-level CPS staff, the Texas Office of Court Administration (OCA) director and staff, Supreme Court staff, and representatives from Texas CASA and the Texas Center for the Judiciary. Occasionally, other invitees, such as judges and legislative staff, attended the meetings depending on the issues addressed. Collaborative meetings were scheduled weekly and often served as a springboard for ideas that became staff directed projects. During the calls, each partner provided a brief synopsis of their organization's efforts and concerns, and described how they thought other collaborative partners might assist or be affected. The meetings served to inform partners of the many ongoing initiatives in Texas to improve the child protection system.
- Formed a subcommittee to **study the long-term effects** – on youth and society – **of youth growing up in foster care** (under the state's permanent managing conservatorship (PMC)). The Commission is partnering with a nonprofit in this ongoing study to examine how long-term life outcomes for children who are growing up in long-term foster care may be improved by identifying their common problems and needs, services available to them, and barriers to successful outcomes. The study is also examining best practices within the legal system and how using those best practices may improve outcomes.

- Formed a subcommittee to examine the needs of **dually managed youth**. This ongoing project examines whether the needs of youth who are dually managed by CPS and the Texas Youth Commission (the state's juvenile justice system) are being met, and ways to improve communication and collaboration between the two agencies.
- Participated in the federal **Child and Family Services Review (CFSR)**. The Commission's executive director conducted on-site reviews in March 2008, as well as the chair of the Basic Projects Committee, District Judge Robin Sage. Commission staff continues to partner with DFPS staff to develop and implement Texas' Program Improvement Plan (PIP). Commission staff is involved in a PIP workgroup focusing on children in permanent or long-term foster care. The Commission staff is also working closely with OCA specialists to provide judges with case management options and tools to help the judiciary do its part to achieve compliance with those CFSR components that intersect closely with the judiciary.
- Served as lead partner in the **Texas Partnership for Family Recovery**, an ongoing collaboration of the Commission, DFPS, the Department of State Health Services (DSHS), OCA, and Texas CASA. Casey Family Programs recently joined the partnership. The group seeks to improve outcomes in CPS cases where substance abuse is involved by encouraging better coordination among three key groups involved in such cases – the judiciary, CPS, and substance abuse treatment and education organizations. Several Texas communities have started family drug treatment courts to coordinate services.
- Served on the **DFPS Statewide Task Force on Disproportionality**. Staff attended Undoing Racism Training and will serve on the Statewide Task Force on Disproportionality created to examine disproportionality in the Texas child protection system.
- Collaborated with OCA staff to develop a comprehensive set of **functional requirements** and case management tools for courts responsible for child abuse and neglect cases.

BASIC GRANT PROJECTS

The strategic plan included in Texas' 2008 Basic CIP grant application included broad, statewide efforts to improve safety, permanency, and well-being for children in the child welfare system. The Commission's newly adopted strategic plan encompasses these efforts and goes beyond them to further its mission of developing and implementing policy initiatives to strengthen courts for children, youth and families, thereby improving the safety, permanency, and well-being of the children involved. The Commission chooses strategies and projects that will produce data-informed, evidence-based, outcome-driven results and accomplishments.

The Commission established the Basic Projects Committee (see Appendix B) to oversee the basic grant funds and to implement the Commission's strategic plan goals related to them. Members of the Basic Projects Committee include representatives of the judiciary, DFPS, Texas CASA and commission staff. With the Basic Grant funds, the Commission has worked to improve the state child welfare system through:

- Funding expenses associated with commission meetings, member travel, and meeting-related expenses.
- Supporting the activities of the executive director and other commission staff, including strategic and program development, implementing the CIP grant program, conducting site visits, representing Texas courts, attending judicial and child welfare conferences, and attending, and at times coordinating, stakeholder meetings.
- Disseminating information to the judiciary and stakeholders through the Commission's website, newsletter, meeting minutes, and personal contacts.
- Ensuring statewide collaboration on all CIP grants is conducted in a meaningful and ongoing manner.
- Advocating for projects that improve court performance and practices throughout the state.

Summaries of Basic grant projects follow.

| Project Name | Award Amount |
|--|---------------------|
| Brazos Valley National Adoption Day | \$1,200 |
| Subgrantee/Fiscal Agent | |
| Voices for Children, Inc., CASA of Brazos Valley | |
| Corresponding Item in 2007 Strategic Plan | |
| National Adoption Day ¹ | |
| Activities | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided a free training session to local attorneys about the adoption process. • Provided opportunity to recruit volunteer advocates. • Provided opportunity to increase community involvement by asking local families to sponsor adoptive families by paying adoption fees. • Created a celebratory community event to increase community awareness. | |
| Accomplishments | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seven children were adopted. | |

¹ Texas Court Improvement Program (CIP), 2007 Grant Applications & Strategic Plans, Basic Grant Application, August 1, 2007, Tab 5, pg. 10, item 4.5.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six attorneys completed training. • Media coverage increased community awareness. • A state senator and state legislator presented. |
| Collaboration |
| Voices for Children, Inc., CASA of Brazos Valley, Texas CPS, Aggieland Pregnancy Outreach, Inc., Homes4Good. |

| Project Name | Award Amount |
|--|---------------------|
| Travis County Drug Court Attorney Training | \$3,896 |
| Subgrantee/Fiscal Agent | |
| Austin Recovery Center is a multi-level care substance abuse treatment center that served as the fiscal agent for this activity. | |
| Corresponding Item in 2007 Strategic Plan | |
| Family Drug Treatment Court Initiatives ² | |
| Project Description and Activities | |
| Two attorneys that serve the newly established Family Treatment Drug Court in Travis County – Austin, Texas, attended the specialized National Drug Court Institute (NDCI) Drug Court Defense Counsel Training August 5-8, 2008. | |
| Accomplishments | |
| The attorneys attended classes specifically targeted at legal representation issues. They submitted a five point action plan consistent with the training to their drug court for procedural changes that would assist them in better representing their clients. The defense attorneys said they felt, "we have gained a clearer perspective not just of our role on the team, but also a better understanding of the procedures our drug court should consider following in the future." | |
| Collaboration | |
| Casey Family Foundation, Travis County Family Treatment Drug Court, local attorneys and child welfare stakeholders. | |

| Project Name | Award Amount |
|---|---------------------|
| Travis County Drug Court Peer-to-Peer Training | \$4,527 |
| Subgrantee/Fiscal Agent | |
| Austin Recovery Center is a multi-level care substance abuse treatment center that served as the fiscal agent for this activity. | |
| Corresponding Item in 2007 Strategic Plan | |
| Family Drug Treatment Court Initiatives ³ | |
| Project Description and Activities | |
| Fourteen representatives of different state and county agencies and civil courts from Travis County traveled to Omaha, Nebraska to observe the operations of an established family drug treatment court (FDTC) that serves children ages zero to five. Travis County visitors observed and participated in all aspects of that model court's activity, including team staffing sessions, hearings, and pre-hearing conferences. The objective was to learn how a model FDTC operates and to apply that learning at their newly formed Travis County FDTC. Participants learned about local community resources, such as an inpatient substance abuse treatment facility for women | |

² Ibid, Tab 5, pg. 10, item 4.8.

³ Ibid, Tab 5, pg. 10, item 4.8.

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| and children, and an assessment and counseling center focused on improving the attachment between parents and children utilizing an innovative approach called dyadic therapy. |
| Accomplishments |
| All of the Travis County participants agreed with the basic structure of the FDTC in Omaha and wanted to implement the same basic structure in Travis County. An emphasis on praise and applause, rather than sanctions, was also discussed as an appropriate way for the Travis County FDTC to emulate the one in Omaha. Travis County has implemented a FDTC and the participants commented during the site visit that they were better prepared for implementation. |
| Collaboration |
| Travis County Family Drug Treatment Court, Civil Courts of Travis County, CASA of Travis County, Texas CPS, District Attorney’s Office, Court Appointed Family Advocates (CAFA), Casey Family Programs, Austin Recovery, Supreme Court Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families, Travis County Health and Human Services, and Veterans Services (Children’s Services Division). |

| Project Name | Award Amount |
|---|---------------------|
| Texas Partnership for Family Recovery | \$19,697 |
| Subgrantee/Fiscal Agent | |
| Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) | |
| Corresponding Item in 2007 Strategic Plan | |
| Texas Partnership for Family Recovery ⁴ | |
| Project Description and Activities | |
| <p>The Texas Partnership for Family Recovery is an ongoing collaboration of the Commission, DFPS, the Department of State Health Services (DSHS), OCA, and Texas CASA. It was created to improve outcomes in CPS cases where substance abuse is involved by encouraging better coordination among the three key groups involved in such cases – the judiciary, CPS, and substance abuse treatment and education organizations. By integrating services, including establishing family drug courts, the partnership seeks to reduce the number of children who enter foster care, and to subsequently reunify families more quickly.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Held a joint meeting for DSHS-funded outreach, screening, assessment and referral (OSAR) agencies, and DFPS regional substance abuse specialists on Nov. 1-2, 2007. • Conducted a joint meeting with partnership members and family court judges on Feb. 20, 2008. • Held a meeting of DSHS and DFPS evaluation staff to identify data needs and initiate planning for data sharing to evaluate outcomes and impacts of family drug treatment courts in Texas. • Conducted site visits to four separate family drug treatment courts in Texas. • The Commission's assistant director attended a meeting in July, 2008, for DFPS substance abuse specialists. • Commission staff attended several other collaborative meetings. | |
| Accomplishments | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified internal procedures and common training components among agencies. • Developed interagency referral policies and procedures, and regional service integration plans. | |

