

# Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program

## 2017 Report to the Legislature



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## **INTRODUCTION**

This report provides an overview of the Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Programs (FJCIP) in Washington State and shows how a small investment of funds provides better outcomes for children and families while also reaping tangible financial benefits to the community. The FJCIP incorporates Unified Family Court (UFC) principles (see Appendix C) in a model that allows flexible implementation centered on core elements including stable leadership, education, and case management support.

The statewide program promotes a system of local improvements that are incremental and measurable. Funding for the FJCIP makes system improvements possible in each court, large or small, regardless of calendaring systems, number of judges, and availability of local resources. The goal of this effort is to foster judicial and court administrative leadership to institute improvements in family and juvenile courts that are consistent with the UFC principles identified in Appendix C. This report provides examples of some of the work that FJCIP courts are performing, as well as some of the challenges these courts face as reported from October 2016 through September 2017.

Continued funding for the FJCIP is critical with the ultimate goal of providing this program to all dependency courts in Washington State. We are hopeful that the new Department of Children, Youth, and Families will provide an increased awareness of the resources needed by our most vulnerable families. FJCIP courts can shine a light on barriers that prevent dependency cases from moving forward. But, if the necessary resources are not available for families to address underlying causes, delays in timeliness and permanency outcomes are the result. We encourage the Legislature to continue to address these challenges.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- ❖ FJCIP courts provide meaningful assistance and services to families and other stakeholders involved in dependencies.
- ❖ FJCIP courts provide dedicated staff to manage court processes for dependency cases, and under judicial leadership, collaboratively work with
  - Court partners,
  - Community partners, and
  - Other FJCIP coordinators, who share innovative ideas and work together toward continuous quality improvement.
- ❖ These programs can impact a variety of outcomes, ranging from a parent's understanding of court processes to decision-makers receiving more relevant information.
- ❖ Data demonstrates that FJCIP courts generally perform better than other courts on timeliness measures (see Appendix A).
- ❖ Key impacts that negatively affect dependency cases, caseloads, and timelines are:
  - Social worker turnover and
  - Lack of substance abuse treatment programs/facilities.

## **HISTORY**

In 2008, thanks to 2SHB 2822, the FJCIP was established. It provided funds for the initial efforts to reform and enhance court systems that manage family and juvenile cases. The legislature wanted to improve the dependency system in Washington State to be consistent with Unified Family Court principles being adopted nationwide. The judicial branch agreed and asked that improvements be focused on local circumstances. The guiding principles for reform are based on the UFC methodology as well as state and federal timelines related to processing dependency cases. The FJCIP is a balanced approach that directs the dependency reform efforts but allows courts autonomy in deciding how to focus their efforts within the context of UFC.

The FJCIP also requires judicial officers to receive a minimum of 30 hours of topic-specific training in order to preside over family and juvenile cases.

Initially, state funding of \$800,000 provided grants to 16 sites across the state. The money primarily funded case coordinators who worked with the juvenile court/UFC chief judges to conduct local court analysis of service delivery. Findings from the Dependency Timeliness Report were used to establish local improvement plans to facilitate improvements to court practices using the UFC principles as a guide.

State funding was reduced after the first year and currently \$598,819 is allotted for FJCIP annually. The funding reduction precluded funding of innovative projects, training, and travel. Funding covers 83% of the salaries and benefits for the FJCIP coordinator positions. Despite these cuts, 13 superior courts continue to participate in the FJCIP program: Asotin, Chelan, Clallam, Columbia, Garfield, Island, Jefferson, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, and Thurston. This report shows a small annual investment of less than \$600,000 realizes financial benefits over time, not to mention better outcomes for children and families.

FJCIP continues to hold the promise that local reform efforts can be accomplished based on a set of universal best practice principles. During these years of maintenance, our mission has been to develop projects within existing resources that yield statewide benefit, implement a system of evaluating statewide and local projects, and design a communication plan between the sites and the legislature. By these actions, the FJCIP has proven to be a solid investment of state funds. Primary enhancement of the program lies in the expansion of this proven program to other counties in Washington State. The primary focus for the administration of FJCIP over the past few years has been to ensure consistent coordination of dependency reform efforts and best practices throughout the state.