⁴ Ibid, Tab 5, pg. 10, item 4.6

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identified needs and concerns facing those who want to start a family drug treatment court, such as judicial training needs, state agency roles, fiscal sustainability, and others. • Began efforts to share data between DSHS and DFPS to develop statewide outcome and impact measures for service planning and legislative initiatives. • Developed a toolkit for integrating services. • Developed a guide for integrating services. |
| Collaboration |
| Office of Court Administration, Supreme Court Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families, Texas CASA, Texas DFPS, Texas DSHS, Texas Center for the Judiciary, Casey Family Services, National Center for Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (NCSACW), National Association of Drug Court Professionals (NADP). |

| Project Name | Award Amount |
|---|---------------------|
| Child Protection Court Program Support | \$26,700 |
| Subgrantee/Fiscal Agent | |
| The Office of Court Administration (OCA) is the fiscal agent for this project, which funds some administrative costs of Texas Child Protection Courts (formerly known as Cluster Courts). | |
| Corresponding Item in 2007 Strategic Plan | |
| OCA – Child Protection Court Support ⁵ | |
| Activities | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided administrative support by paying cell phone expenses for Child Protection Court judges who travel significant distances to cover rural courts that often encompass multiple counties. Cell phones are often the only means for conducting business outside of court and for staying in contact with the courts. • Provided administrative support by paying for computer equipment for two new Child Protections courts. • Funded the purchase of two laptop computers to replace those damaged in a hurricane. • Funded various judicial training conferences, including an OCA-hosted conference for judges and their coordinators. These training sessions provided judges required CLE hours, including the minimum state-required number of family violence hours. | |
| Accomplishments | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributed to the operation of the courts that collectively held 23,687 hearings and issued 5,429 final orders in fiscal year 2008. • Contributed to the creation of two new child protection courts – the North Texas Child Protection Court, and the Child Protection Court of Rio Grande Valley East – to cover under-served rural counties. • Contributed to effective judicial services for child protection courts in rural Texas by providing essential communication tools. • Facilitated continued improvement of staff skills and judicial processes by providing training. | |
| Collaboration | |
| Staff of the Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families, 129 Texas counties, Child Protection Court Advisory Council. | |

⁵ Ibid, Tab 5, pg. 9, item 4.3.

| Project Name | Award Amount |
|--|---------------------|
| ChildSafe and the Family Drug Court: Partnership to Promote Healing | \$55,927 |
| Subgrantee/Fiscal Agent | |
| Alamo Children’s Advocacy Center, dba ChildSafe is a nonprofit children's advocacy center in Bexar County. | |
| Corresponding Item in 2007 Strategic Plan | |
| Family Drug Treatment Court Initiatives ⁶ | |
| Project Description and Activities | |
| <p>This ChildSafe project provides a continuum of services to families in the Bexar County Family Drug Court (FDC) and who are identified as having a sexual abuse issue. ChildSafe offers services to the child who has the outcry of sexual abuse, their siblings, and non-offending family members. Activities for the year included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessed 155 families. • Provided ancillary services to 41 family members, and primary children's advocacy center services to eight children. • Participated in weekly staffing with FDC staff and attending weekly court hearings for qualifying families involved in FDC. • Provided testimony to the court as needed regarding services provided by ChildSafe. • Participated in FDC events and commencement ceremonies. | |
| Accomplishments | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hired a replacement Drug Court Case Coordinator. • Exceeded goal of assessing 150 families through FDC. • No re-referrals were made to CPS for the families who participated in ChildSafe services. • Increased awareness of FDC team members on the topic of sexual abuse through participation in weekly staffing. • Provided counseling, mentoring, emergency assistance in the form of transportation to therapy, and referrals. • Successfully completed one training on child sexual abuse with the FDC parents. | |
| Collaboration | |
| Family Violence Prevention Services, Family Service Association, Alpha Home, The Patrician Movement, CPS, Bexar County Family Drug Court, Bexar County Assistant District Attorney, District Courts, and the University of Texas Health Science Center, San Antonio. | |

| Project Name | Award Amount |
|---|---------------------|
| Texas Foster Youth Justice Project | \$80,000 |
| Subgrantee/Fiscal Agent | |
| Texas RioGrande Legal Aid (TRLA) is one of three legal aid service corporations in Texas. It serves most of South Central and Far West Texas. | |
| Corresponding Item in 2007 Strategic Plan | |
| Legal Hotline for Foster Youth ⁷ | |
| Activities | |

⁶ Texas Court Improvement Program (CIP), 2007 Grant Applications & Strategic Plans, Basic Grant Application, August 1, 2007, Tab 5, pg. 10, item 4.8.

⁷ Ibid, Tab 5, pg. 11, item 5.3.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established a statewide telephone hotline for foster youth and alumni. • Conducted outreach to Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) centers and collaborative agencies. • Trained legal aid lawyers. • Developed legal resources related to youth rights. • Provided direct legal services and assistance to hotline callers and email contacts. |
| <p>Accomplishments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepared and printed brochures and posters for the project. • Added resources to the Texas Foster Youth Justice Project (TFYJP) website at, www.texasfosteryouth.org • Created a judicial checklist for youth aging out of foster care and mailed it to over 130 contacts. • Developed and printed a guide for youth aging out of foster care and added it to the website. • Developed a PowerPoint presentation for youth in foster care about their rights. • Conducted presentations about the rights of youth in four foster care four locations. • Met with agencies serving foster youth in six Texas cities. • Texas Youth Connection (a DFPS project for youth in foster care) added a link on their website to the TFYJP website. |
| <p>Collaboration</p> <p>Texas CASA, Advocacy Inc., Texas Appleseed, Center for Public Policy Priorities, Lifeworks, TRAC, HAY Center, Baptist Child and Family Services, Texas Foster Youth, Inc., Texas Legal Services Center, Texas Youth Commission Ombudsman, Austin ISD Project HELP, Texas Homeless Network, Texas Equal Access to Justice Foundation, Travis County Women's Bar Association.</p> |

| Project Name | Award Amount |
|--|---------------------|
| Tarrant County Family Drug Court (FDC) | \$100,000 |
| Subgrantee/Fiscal Agent | |
| Tarrant County Challenge is a nonprofit agency that works to reduce substance abuse in Tarrant County. It partners with Tarrant County courts to serve people involved with CPS cases who have substance abuse problems. | |
| Corresponding Item in 2007 Strategic Plan | |
| Family Drug Treatment Court Initiatives ⁸ | |
| Project Description and Activities | |
| <p>The FDC took its first client in December 2007, and CIP funds were awarded in March 2008.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hired a full-time intensive case manager. • Served 18 families that included 26 children, 18 mothers, and 10 fathers. • Mentored Dallas County in setting up their FDC. • Initiated case and program evaluation with The Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation in Tarrant County. | |
| Accomplishments | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exceeded the original estimate (10) of clients served. • Of the 18 families served, 14 are on track to complete their programs and be discharged. | |

⁸ Ibid, Tab 5, pg. 10, item 4.8.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One drug-free baby was born to a client and three more drug-free births were expected. • Several clients enrolled in GED programs and four enrolled in college. • Of the 18 families served, only three underwent a new CPS investigation during the grant year. • Increased favorable community response to project, with more community partners indicating a desire to work with drug court clients. • Created a database to track client information, which will be a significant evaluation tool. • Increased the number of community partner organizations from eight to 20. |
| <p>Collaboration</p> <p>323rd District Court, Department of Family and Protective Services, Tarrant County Challenge Lena Pope Home, Recovery Resource Council, CASA of Tarrant County, MHMR – Addiction Services, MHMR – Mental Health, MHMR – ECI, MHMR – Evaluation, VOA Light, VOA Riverside, Nexus Recovery Center, North Texas Addictions Counseling and Education, Salvation Army, Union Gospel Mission, The Next Step, The Women’s Center, Texas Wesleyan School of Law, Bearden Investigative Agency, Community Enrichment Center – Adopt-a-Family Program, Ladder Alliance, Positive Influences, Red Oak Books, Community Learning Center.</p> |

| Project Name | Award Amount |
|---|---------------------|
| Texas Lawyers for Children (TLC) Website Project | \$156,000 |
| Subgrantee/Fiscal Agent | |
| Texas Loves Children, Inc. is a nonprofit agency in Dallas that has developed an online legal resource for attorneys and judges, and conducts legal training. | |
| Corresponding Item in 2007 Strategic Plan | |
| Free or low-cost online legal resource ⁹ | |
| Project Description and Activities | |
| <p>The TLC website project seeks to raise the standard of practice by equipping judges and attorneys with the information they need to make better recommendations and decisions in child protection cases.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided Texas judges and attorneys a comprehensive, topically organized, word searchable, online resource and communication center focusing on legal, medical, and psychological information pertinent to child abuse and neglect cases. • Continued ongoing updates and expansion of the online child abuse library with new materials and resources. • Updated and expanded communication and collaboration tools, including separate email networks – one for judges, one for attorneys, and one for a specialized group of ad litem attorneys appointed to represent children in a large, complex, child abuse case. • Provided critical new information on changes in state and federal legal developments and breaking news in Texas, with analysis on how they would impact children’s cases. • Created secure discussion boards and document vaults. | |
| Accomplishments | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased total monthly hits by almost 81%. | |

⁹ Ibid, Tab 5, pg. 11, item 5.6.

- Increased the number of users by almost 120%.
- Conducted a survey of 61 users (52 attorneys and 9 judges). Results were positive – 56 respondents said the website was extremely valuable to their work in child abuse cases, and that it helped them do a better job than they would otherwise have been able to do.
- Chosen as the communication networking site of the newly formed Texas Association of Child Protection Judges, which was created to share best practices and to mentor new judges.
- Continually maintained an availability rate of 99.94%.
- Added 858 new legal materials, focusing on best practice tips, new research, and user requests for information on specific topics.
- Expanded the peer-to-peer communication in the currently existing networks: Colleague Connection – Attorneys, Colleague Connection-Judicial, and the Pro Bono Network.
- Created a specialized discussion board, soon to be opened to all attorneys, called "Expert Exchange," which will allow attorneys to ask questions to subject matter experts.
- Expanded the use of the Pro Bono Network by recruiting attorneys willing to mentor less experienced ad litems, and attorneys experienced in other legal areas, such as appellate law, preparing trust documents, and trial preparation.

Collaboration

Child Protection "Cluster" Courts, Texas Association of Child Protection Judges (TACPJ), Department of Family and Protective Services, Office of General Counsel, Office of Court Administration, Texas District and County Attorneys Association (TDCAA), State Bar of Texas, Committee on Child Abuse and Neglect, Tarrant County District Attorney's Office Harris County Attorney's Office, National Center for Prosecution of Child Abuse, National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect (now Child Welfare Information Gateway), Fort Worth – Tarrant County Young Lawyers Association.

| Project Name | Award Amount |
|--|---------------------|
| Texas CASA, Inc., Program Expansion and Volunteer Development | \$178,680 |
| Subgrantee/Fiscal Agent | |
| Texas CASA, Inc., advocates for abused and neglected children in the court system through the development, growth and support of local CASA programs. With Texas CASA's support, local CASA programs recruit, train, and supervise volunteers to serve as court-appointed guardian ad litem or special advocates in child protection services cases. | |
| Corresponding Item in 2007 Strategic Plan | |
| Texas CASA, Inc. ¹⁰ | |
| Activities | |
| CASA Program Expansion | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided expansion-related assistance to local programs. | |
| Conducted Statewide Trainings | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic Advocacy Specialist Training – 16-hour training for 47 advocacy specialists from CASA programs all over the state. • Advanced Advocacy Specialist Training – 16-hour training for 30 advocacy specialists from CASA programs all over the state. | |

¹⁰ Ibid, Tab 5, pg. 9, item 4.2.

- Training of Facilitators – a 22-hour interactive training conducted for local CASAs by National CASA that covered the principles of adult learning as well as facilitation skills.
- Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Program Staff Retreat – Program staff from 54 CASA programs attended the Annual Spring Retreat.

Recruitment and Retention of Volunteers

- Hired an international consulting and training firm to improve volunteer development.
- Developed public relations materials for local CASA programs ("PR in a FLASH") to use in recruiting volunteers. These kits were made available to all 68 local CASA programs.
- Conducted Train the Trainer in Volunteer Recruitment – a 7-hour training for five Texas CASA staff and seven program staff from around the state on how to train others to recruit CASA volunteers.
- Conducted Faith Based Recruitment Training – Texas CASA staff and DFPS Faith-Based Recruitment staff conducted training for 25 staff and volunteers from 11 CASA programs at one event, and for 30 staff, volunteers and board members from 16 CASA programs at another. This training resulted in Tyler’s Green Acres Baptist Church actively recruiting for CASA in its magazine and during a Sunday service.
- Launched a statewide volunteer recruitment campaign called the "CASA Volunteer Round Up" that included mini-regional training session in six cities with 214 attendees.

Accomplishments

- Expanded the CASA programs in Texarkana and Bryan.
- Began developing a new CASA program in Williamson County.
- Developed and launched a new volunteer recruitment website, www.becomeacasa.org.
- Increased the number of CASA volunteers recruited and retained in FY2008.
In FY2008, there were 5,259 active volunteers (cumulative through the year) and 1,983 of these were new volunteers. This means that 3276 of these volunteers had been retained from the previous year. In FY2007, there were 4,928 active volunteers and 1,714 of these were new volunteers, with 3214 retained volunteers.

Collaboration

DFPS, Advocacy, Inc., University of Texas School of Law, Children’s Rights Clinic, Star Health, Behavioral Health Academy, Baptist Child and Family Services.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROJECTS

The Commission's Technology Committee (see Appendix B) is responsible for vetting technology projects that meet CIP and Commission goals and making recommendations to the Commission. Technology Committee members include Commission and OCA staff, members of the judiciary, DFPS staff, and county and district clerks. The Commission charged the Technology Committee with implementing the Commission’s strategic plan goals that relate to data collection and Analysis. In the Commission's FY2008 grant application, these goals were defined more broadly than in the previous two years, which has allowed for more creativity and flexibility in funding projects.

In Texas, more than 350 judges have jurisdiction to hear child protection cases in 254 counties across a staggering diversity of institutional arrangements, legal cultures, and political climates. The sheer number of child protection courts, the state's decentralized court system, the manner in which these courts are funded, and the state's large size present daunting challenges to data collection and analysis. Because Texas has perhaps the single most fragmented court system in the country, best practices and working solutions must be developed primarily through consensus-building.

Despite the challenges, through the Texas Data Enabled Courts for Kids (TexDECK) project, significant progress was made during the grant period toward better case tracking and analysis in Texas. The Commission, with CIP grant funding, will continue case management and reporting projects to meet these challenges to improve the safety, well-being, and permanency for children in the Texas child welfare system.

| Project Name | Award Amount |
|--|---------------------|
| Texas Data Enabled Courts for Kids (TexDECK) | \$256,010 |
| Subgrantee/Fiscal Agent | |
| The Texas Office of Court Administration (OCA) is the administrative arm of the state's court system and provides technical and administrative services to certain trial and appellate courts. | |
| Corresponding Item in 2007 Strategic Plan | |
| Detail of Data Grant Projects for FY2007 ¹¹ | |
| Project Description and Activities | |
| TexDECK is the name of a data collection and analysis effort that includes several different projects. | |
| <p>1. Functional Requirements Study (FRS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a functional requirements document, which is a massive interactive record that behaves like a web site and contains almost every conceivable step a CPS court case could take. It includes case scenarios and an exhaustive library of court activities. It can be used either to develop new automated case management systems or to improve existing ones. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Conducted site visits and data collection in four urban district courts and four specialty courts. – Determined the legal requirements involved in processing CPS cases, such as statutory | |

¹¹ Texas Court Improvement Program (CIP), 2007 Grant Applications & Strategic Plans, Case Management and Reporting Grant Application, June 30, 2007, Tab 3, pg. 7, item (6).

timelines, and the data elements required to support the processes, and included them in the document.

- Facilitated extensive review of the project by case management software vendors and with OCA staff who support and maintain the Specialty Docket Case Management System (SDCMS).
- Facilitated extensive document review and approval by the Commission's Technology committee.
- Posted the completed FRS documentation on the Commission' website, at www.courts.state.tx.us/oca/texdeck/frd/texdeckfunctional_requirements.htm.

Accomplishments

- Completed the Functional Requirements Study
- The Commission formally adopted the FRS in June 2008.
- Conducted a meeting to present the FRS to the vendor community to determine vendor interest and the possibility of them incorporating its key components into existing or new product offerings.
- Presented the FRS at the 11th National Child Welfare Data and Technology conference in Washington D.C., July 21-23, 2008.