## REPORTING

RCW 2.56.230 requires the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) to compile a financial report comparing the spending plan to actual expenditures and submit it to the appropriate committees of the legislature. When state funding for the FJCIP program was cut in 2009, salaries and benefits of FJCIP coordinators became the primary funding objective for the program, and other expenses, such as training, office supplies, etc., were not reimbursed due to lack of funding.

The “Actual Expenditures” listed below show the actual cost to counties for the FJCIP coordinator salaries and benefits, along with the amount reimbursed by the AOC. The “Spending Plan” shows the amount contracted between each county and the AOC. For most of these counties, the contracted amount does not cover the full cost to the counties for salaries and benefits for the coordinator position, nor does it cover other costs associated with the projects and programs implemented by those courts.

### FJCIP Expenditures FY2017

County	Actual Expenditures		Spending Plan
	Cost to Counties	Reimbursed by AOC	Contracts
Asotin/Garfield/Columbia	\$14,248.68	\$14,248.68	\$18,720.00
Chelan	\$43,546.00	\$19,325.00	\$19,325.00
Clallam	\$34,951.00	\$30,496.32	\$29,673.00
Island	\$29,782.00	\$19,989.00	\$19,989.00
Jefferson	\$12,761.00	\$12,286.54	\$14,420.00
King	\$108,700.00	\$86,308.56	\$85,175.00
Kitsap	\$105,880.00	\$94,015.99	\$90,146.00
Pierce	\$108,172.00	\$100,783.16	\$108,160.00
Snohomish	\$112,011.00	\$95,612.34	\$93,946.00
Spokane	\$76,770.00	\$59,837.66	\$56,000.00
Thurston	\$72,412.50	\$65,915.75	\$63,265.00
TOTAL	\$719,234.18	\$598,819.00	\$598,819.00

FJCIP courts submit semi-annual reports to the AOC providing a comprehensive review of data to identify any trends, address any barriers, and provide possible solutions. Based on these reports, the following information is provided.

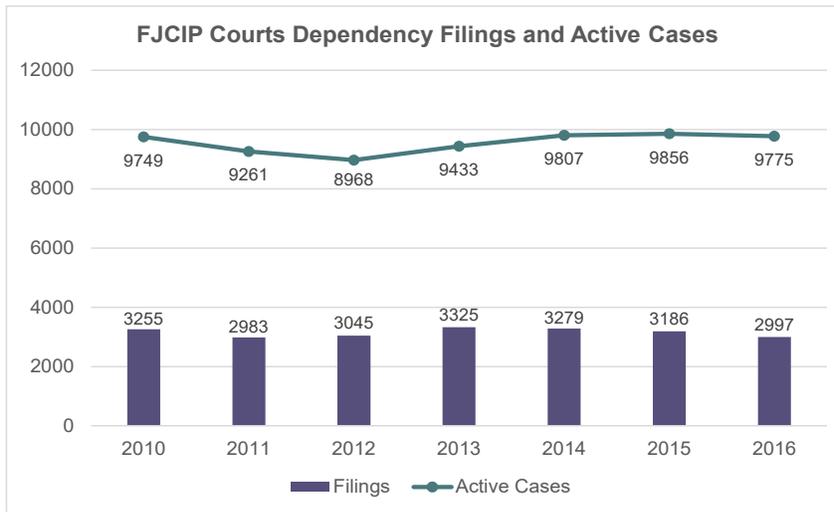
FJCIP courts meet the following requirements established in RCW 2.56.230:

- Assign a chief judge to the family and juvenile court for a minimum of two years;
- Implement one judicial team hearing all of the proceedings in a case involving one family; and
- Judicial officers assigned to family or juvenile courts receive a minimum of 30 hours in specialized topics related to family and juvenile matters within six months of assuming duties in family and juvenile court. (Appendix B lists training received October 2016-September 2017 for judicial officers, in addition to the minimum required 30 hours, and FJCIP coordinators.)

FJCIP grant funding allows the courts to hire FJCIP coordinators. FJCIP coordinators work with the assigned chief judge, conduct local analysis, understand the timeliness indicators and lead local reform efforts identified through the FJCIP project. FJCIP coordinators access the Interactive Dependency Timeliness Reports (IDTR), a web-based application provided by the AOC. This data assists FJCIP coordinators in tracking individual cases and assessing trends in their dependency court system. In the process of providing case management, FJCIP coordinators recognize needs, convene stakeholder groups to develop solutions, and develop and implement projects to address local court needs. Some FJCIP coordinators also implement specific training for their judicial officers and FJCIP court partners. The following are some highlights of trends and possible solutions that we noted in 2017.