2. Specialty Docket Case Management System (SDCMS)

- Began efforts to enhanced the design of SDCMS, which is the child protection court case management system used by the 15 OCA-supported child protection courts. A developer was contracted in November 2007 to assist with SDCMS support and maintenance.
- Concluded that creating a new web-based system (that included the components of the functional requirements study) would be more efficient and cost-effective than redesigning this one.

3. Child Protection Case Management System (CPCMS)

- Began developing this system to replace the older SDCMS.
 - Created an advisory group of specialty court judges and their coordinators to work with the OCA project team to provide user perspective for design and development.
 - The project team will continue to be staffed by a contracted business analysts, an application programmer/developer, and a database developer. The OCA project manager will continue to manage this project, which is scheduled to be completed by fall of 2009.

4. Re-platform Judicial Web Page (JWP)

- Continued efforts to re-platform the Judicial Web Page (JWP), which was originally developed and maintained by DFPS with CIP funds. The JWP makes key data stored in DFPS databases available to judges.
 - Contracted a developer/analyst who completed the JWP in March 2008.
 - Tested site and coordinated security issues with DFPS

Accomplishments

- Completed Re-platform of the Judicial Web Page (JWP)
- Went live on September 1, 2008 on OCA's website.
- Marketed the new JWP to judges and their coordinators with emails and letters.

- Demonstrated the JWP at the 2008 Judicial Section Annual Conference in Dallas, Texas and the 2008 CPS Judicial Conference in Austin, Texas.
- Contributed a tool courts can use to improve timeliness outcomes because can use the JWP to verify that data between DFPS and courts match.

5. Data Interchange Standards

- Continued efforts to develop national data interchange standards which would allow direct, computer-to-computer information exchange between courts and DFPS.
- Participated in state and national data exchange workgroups that include representatives of the National Center for State Courts (NCSC).
- Attended a 3-day National Information Exchange Model (NIEM) Practical Implementer's Course.
- Participated in several meetings and workshops of the Child Welfare Data Exchange Group.

Accomplishments

- Provided major contributions to several national meetings of the Child Welfare Data Exchange Group meetings where data models of eight crucial components to the data exchange process were either defined, drafted, or completed. They include affidavits, service plans, and dependency petition.

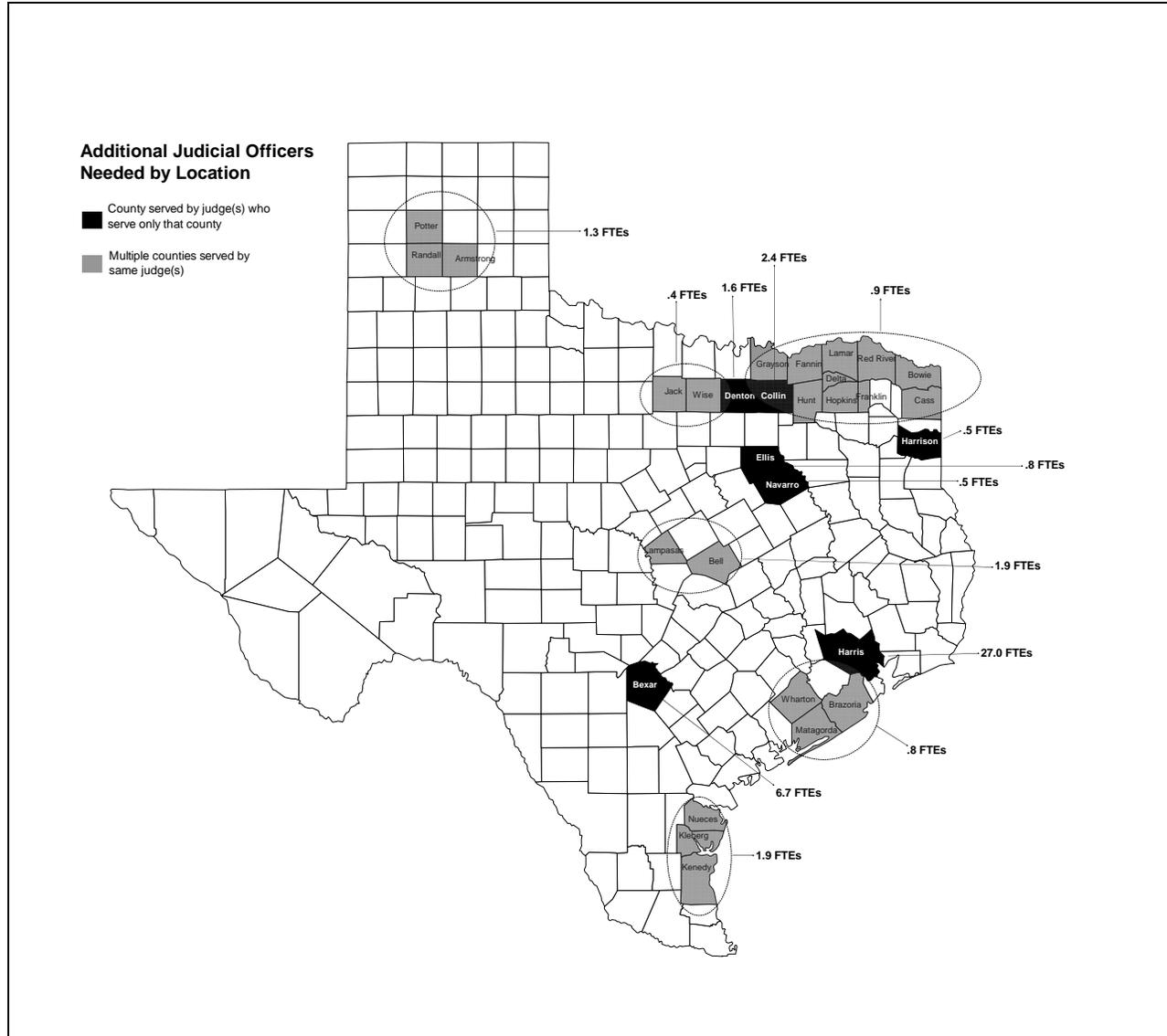
6. Weighted Caseload Study

As part of a larger weighted caseload study of all the state's courts, CIP funded an intensive study of the 15 Texas Child Protection Courts (CPCs).

- Conducted a focused analysis of the workload dynamics of these 15 courts.
- Developed case weights specific to these courts using data from their specialized case management software system.
- The analysis produced a case weight of 323 minutes per filing for these cases, and clearly illustrates the fact that child protection cases require a great deal of judicial officer time to resolve. While the 323 minute case weight applies to the 15 OCA CPCs, it is a reasonable assumption that other judges in Texas hearing child protection cases likely spend similar time moving these cases from filing to disposition.

Accomplishments

- The results of the weighted caseload study indicated that 31 counties needed additional judicial officer resources to adequately handle existing workload (see map below).



Collaboration

Child Protection Court Of Central Texas, 323rd District Court (Tarrant County), Sabine Valley Child Protection Court, 126th Judicial District Court (Travis County), 311th District Court (Harris County), 330th Family Court District (Dallas County), South Plains Cluster Court, Child Protection Court Of The Hill Country, Supreme Court Of Texas, Judicial Commission For Children, Youth And Families, Texas Department Of Family And Protective Services.

TRAINING GRANT PROJECTS

The Commission delegated to its Training Committee (see Appendix B) oversight of the CIP Multidisciplinary Training Grant. Committee members include judges, attorneys, commission members and staff, and staff from OCA, DFPS, and the Texas Center for the Judiciary. The Training Committee plans and implements the Commission's strategic plan goals as they relate to training needs. In the Commission's FY2008 grant application, these goals were defined more broadly than in the previous two years, which has allowed for more creativity and flexibility in funding projects.

In September, the Commission signed an \$180,000 contract with the National Association of Children (NACC) to develop and conduct between 14 and 17 training conferences for attorneys who represent children, parents, or the child welfare agency in child protection cases. The training will address parental and child rights, best practices for effective advocacy, trial and mediation skills, and will include discussion of local rules and practices. NACC will coordinate the training with local judges and focus groups. Along with this training, the Commission is working with NACC and the Texas Board of Legal Specialization to establish a child welfare law certification test for attorney board certification in Texas.

Judges, attorneys and DFPS staff who participated in CIP-funded training have gained more knowledge to help them make better recommendations and decisions. Informed decisions improve overall performance on the CFSR outcome measures of safety, permanency, and well-being.

| Project Name | Award Amount |
|--|---------------------|
| Judicial Training, and National Conference Sponsorship | \$573,380 |
| Subgrantee/Fiscal Agent | |
| Texas Center for the Judiciary is a nonprofit corporation established in 1973 by the Judicial Section of the State Bar of Texas to provide continuing judicial education programs for the state's judiciary and supportive personnel. | |
| Corresponding Item in 2007 Strategic Plan | |
| Proposed List of CIP Training Grant Projects ¹² | |
| Activities | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conducted four judicial training programs (Beyond the Bench, CPS Judicial Conference, Associate Judges' Conference, and Social Workers and CPS Training Conference). • Coordinated participant attendance to five national training programs (National Conference of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, National Forum on Children, Families and the Courts, National Conference of Juvenile Justice Judges, Enhancing Judicial Skills in Domestic Violence, and Continuing Judicial Skills in Domestic Violence). <p>Although most training events targeted judges, some have included court staff and administrators, social workers, state court and agency officials and others, including commission staff.</p> | |
| Accomplishments | |

¹² Texas Court Improvement Program (CIP), 2007 Grant Applications & Strategic Plans, Multidisciplinary Training Grant Application, June 20, 2007, Tab 4, pg. 6, item (3).

Program evaluations, participant evaluations and comments reflected:

- High level of satisfaction.
- Enhanced awareness of child protection issues – including best practices.
- Greater cross-disciplinary communication, and the
- Receipt of tools enhancing judges’ ability to make more informed decisions leading to better safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children and families. The programs also:
- Increased access to cost-effective, specialized education for the judiciary and other stakeholders that satisfied continuing education requirements.
- Increased attendees’ awareness on pertinent issues.
- Increased the use of best practices.
- Increased communication networks between judges and between judges and other stakeholders.

| Name of Event | Date(s) | Location | Number in Attendance |
|---|----------------|------------------|-----------------------------|
| National Conference of Juvenile and Family Courts Judges | 3/9-12/2008 | St. Louis, MO | 29 |
| Beyond the Bench | 4/13-15/2008 | Dallas, TX | 67 |
| National Forum on Children, Families and the Courts: Planning for the Future | 4/29-5/2/2008 | Philadelphia, PA | 4 |
| Associate Judges Conference | 7/7-9/2008 | Austin, TX | 78 |
| Social Workers & CPS Training Conference | 7/7/2008 | Austin | 6 |
| National Conference of Juvenile Justice Judges | 7/27-30/2008 | Norfolk, VA | 54 |
| CPS Judicial Conference | 8/25-27/2008 | Austin, TX | 48 |
| Enhancing Judicial Skills in Domestic Violence | 9/14-17/2008 | Providence, RI | 7 |
| Continuing Judicial Skills in Domestic Violence | 9/18-20/2008 | Providence, RI | 5 |
| Total for all Events | | | 298 |
| Combined average favorable rating on post-event evaluations. (1-5 scale) | | | 4.6 |
| Number of hours of training provided that meets a statutory or state rule required element for judges, attorneys, or GALs | | | 118.5 |
| Number of hours of training provided that meets a licensure, professional standard or other plan policy or operational requirement for judges, attorneys, or GALs | | | 48.5 |

Collaboration

Center for Public Policy Priorities, Supreme Court Task Force on Foster Care, Texas CASA, Nestor Consultants, Inc., TRAC, CASEY Family Programs, TDFPS, House Committee on Human Services, UT Southwestern Medical Center, East Texas Workforce Centers, Safe Haven of Tarrant County, CASA of Collin County, Plano Police Department, Keller & Stark, Lancaster ISD, Dallas Co. District Attorney's Office, Plumlee & Associates, P.C., Bright Elementary,

Kaufman County Children's Center, Texas Scottish Rite Hospital, Dallas CASA, Grand Prairie
ISD, Collin County DA's Office, East Tx Council on Alcoholism & Drug Abuse, Collin Co.
Children's Advocacy Center, Bradley & Hill, Grand Prairie Police Department, Collin Co.
Children's Advocacy Center, Dallas CASA, Safe Haven of Tarrant County, Dallas County DA's
Office, Brief Therapy Institute, East Texas Child Advocates, U.S. Attorney's Office, U.S. DOJ,
Gregg County Criminal DA's Office, Longview ISD, Smith County, Ct Administrator, 321st
District Court, Methodist Children's Home, Dallas County, Court Coordinator, 383rd District Ct
Court Coordinator, 398th District Ct, Asst. Co. Atty, El Paso County, Ct Administrator, 414th
District Ct, Case/Court Mgr, 388th District Ct, Juvenile Counselor, 102nd District Ct
Court Administrator, County Ct at Law #1, Court Administrator, 16th District Ct
CASA of Ellis County, El Paso Area Foster Youth, Court Coordinator, 66th District Court.

APPENDIX A: SELECT FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Select Financial Information for the year ending September 30, 2008

Sources of Funding

| | |
|--|------------------------|
| Basic State Court Improvement Program | \$ 626,951.51 |
| Training State Court Improvement Program | 524,092.80 |
| Data Sharing State Court Improvement Program | 310,642.50 |
| Total Funding | \$ 1,461,686.81 |

Expenses

Program Expenses

| | |
|--|------------------------|
| Texas Office of Court Administration | |
| CPS Judicial Support | 15,755.87 |
| TexDeck Project | 428,982.04 |
| Texas CASA | 118,275.60 |
| Texas Department of Family and Protective Services-Texas Partnership for Family Recovery | 13,350.43 |
| CASA of Brazos Valley | 951.00 |
| Texas Loves Children | 93,978.04 |
| Texas RioGrande Legal Aid | 63,172.89 |
| Austin Recovery Inc. | 3,798.18 |
| ChildSafe | 22,201.62 |
| Tarrant County Challenge | 44,861.56 |
| Texas Center for the Judiciary | |
| Judicial Training | 215,531.45 |
| National Conferences | 138,382.98 |
| Permanent Judicial Commission for Child, Youth and Families | 17,111.90 |
| Total Program Expenses | \$ 1,176,353.56 |

Supporting Services

| | |
|------------------------|---------------|
| Management and General | \$ 285,333.25 |
|------------------------|---------------|

| | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Total Expenses | \$ 1,461,686.81 |
|-----------------------|------------------------|

APPENDIX B: COMMISSION AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS



APPENDIX C: COLLABORATIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS

Emy Lou Baldrige

Co-Founder
Greater Texas Community Partners

Conni Barker

Director/Government Affairs
DePelchin Children's Center

Carolyn Bivens

Executive Director
Texas Council of Child Welfare Boards

Roy Block

Executive Director
Texas Foster Family Association

Judy Brow

Specialized Female Services Coordinator
Texas Department of State Health Services

Salvador Cavazos

Assistant Superintendent
Brownsville Independent School District

William B. Connolly

Attorney at Law
William B. Connolly & Associates

Penny Cook

Co-Founder
The Faith Connection

Cathy Crabtree

Executive Director
Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas

Susan Hopkins Craven

Executive Director
Texas Association of Infant Mental Health

De Shaun Ealoms

Parent Program Specialist
Texas Dept. of Family & Protective Svcs.

Barbara Elias-Perciful

President
Texas Lawyers for Children

Debra D. Emerson

CPS Dir. of Policy and Program
Texas Dept. of Family & Protective Svcs.

Tomas Esparza, Jr.

Attorney at Law
The Law Office of Tomas Esparza, Jr.

Benigno J. Fernandez, MD

President
Texas Society of Child & Adolescent
Psychiatry

Paul E. Furrh, Jr.

Chief Executive Officer
Lone Star Legal Aid

Mike Foster

Immediate Past President
Texas Association of Child Placing
Agencies

Joe Gagen

Chief Executive Officer
Texas CASA, Inc.

Eileen Garcia-Matthews

Executive Director
Texans Care For Children

David Halpern

Director
Seedling's Promise Mentor Program

Alicia Key

Deputy Attorney General for Child Support
Office of the Attorney General

Richard LaVallo

Senior Attorney
Advocacy, Inc.

Donald Lee

Executive Director
Texas Conference on Urban Counties

Tracy Levins

Director
Admn. Svcs/Community Relations, Texas
Youth Commission

Rebecca Lightsey

Executive Director
Texas Appleseed

Madeline McClure

Executive Director
TexProtects

Hon. F. Scott McCown, ret.

Executive Director
Center for Public Policy Priorities

Trista Miller

Region 07 Youth Specialist
Child Protective Services

Bryan Sperry

President
Children's Hospital Association of
Texas

Vicki Spriggs

Executive Director
Texas Juvenile Probation Commission

Gene Terry

Operations Director
Texas Association of Counties

Gloria Terry

Coalition President
Texas Council on Family Violence

Gina VanOsselaer

Executive Director
Austin Children's Shelter

Arabia Vargas

Chair
Bexar County Child Welfare Board

Henrietta Wright

Vice President, Board of Directors
Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas

APPENDIX C: BETTER COURTS FOR KIDS, APRIL AND SEPTEMBER 2008

Click on [April 2008](#) or [September 2008](#) to see the issue online.