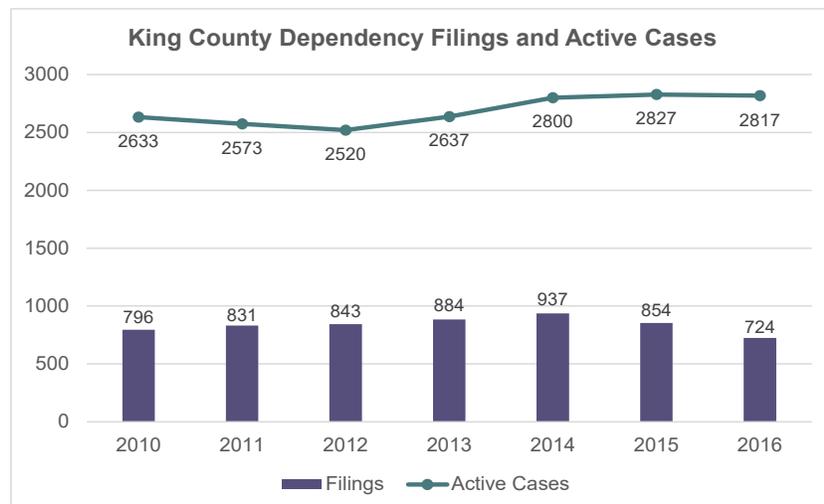
## System Overload with Active Cases



Some FJCIP counties noticed a decrease in filing of dependencies, while others noticed an increase. For example, both King and Snohomish counties realized a decrease in filing of dependencies in 2016, but active cases have continued at higher levels for the past two years. Social worker turnover is one likely contributing factor to the

increase. Another possible contributing factor could be the implementation of the Family Assessment Response (FAR), where the dependency cases that are filed are more difficult and complex. Many of these cases involve substance abuse without adequate access to treatment, increasing time to resolution, which increases the workload with no additional resources.

Continuances of dependency hearings also cause cases to take longer and bog down the system. FJCIP courts regularly review their continuances. A review by King County identified that 1700 cases were continued in 2016. Of those cases, 30% were related to social worker turnover, over half were attributed to court reports and proposed orders not filed or filed late, or new social worker assigned. Many cases were continued multiple times—not just once.



Social worker turnover has been noted as a trend that causes system overload with active cases. According to the Children’s Administration, when there is a change in the social worker assigned to a case, this adds on average three months to the time to case resolution. This is due to large caseloads and training downtime for new employees, along with instability regarding services offered.

## **Solutions Used to Address System Overload**

### ***Additional Review Docket***

Pierce County is considering an additional review docket to manage high caseloads; however, additional staff will be needed.

Snohomish County has added additional review hearings to increase court oversight on cases, particularly in cases involving infants and toddlers or other high risk issues.

### ***Calendar Realignment Project***

King County implemented a calendar realignment project for more even distribution of cases between the Kent and Seattle courthouses to address the increasing disparity in filings between the two courts.

Snohomish County is meeting with their stakeholder team to determine if moving from two teams to six smaller teams would allow for more consolidated calendar time, efficiency in communication from the team, and the ability to increase review hearings and oversight from the court.

### ***Continuances***

Clallam County created a new policy requiring any party requesting a continuance past the statutory deadline to accompany that motion with an affidavit of good cause explaining the factors justifying the delay.

Thurston County now includes the date of the 75th day (for fact finding hearing) on the weekly dependency docket to assist the judge in readily identifying whether or not a continuance should be granted when requested.

### ***Dependency Work Group***

Kitsap County formed a new dependency work group organized to target dependency timelines, identify barriers delaying permanency, and collaborate on possible solutions. They have consolidated the number of hearings and changed the hearing location to the Juvenile Court. This provides relief to the court calendar, and judicial officers, clerks, attorneys, and social workers can now devote more time to clients.

### ***Highlight Cases with Child Representation***

Thurston County highlights cases on the weekly docket where an attorney is appointed for the youth so the judge can hear these cases in a concurrent fashion, allowing youths' attorneys to spend less time in court waiting for their case to be called.