Better Courts for Kids

Newsletter of the Permanent Judicial Commission for
Children, Youth and FamiliesVolume 1, Number 1
April, 2008



"Courts are gatekeepers for families in crisis,"
— Justice Harriet O'Neill, Chair, Children's Commission

Inside This Issue

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[Court assistance program coming soon](#)

[Find county-specific CPS information online](#)

[Get court administration consults for free](#)

[Website offers free tools for judges and attorneys](#)

[Texas and other states face difficult child welfare audits](#)

To unsubscribe, send an email with the word unsubscribe in the subject line to children@courts.state.tx.us

Children's Commission Launched

Supreme Court moves to help CPS courts

To help courts better serve children in foster care, the Supreme Court of Texas created the Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families this past November.

"We want to make our system more efficient and fair and protect our children with greater care," said Supreme Court Chief Justice Wallace B. Jefferson. "We've been told that children in foster care are often referred to as forgotten children. By creating this commission we demonstrate that we have not forgotten these children."

The 18-member commission brings together public and private institutions to work toward reducing the amount of time children spend in foster care and ensuring better outcomes for children and families. Members include judges, Child Protective Services (CPS) and Health and Human Services officials, attorneys, legislators and other elected officials, the vice president of a nonprofit foundation, and a former State Bar president.

"We have not forgotten these children," – Chief Justice Wallace Jefferson

Although many groups and individuals are dedicated to improving the state's foster care system, this is the highest-level group formed specifically for judicial leaders and CPS leaders, along with other community partners, to work on problems together.

Supreme Court Justice Harriet O'Neill, who spearheaded efforts to form the commission, said no other vehicle brings this many high-level stakeholders together from both public and private sectors. "To champion the needs of children, we must foster collaboration among courts, CPS, and other participants."

The Court appointed Justice O'Neill to chair the commission, which is charged specifically with developing and implementing policy initiatives toward achieving child-welfare outcomes of safety, permanency and well-being for the more than 22,000 Texas children in foster care.

Aiming for Case Management Utopia

Agency works to bring Texas courts into the digital age

With funding from a federal grant, the Office of Court Administration (OCA) has undertaken a long-term, multi-pronged project to bring Texas courts' child protection case management systems into the digital age.

OCA executives hope that one day Texas judges will have automated case management systems with instant electronic access to information about child protection cases before them, including Child Protective Services (CPS) reports and proceedings in other courts. The project, called Texas Data-Enabled Courts for Kids (TexDECK), has four main components:

Children's Commission

Hon. Harriet O'Neill, Chair
Hon. John Specia, Vice Chair
Hon. Darlene Byrne
Hon. Camile G. DuBose
Bruce Esterline
Stewart W. Gagnon
Albert Hawkins
Joyce M. James
Kristi Jordan
Hon. Patricia A. Macias
Carolyne Rodriguez
Eduardo Roberto Rodriguez
Hon. Dean Rucker
Fairy Davenport Rutland
Hon. Cheryl Lee Shannon
Hon. Yvonne Gonzalez
Tourelles
Hon. Jeff Wentworth
David M. Williams

- Update the Texas Department of Family and Protective Service's Judicial Web page to use current technology and make it more supportable.
- Establish the electronic language (data standards) that different systems must have to communicate and exchange information, moving from paper to digital court processing.
- Study judges' caseloads to identify how much time it takes to process a case.
- Study selected child protection courts to determine exactly what they need in case management software systems (a functional requirements study).

After months of visiting courts that hear CPS cases, interviewing court staff, and studying procedures, OCA will roll out in May the next developmental stage of the functional requirements study. All of the background work to determine the unique needs of CPS courts has culminated in a massive interactive document that behaves like a Web site and contains almost all conceivable steps a CPS court case could take. It includes case scenarios and an exhaustive library of court activities.

"The idea is to document and describe all the different functionalities important to systems, processes, features, and data items," said Scott Jones, TexDECK project manager.

Mr. Jones and his staff will review the document with subject matter experts to flesh it out and test it. Then they will present it to software developers who, OCA hopes, will incorporate CPS courts' functionality needs into software products.

Although it has taken many months to produce, Mr. Jones says the greatest challenge "is not necessarily in developing the requirements. The biggest challenge is getting them implemented." Texas' decentralized court system presents a tremendous barrier to incorporating common functionality. OCA will work to overcome these barriers over the next few years as the TexDECK effort strives to improve child protection court systems.

By Invitation Only

Court assistance program coming soon

The Children's Commission this summer expects to launch a judicial consultation service to spread best practices for Child Protective Services (CPS) cases throughout the state. With technical help from the National Center for State Courts, the Court Assistance Results in Excellence for Kids (CARE for Kids) program aims to help courts improve outcomes for children, youth and families.

A team of child-welfare experts led by two former district judges will be available to help courts apply nationally recognized standards in their local jurisdictions. At a court's invitation, the team will review with the court its local CPS statistics, assessing strengths and pinpointing areas that can be improved. Senior District Judge John J. Specia and Retired Judge F. Scott McCown will lead the team. Judge Specia, vice chair of the Children's Commission, is a nationally recognized expert in child welfare and court improvement. Judge McCown, an expert in child-welfare policy, is the executive director of the Center for Public Policy Priorities. The team will include Carl Reynolds, Administrative Director of OCA, and Joyce James, Assistant Commissioner of CPS.

Judicial Web Page Revamped

Get county-specific CPS case information

In May, the Office of Court Administration (OCA) will launch its updated Judicial Web page. Judges will be able to search Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) databases for Child Protective Services case information in their county. Begun in the late 1990s with federal Court Improvement Program grant funds

**Children's Commission
Collaborative Council**

Emy Lou Baldridge
 Conni Barker
 Carolyn Bivens
 Roy Block
 De Shaun Bradley
 Judy Brow
 Salvador Cavazos
 Penny Cook
 Cathy Crabtree
 Susan Hopkins Craven
 Barbara Elias-Perciful
 Debra D. Emerson
 Tomas Esparza, Jr
 Joe Gagen
 Eileen Garcia-Matthews
 Alicia Key
 Richard LaVallo
 Donald Lee
 Tracy Levins
 Rebecca Lightsey
 Madeline McClure
 F. Scott McCown
 Trista Miller
 Bryan Sperry
 Vicki Spriggs
 Gene Terry
 Gloria Terry
 Gina VanOsselaer
 Arabia Vargas
 Henrietta Wright

and housed at DFPS, the Web site needed a technology update.

As part of its Texas Data-Enabled Courts for Kids (TexDECK) project, OCA began reworking the database's technology in 2007. For more information, email Scott Jones at Scott.Jones@courts.state.tx.us.

Get Organized On-The-Spot

OCA provides administration consults free to courts

Eva Walla, court services consultant with the Office of Court Administration (OCA), provides case management and court administration consulting services to help courts improve their efficiency and administration of justice – key elements of OCA's mission. At no cost, Ms. Walla visits courts and evaluates dockets, systems, practices, and procedures, and helps develop improvements. Her services include:

- Managing cases and calendars, and general administrative processes.
- Creating a court procedures manual.
- Developing case management forms, such as dismissal dockets, pretrial scheduling orders, notices, mediation orders, and others.

Ms. Walla has more than 10 years experience as a district court administrator and is the cofounder and former vice president of the Texas Rural Association for Court Administration. To learn more about the services OCA offers or to request assistance, call Ms. Walla at (512) 475-1777 or e-mail her at Eva.Walla@courts.state.tx.us.

Information at Your Fingertips

Website offers free tools for judges and attorneys

All Texas judges and attorneys who handle cases involving children may register at www.TexasLawyersforChildren.org for free access to an online legal library designed to help judges and attorneys improve the handling of child abuse cases.

Texas Lawyers for Children (TLC) is a nonprofit group that for three years has offered an online legal resource center with materials gathered from national experts and key practitioners around the state. The resources include:

- Legal forms (including orders and jury instructions).
- Articles and manuals.
- Case summaries (linked to the full text of the cases).
- Statute digest (linked to the statutes).
- Medical and mental health information about children and families, and more.

A team of experienced attorneys reviewed and summarized the materials and organized them by topic. A couple of mouse clicks will take users to relevant and timely information on their topic of interest. Recently, TLC added a private e-mail network exclusively for Texas judges called the Colleague Connection. Judges can locate and network with colleagues via phone or e-mail. District Judge Guilford L. "Gil" Jones is the network's moderator.

TLC also recently launched its Pro Bono Network to build a cadre of attorneys who are willing to handle pro bono cases or mentor other attorneys. One of TLC's goals is to increase both the number and the expertise of attorneys who handle children's cases. TLC has been funded by the Texas Court Improvement Program grant, the Children's Justice Act grant, private foundations, and individual donors. You may register by visiting www.TexasLawyersforChildren.org and clicking on "Register." TLC staff will call you to verify your status as a sitting judge before your admission to the site and to explain the site's security features. For questions, contact TLC at (800) 993-5852.