### ***Multi-system Youth Coordination***

Spokane County is beginning the conversation to identify multi-system youth to increase communication and coordination between dependency and juvenile offender cases.

## ***Timeline Report***

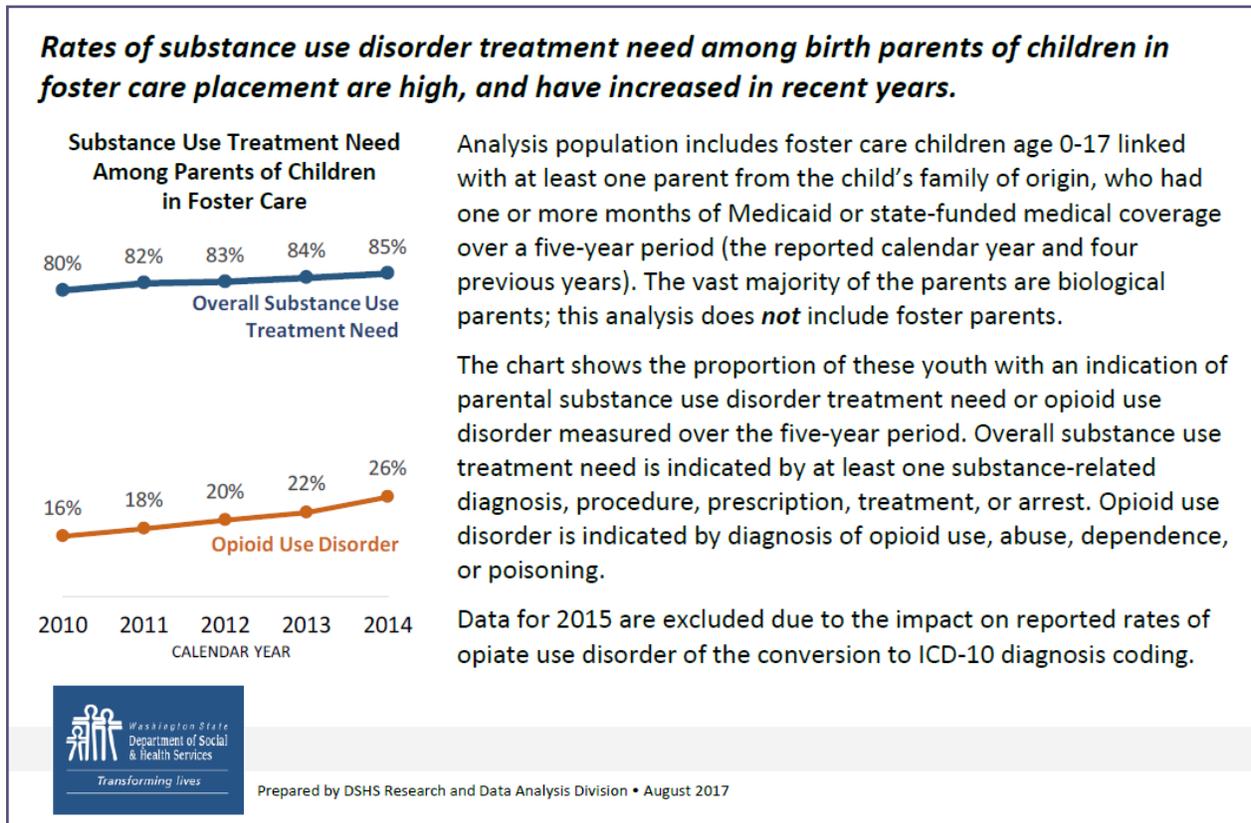
King County worked with their IT department to develop a new timeline report. For each case on the docket, the report shows the deadline for 75 day fact-finding, 6 month review hearing, 12 month permanency planning hearing, and 15 month permanency timeliness measures.

Snohomish County is working on using the newly implemented Odyssey Case Management System to track key dates for fact-finding, reviews, and termination petition filing.



# Increase in Substance Abuse/Chemical Dependency/ Mental Health Issues

The chart below, provided by the Department of Social and Health Services, shows increases in substance abuse and opioid use by parents of children in the foster care system. While this data was only available through 2014, it is well known that throughout the nation there has been an explosive increase in opioid and heroin addiction. So much so that most states, including ours, have developed a Governor’s Task Force on Opioid Abuse, and now a National Task Force on Opioid Addiction has been implemented by the Conference of Chief Justices and Conference of State Court Administrators.



Our FJCIP courts have also noticed that mental health issues have increased and appear to be more severe and complex. Lack of service providers is a huge issue, especially in the rural counties where service providers are sometimes a two-hour drive away. Transportation to obtain services can likewise be a barrier for many families. Even in urban areas, substance abuse treatment, especially in-patient treatment, is scarce. Coupled with the challenge of finding enough foster homes for children with behavioral issues, court officials and case workers have a difficult time responding to the wide variety of needs faced by children in this system. Despite these sometimes overwhelming challenges, courts are continuing to investigate promising programs or services to address these issues.

## **Solutions Used to Address Increased Substance Abuse/Mental Health Issues**

### ***Community-wide Trauma-Informed Practice***

Snohomish County is collaborating with the Children’s Wellness Coalition through programs and training to establish a trauma-informed community to ensure children and youth flourish, and are equipped with resiliency.

### ***Cross-Training Providers***

Jefferson County is considering cross-training the provider for the parenting class to also offer family preservation services. This would increase the caseload size to help retain a service provider in their rural community.

### ***Family Recovery Court Screenings***

Pierce County noticed that almost half of the parents referred for family recovery court screenings did not appear. They realized the location of the screening made a difference, so it was moved to the juvenile court campus. They also changed the hearing times from early morning to later in the afternoon. The judge held an informational session for parents’ attorneys and stakeholders to learn how family recovery court might benefit dependency parents with substance use disorders, including a panel with parent allies who spoke about how this treatment court was helpful to them.

### ***Family Treatment Court***

Clallam County FJCIP coordinator prepares a binder including all participants’ current dependency court orders to allow for quick reference by the court. The coordinator will begin attending the Living in Families Together (L.I.F.T.) court staffing.

Jefferson County received increased grant funding to improve their therapeutic court.

King County expanded their family treatment court from half-day to a full-day at the Kent location.

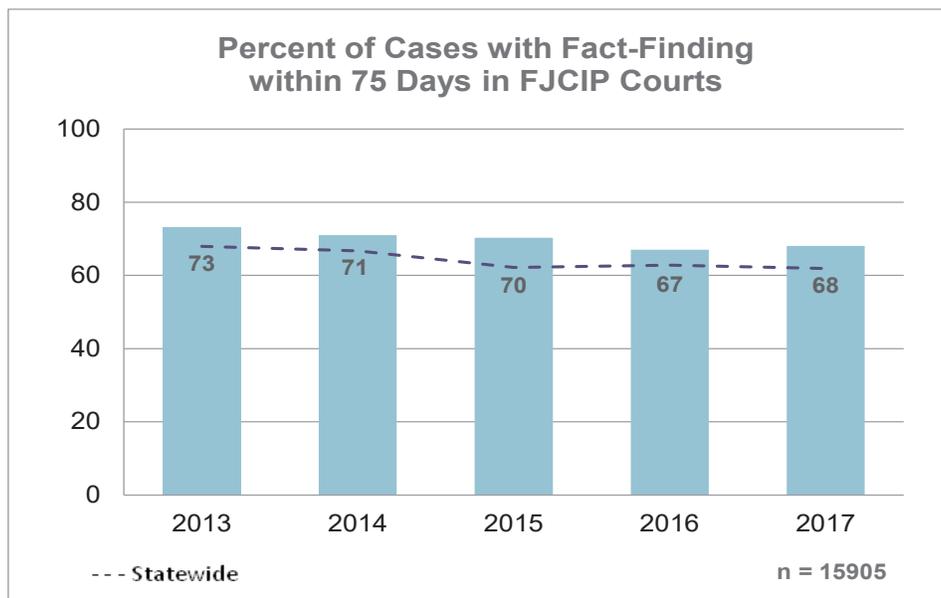
### ***Wrap-Around Approach to Services***

Snohomish County, in collaboration with community partners, including government agencies/ programs, local service providers, funding sources, and others, formed a workgroup in response to a significant increase in the number and proportion of children under one year of age entering dependency due to heroin/opioid use by the parent(s). The group identified and prioritized a list of services that are most critical to the populations served:

- Substance abuse assessments/evaluations/detox/treatment
- Mental health information/assessments/evaluations/treatment
- Housing information/assistance/resources
- Parenting support/mentoring/advocacy
- Basic needs (food, clothing, etc.)