Measuring Success

Texas and other states face difficult federal child welfare audits

For decades, the federal government poured billions into state child welfare programs with relatively low oversight. That changed drastically in 2001 when the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) instituted the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), a comprehensive and outcome-oriented audit that sets high national standards for measures of safety, permanency, and well-being.

The standards are so high, in fact, that by the end of the first round of CFSRs in 2004, not one of the 50 states had achieved full compliance. Some states, including Texas, still face millions in potential fines for not reaching negotiated targets, even as the second round of reviews has begun.

The CFSR review evaluates the state’s child welfare system by conducting individual case reviews and stakeholder interviews, and takes into account statewide data and a state agency’s written self-assessment.

Because CFSR success impacts the flow of federal funds, concerned Texas leaders want to spread the word beyond Child Protective Services (CPS) about what the review measures and how it’s conducted.

“When you know the standards, you can aim for them. Otherwise, you’re just shooting in the dark,” — District Judge Robin Sage

“The CFSR is not just a review of CPS,” said District Judge Dean Rucker, of Midland, Presiding Judge of the Seventh Administrative Judicial Region of Texas. “It’s a review of the state’s whole system. And all players, including courts, contribute to our performance in outcomes for children.”

Although courts are integral to the child welfare system, CFSR awareness among judges who hear CPS cases is probably fairly low, said District Judge Robin Sage, of Longview, who has been hearing CPS cases for 17 years. “Most judges probably know that there is a federal review. But they don’t know the details or specifics or even the consequences of it.

“As judges, we need to know what the standards are that are being reviewed,” Judge Sage said. “When you know the standards, you can aim for them. Otherwise, you’re just shooting in the dark.”

CFSR standards – the super sevens

Overall, the CFSR determines safety, permanency, and well-being by using seven systemic factors to measure systems in place (see below) and seven outcome categories to measure results (see Table 1.).

Seven Systemic Factors for Measuring Systems in Place

- Statewide information system
- Case review system
- Quality assurance system
- Staff training
- Service array
- Agency responsiveness to community
- Foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention

Table 1. Seven Outcome Categories for Measuring Results

| Safety | Permanency | Child and Family Well-Being |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect. • Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children have permanency and stability in their living arrangements. • The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs. • Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs. • Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs. |

Within the seven systemic factors and seven outcomes are 45 separate measurable items. Some are scored using statewide statistics and others are specific to the case reviews and stakeholder interviews. ([View all of the measures.](#))

The CFSR has three stages. Stage one begins with a federal analysis of statewide data and a state self-assessment. Stage two is the on-site review, and the third stage is the program improvement plan (PIP).

Stage one – crunching the numbers

HHS sends each state a statistical report card based on data the state reports to HHS twice a year. These data – some aggregate and some case-level – come from two automated federal reporting systems, the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS). These automated systems require consistency in how states count or report their data, making it possible for states to be compared to each other. In general, NCANDS contains investigation-related data and AFCARS contains data associated with children in state conservatorship.

About six months before its on-site review, HHS takes 12 months of data from a state’s NCANDS and AFCARS, runs it through an algorithm, scores it, and sends the state an individualized state data profile. The state data profile contributes to two of the seven outcomes – one safety and one permanency outcome.

If a state’s overall performance on these two outcomes is not in substantial conformity, then the state knows it must negotiate a PIP even before HHS conducts the on-site case reviews and stakeholder interviews. Texas already knows it must have a PIP for this CFSR because of its scores on five of the six safety and permanency data indicators and composites. For example, placement stability, one of the permanency composites Texas will need to address, is measured by the percentage of children who had two or fewer placement settings. Table 2. below shows that children in DFPS conservatorship do not have the placement stability needed to achieve conformity.

Table 2. Placement Stability

| Two or fewer placements in: | National median | National 75th percentile | Texas |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|-------|
| less than 12 months | 83.3% | 86.0% | 80.1% |
| for 12 to 24 months | 59.9% | 65.4% | 52.6% |
| for 24+ months | 33.9% | 41.8% | 20.8% |

Texas doesn’t miss the mark significantly for children who are in care less than a year – 80 percent of Texas children are moved two or fewer times versus the 86 percent national 75th percentile. But for children who are in care two years or more, there is a bigger gap and greater need for improvement.

This measure was a challenge for Texas in the first CFSR (February 2002), and, according to Judge Sage, it’s an example of a score she believes could improve simply by making sure all judges know the national standard. “Studies show that kids do better the less they’re moved,” she said. “If we know that the standard is two or fewer placements, it can help us make better decisions.” ([View Texas’ most recent self-assessment, which includes the Data Profile.](#))

“Our statewide data shows, before we even go through the on-site review, that we still have some key areas in which to improve,” said Liz Hughes Kromrei, CPS director of Staff Services and Texas CFSR coordinator.

The statewide assessment is where Texas gets a chance to identify its strengths and weaknesses and offer explanations, when necessary, for deficiencies. “It’s our opportunity to assess ourselves,” Ms. Kromrei said. “We get to express our opinions about the data.”

HHS mandates that agencies include stakeholders from outside the agency in the self-assessment. States must submit their self-assessments to HHS 60 days before the on-site reviews. HHS then prepares a preliminary assessment and distributes it to the on-site review team jointly staffed by federal and state reviewers.

Stage two – 65 cases rate the whole state

For the current CFSR, HHS upped the number of cases reviewed to 65 from 50 in 2002. The on-site review is more robust than a simple records audit. Review teams interview children, parents, foster parents, caseworkers, and others involved in the 65 cases and include their input in measuring the outcomes. It’s also in this stage that reviewers assess the seven systemic factors through interviews with stakeholders, who are involved with the system but not attached to specific cases reviewed.




Better Courts for Kids and Families

Newsletter of the Permanent Judicial Commission for Children,
Youth and Families

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Harriet O'Neill
Justice, Supreme Court
of Texas, and
Chair, Children's
Commission

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Commission to Study Children in Long Term Foster Care

Joint project will look for ways to improve outcomes

Almost 15,000 Texas children live in long-term foster care, some with little chance of ever rejoining their families or of being adopted. Almost a third will be moved multiple times and will age out of the system at 18, never having found a permanent home.

Long-term foster care does not adequately prepare these children for adulthood. Children who age out of foster care face increased risks of poverty, drug addiction, homelessness, and unemployment.

Recognizing the myriad problems these youth face, the Children's Commission this April charged one of its subcommittees to research the issue. This subcommittee is working with Texas Appleseed, a public interest law center led by Executive Director Rebecca Lightsey, who is also a member of the Children's Commission's Collaborative Council. Appleseed will lead a two-year study to examine the challenges these children confront and identify best practices for the legal system to improve outcomes for them. Texas Appleseed's pro bono partner in the study is Fulbright & Jaworski, L.L.P., with assistance from McGinnis, Lochridge & Kilgore, L.L.P.

"The project's broad goal is to fully understand the issues of children in permanent managing conservatorship of the state, and how the legal system can be strengthened to improve their lives," Ms. Lightsey said. "We intend to identify their needs, common problems they have, the services available to them, and barriers to successful outcomes. We will also identify best practices within the legal system and how using those best practices may improve these outcomes."

The study will include data collection, surveys and interviews of persons involved in the child welfare system, including judges, attorneys, guardians ad litem, and others in the 10 most heavily populated counties and in approximately five regions covered by the specialty docket Child Protection Court judges. Although the study will not be complete until late 2009, the group expects to have initial findings developed by January 2009.

Pushing Past Permanency Barriers

Fort Bend County's team approach benefits young children in CPS care

On a hot morning this July in Fort Bend County's 328th District Court, Judge Ron Pope heard a morning's worth of what seemed like a typical CPS docket, crowded with the usual gamut of cases.

It started with a young couple who couldn't stay drug free long enough to get their baby placed back in their care and who both had ignored the court's recommendation for inpatient drug treatment. Later, a mother and daughter's bitter personal feud complicated visitation schedules and slowed progress of the daughter's case. Their feelings toward

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one another seemed more important to them than the return of the daughter's children, who had been removed for neglect. In contrast, later a teenage mother who was steadily winning her fight against addiction stood before Judge Pope sober, determined, and one day closer to reunification.

*"In my court, we have seen tremendous progress in helping children and parents ... " —
District Judge Ron Pope.*

Although Judge Pope's courtroom that morning looked like a typical CPS docket, it was actually quite different than most. Working with a contingent of professionals that make up a specialized court team, he closely monitors a particular group of cases and hears them

at least once a month. Since October 2005, his court has partnered with the national nonprofit organization, ZERO TO THREE (ZTT), in one of five pilot projects nationwide called Court Teams for Maltreated Infants and Toddlers that focuses on children younger than three in foster care. The project's overall goal is to improve outcomes and reduce the recurrence of abuse and neglect in this age group.