Staff at the Denney Juvenile Justice Center are currently working with community partners to plan and implement a targeted approach to make services and supports available when and where they are most needed.

## Fact-Finding within 75 Days



Several of our FJCIP counties have improved performance regarding compliance with Fact-Finding within 75 days. Chelan County has increased from 86% to 98% compliance; Kitsap County increased from 71% to 80% compliance; and Pierce County increased from 78% to 82% compliance.

However, that is not the case for all FJCIP counties. For instance, in 2012, King County had their highest rate of compliance with 70% of the 785 cases complying with a median time of 65 days. Currently the rate of compliance is 53% for 644 cases, with a median time of 75 days. Approximately 20% of the non-compliant cases were reviewed, showing two main reasons for pre-dispositive continuance: first, more negotiation was needed and second due to the unavailability of at least one of the parties. The average length of time cases exceeded the 75 day measure was 56 days.

Snohomish County has also observed that more cases are going to trial. The number of cases in which heroin addiction is the primary cause for the dependency has increased. The time to obtain assessment/evaluation and subsequent treatment appears to be contributing to increased time to fact-finding.

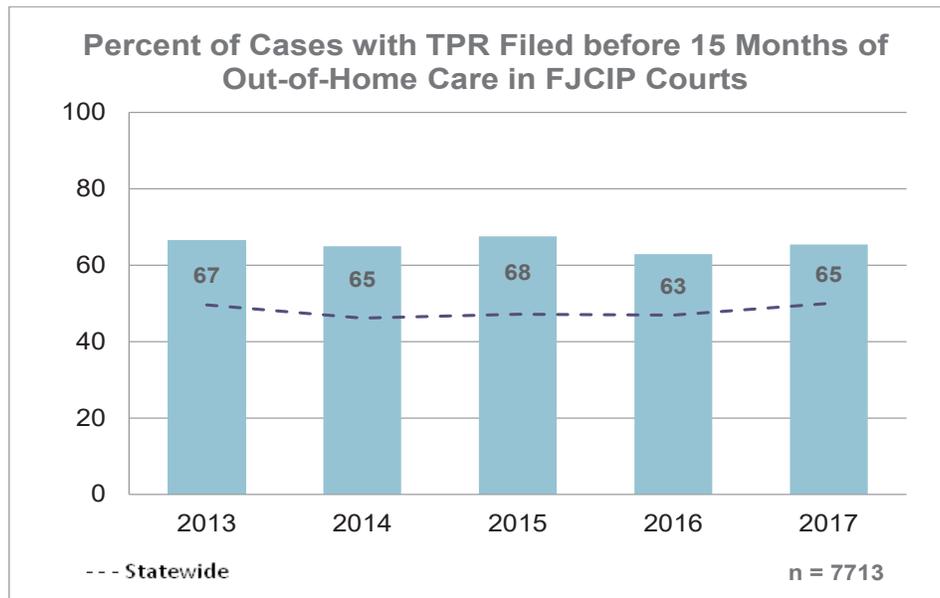
Thurston County has further noticed more contested cases are being filed, which require the need for extended fact-finding trials. Continuances are frequently granted beyond the 75 day timeline as the need for more fact-finding trials has congested the court schedule.

## Solutions Used to Address Compliance with Fact-Finding within 75 Days

Pierce County frontloads their case schedules to help engage the parties earlier in the process. Pierce County has returned to the practice of setting a 30-day case conference at the shelter care hearing in order to bring the parties to the case to develop a case plan, including expectations of Children’s Administration and parents regarding the care and placement of the child. Fact-Finding hearings are set at 45 days and the dispositive order is entered in the majority of cases. If an agreement is not reached, a settlement conference is scheduled at the next available date (prior to the 75 day mark). Occasionally, an Order of Dependency in which the parents acknowledge the need to remedy parental deficiencies is entered, and a settlement conference is set if there are any other issues in contention like placement, visitation, or services. A modified “Spokane Model” team system is used to minimize conflicting attorney schedules.



## Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) within 15 Months



Compliance with this measure has improved for several of the FJCIP counties. Kitsap County increased from 50% to 70% compliance mostly due to improper codes no longer being entered in the case management system. Jefferson County is also working on the issue of improper coding. King County observed that 27% of their noncompliant cases were due to coding errors. Pierce County also increased in compliance from 75% to 88%; however, they have observed that it takes longer to engage opiate abusing parents, who often don't become engaged until 6-9 months into the case. Snohomish County has consistently remained in the mid-80% range, but has also experienced the impact of opioid addiction on cases resulting in an increased focus on early engagement with parents in cases involving infants.

### Solutions Used to Address Compliance with TPR within 15 Months

#### *Bring Issue to Stakeholder Group*

In King County, the FJCIP coordinator brought the issue to the attention of the dependency court judges, and then to the Dependency Operations Committee, which consists of child welfare stakeholders, who will engage their staff for possible resolution.

#### *Case Status Report*

The Clallam County FJCIP coordinator provides a report to stakeholders each month, including TPR cases coming due and current status of cases. The coordinator is monitoring good cause findings and making sure the box gets checked for the clerk to input. A new court procedure is also being considered: once a change in permanency plan has been ordered, the court will set a review hearing within 45 days. If the petition has not been filed at 45 days, the court will set the matter on the calendar every two weeks until the petition has been filed.

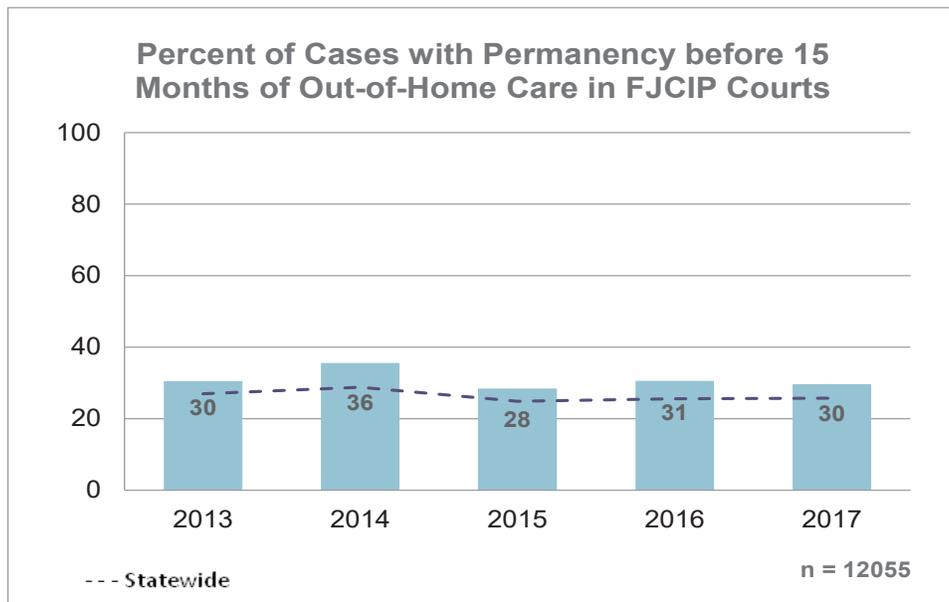
## ***Consult with Assistant Attorneys General (AAG)***

In Kitsap County, the FJCIP coordinator provided out of compliance case numbers to the AAG to identify why the cases are out of compliance.

In Thurston County, the FJCIP coordinator closely monitors the cases and frequently communicates with the AAG regarding due dates, which has increased compliance.



## Permanency within 15 Months



Achieving permanency before 15 months of out-of-home care has been challenging for all counties. In Clallam County, the completion of home studies for guardianship or adoption is one of the biggest barriers to closing cases and providing permanency. This is partly due to a lack of staff to complete home studies and to assist families in getting paperwork completed timely to start the process. Snohomish County has noticed that time to permanency is impacted by emancipation and guardianships. Sometimes court officials and personnel are forced to maintain an open case to make sure the youth have full access to resources, or finding relatives later in the case that allow a child to stay with family through guardianship. Thurston County observed that dismissal of dependency action is slowed when parenting plans need to be established and the non-custodial parent cannot be found for legal service and has not had contact with the attorney or social workers.