The most common victims of child maltreatment are three years old or younger, and in Texas, more than 25,000 children in this age range were confirmed victims of child maltreatment in 2006. Studies have shown that once infants and toddlers are removed from their homes and placed in foster care, they are more likely than older children to be abused and neglected and to stay in foster care long. ([View study sources here.](#))

According to Dr. Connie Almeida, the project's Community Coordinator in Fort Bend County, this age group is the most vulnerable to the effects of maltreatment because the human brain develops more rapidly during this time than any other. Stress and trauma change brain development, Dr. Almeida said. "Studies show that very young children placed in foster care who are moved often from place to place are almost six times more likely than the general population to have developmental delays."

"Maltreated young children have lower social competence and are more likely to have lower IQ scores, which can lead to negative life outcomes such as substance abuse, welfare dependence, academic failure, and developmental or physical disabilities," Dr. Almeida said.

"This project has brought to the forefront the critical needs of maltreated infants and toddlers," Dr. Almeida said. "These youngest victims present unique challenges and opportunities for intervention and we can ameliorate the impact of abuse if we intervene early and effectively."

The court team seeks to improve outcomes for young children and families by incorporating the science of early childhood development into child welfare practice.

Case workers, CASA volunteers, attorneys, and providers of medical and behavioral health care, early intervention, early education and other services come together to create service plans that are specific to the needs of each child and family. By focusing on individual cases, the court team assesses how well the local service delivery system is functioning and, where gaps are identified, works to develop new community services to better serve children and families.

"In my court, we have seen tremendous progress in helping children and parents because the attorneys ad litem and the County Attorney's Office that handle the CPS dockets are better informed and educated about services available, which questions to ask, and how to help their clients through this process," Judge Pope said.

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| <p><u>Children's Commission Collaborative Council</u> Emy Lou Baldrige Conni Barker Carolyn Bivens Roy Block Judy Brow Salvador Cavazos Penny Cook Cathy Crabtree Susan Hopkins Craven De Shaun Ealoms Barbara Elias-Perciful Debra D. Emerson Tomas Esparza, Jr. Benigno J. Fernandez, M.D. Paul E. Furrh, Jr. Joe Gagen Eileen Garcia-Matthews Alicia Key Richard LaVallo Donald Lee Tracy Levins Rebecca Lightsey Madeline McClure F. Scott McCown Trista Miller Bryan Sperry Vicki Spriggs Gene Terry Gloria Terry Gina VanOsselaer Arabia Vargas Henrietta Wright</p> <p><u>Children's Commission Staff</u> Tina Amberboy, <i>Executive Director</i> <i>Newsletter Executive Editor</i></p> <p>Tiffany Roper, <i>Assistant Director</i></p> <p>Bryan Wilson, <i>Grant Administrator</i></p> <p>Jacque Barclay, <i>Financial Analyst</i></p> <p>Teri Moran <i>Executive Assistant</i> <i>Newsletter Editor</i></p> <p>Sylvia Griego <i>Executive Assistant to</i> <i>Justice O'Neill</i></p> | <p>Judicial leadership is number one on the project's list of eight components that include training and technical assistance from ZERO TO THREE, as well as the court team's expanded use of court-ordered service referrals. More frequent hearings also speed the progress to permanency, Judge Pope said. "In a typical CPS docket, you can't manage more hearings than what is statutorily required. Here, because we meet every 30 days, it's much more intensive, which helps us reach permanency quicker."</p> <p>"You know pretty well after a couple of months whether these parents are really interested in doing the things they need to do to be reunited with their children, or if there are relatives who are interested," Judge Pope said. "There is a sense of urgency to get these babies into a permanent home quicker, because they are going to attach to whoever is taking care of them."</p> <p>Since it began almost three years ago, the ZERO TO THREE project has served 70 children and already has addressed some key factors that contribute to better permanency outcomes for very young children, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reductions in the number of times maltreated infants and toddlers move from one foster home to another. • Increased visits between parents and their young children in foster care. • Increased critical health and developmental screenings. • More placements for care with relatives. • Expedited and enhanced services to parents to facilitate reunification. <p>"I am convinced that this program is of real benefit to children and their parents in this system," Judge Pope said. "In a short time, I have seen real progress in impacting these babies, and I would like to see this program expand to courts throughout Texas."</p> <p>WINGS Program Gives Youth Chance to Soar <i>Fort Bend County program helps youth who will age out of the system</i></p> <p>All the ingredients have come together for Child Advocates of Fort Bend (CAFB) to become one of the few programs in Texas to provide a CASA volunteer for every child in its county's CPS system. These components include a committed staff, a steadfast cadre of dedicated volunteers, and strong community support, according to Executive Director Susie Moseley, not to mention an active, hands-on board whose members are as comfortable stuffing goody bags or leading teen field trips as they are making boardroom decisions.</p> <p>"We are very fortunate to have enough volunteers to put on every case, and we work very hard to do that," Ms. Moseley said. "Because of our community's involvement, we are now working smarter and in more collaborative ways on behalf of children."</p> <p>And while the program has much to commend it, including having trained more than 550 volunteers and served some 8,000 children since 1991, Ms. Moseley is especially proud of recent efforts to concentrate on and specialize in certain areas, such as strong participation in Judge Pope's ZERO TO THREE project. Another relatively new program, called WINGS, focuses on helping older youth who are growing up in foster care to prepare for independent living. Both programs are headed by staff members who provide specialized training to volunteers who work with these age groups.</p> <p>"First of all, as part of the WINGS program, we try to get these kids unstuck, if we can," said Allison Edwards, CASA Program Director. "We try to either get them adopted, or we revisit family members for kinship care possibilities. But if it looks like they're going to age out of the system, we focus on ways we can help them transition."</p> |
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Youth who age out of care tend to have poor life outcomes, studies show. ([View a Casey Family Programs white paper](#)). They have higher rates of arrests, substance abuse and health problems and unemployment than their peers in the general population. ([View a 2001 Texas-specific study](#)).

Traditionally, kids in permanent managing conservatorship or long-term foster care, often referred to as PMC kids, tend to fall through the system's cracks. Additionally, they were seen as easy cases for CASA volunteers because they have only two hearings per year and don't involve parents or attorneys. "We found that our volunteers were frustrated," Ms. Moseley said. "They wanted to help these kids, but they didn't know exactly where to start."

"Our volunteers were frustrated. They wanted to help these kids, but they didn't know exactly where to start," – Susie Moseley, Executive Director of Child Advocates of Fort Bend County.

In January 2006, CAFB hired a full-time CASA supervisor for CASA volunteers who work with PMC kids. The result is closer monitoring of the youths' cases and frequent review of transition plans. "For instance we were finding that the Circle of Support meetings, implemented by Child Protective Services to help these teenagers design a plan for their futures, are a great idea, but not if the plan only becomes a piece of paper lost in a file," Ms. Moseley said. "Our volunteers will go back and follow-up on transition plans to make sure they're workable. And to make sure someone has taken responsibility, for instance, of getting a kid an ID card. Our volunteers can keep everyone on track."

The WINGS program focuses on three goals — education, transition services, and creating and maintaining connections, especially with responsible adults.

This summer the program has offered field trips for high-school aged PMC youth to learn life skills, such as opening and managing a bank account with a small stipend and learning what resources are available in a library, as well as how to acquire and maintain credit and different kinds of insurance.

"On other days, we're going job shadowing, where kids will go to local businesses such as Chick-Fil-A, Best Buy, and a local engineering company," Ms. Moseley said. "Our board members and CASA volunteers chaperone the kids."

CASA attributes its success to local judges' commitment to appointing CASA volunteers as guardian ad litem, which gives them legal authority and more influence. "That's a very, very vital part of the process," Ms. Moseley said.

CAFB combines its local CASA office and Children's Advocacy Center and houses District Attorney and County Attorney offices as well as offices for 13 law enforcement agencies and CPS staff.

Children's Commission Member Named NCJFCJ President

Judge Patricia A. Macias to head National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ)

Judge Patricia A. Macias, Presiding Judge of the 388th Family District Court in El Paso, Texas, was installed as President of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) this July. NCJFCJ is a national nonprofit dedicated to improving the effectiveness of the nation's juvenile courts

"I am proud to serve as leadership of the National Council," Judge Macias said. "Through our work, I join my Texas colleagues and judges throughout the country in promoting best practices in juvenile and family courts."

Judge Macias has served on the bench for more than 13 years and has long been involved with state and national organizations focusing on the needs of children. She was instrumental in developing El Paso's Children's Court, which was designated a Model Court by NCJFCJ, and she led the development of a state pilot project to unify the El Paso Family Courts. She is a member of the Texas Supreme Court Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth and Families, and was a longtime member of the Texas Supreme Court Task Force on Foster Care.

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