### Solutions Used to Address Compliance with Permanency within 15 Months

#### ***Best for Babies Project/Court***

The Pierce County Baby Court Team meets regularly to evaluate the program and incorporate feedback received from stakeholders. Eleven infants/toddlers have been served by the Baby Court since implementation in October 2016, including 4 dismissals resulting in reunification. Dismissals resulting in reunification occurred at 8, 9, 10, and 16 months, which is far earlier than the standard dependency case (24+ months). The FJCIP coordinator and Best for Babies CASA coordinator implemented the program under the guidance of the Baby Court Judge.

The News Tribune recently published an article, “Can Giving Babies Back Sooner to Parents in Drug Treatment be Best? A Court is Trying It” <http://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/crime/article167226732.html>. The link also contains an online video that provides a parent’s perspective of their Baby Court/Best for Babies experience. The Baby Court in Pierce County is now being reviewed with interest as a promising new model for courts nationwide.

### ***Case Conference Meetings***

In Chelan County, cases where parents are ready and able to engage in services are scheduled for a case conference at the courthouse the Wednesday following the shelter care hearing. This provides additional time for social workers, attorneys, and guardians ad litem to focus on complex cases.

### ***Early Engagement Team***

King County has a Table of Ten stakeholder group working on early intervention services for children in the system, ages birth to three, needing early education services identified and matched with a professional.

The Pierce County team meets quarterly with the goal of early engagement and assisting parents to get services sooner so children can be returned when safety threats can be safely managed in the home. The following are some of the team strategies:

- When possible, Children’s Administration will hold family team decision meetings (FTDM) before the shelter care hearings, allowing families to be more prepared for court and begin to understand the reason for the child’s removal.
- The Parents for Parents program partnered with Children’s Administration court workers to share resources, help parents understand the dependency process, and assist with registering for Dependency 101 classes.
- A family resource wall was created in the lobby of the court where publications will be stocked by social workers, parent allies, etc.
- The FJCIP coordinator in conjunction with the guardian ad litem program provides paternity tests at the courthouse, allowing alleged fathers to be tested right away.
- A visitation provider was identified to pick up interim visits within 12-24 hours of a referral, which can provide parents a visit before or shortly after shelter care, increasing family trust.
- To address the need for quicker identification of relative placements and completion of background checks, the AG’s office has the background check forms available at court for parents and families. Children’s Administration court workers and parent allies will be able to assist families in filling out the forms so children are placed with relatives sooner.

## ***Establishing Biological Paternity Early Project (EBPEP)***

After the successful pilot project for the EBPEP, several FJCIP counties have implemented the program in their courts. Chelan, Kitsap, Pierce, and Thurston have fully implemented this program. King and Snohomish Counties are in the process of implementation. The purpose of EBPEP is to significantly reduce the time to determine paternity in dependency and termination cases by providing no-cost, easily accessible, and rapid DNA testing to alleged fathers in dependency and termination cases. This has resulted in cost savings and increased placement with biological fathers and paternal relatives. Pierce County has realized median time from testing ordered to results received—14 days. Long-term funding for this service needs to be addressed. Presently Pierce County has pieced together funding from Children’s Administration and the Office of Public Defense to pay for the testing, yet the funds received will not cover the costs of the program. Pierce County Juvenile Court is paying for the amount not covered by contracts. It is hoped the program will continue into 2018. At the time of this report, contracts are not yet in place and are being negotiated.

## ***Family Court Navigator***

In Chelan County, the Family Court Navigator serves as an initial point of contact for any parent in cases where an order granting concurrent jurisdiction has been entered. The navigator provides assistance, schedules appointments with the courthouse facilitator, refers for a volunteer attorney through the Coordinated Legal Education Advice and Referral (CLEAR) organization or local volunteer attorney services agency, and provides specialized case flow management and resource referrals.

## ***Mediation***

In King County, dependency mediation will begin in November 2017 in Kent.

## ***Parent Mentorship***

Chelan County is implementing a parent mentorship program for families entering the dependency system by assigning a parent ally to families at the shelter care hearing, viewing a Dependency 101 video, and providing parents with a resource manual (based on Spokane’s program, but modified for their local community).

Clallam County was approved as one of four new sites to implement the Parents for Parents program, funded by the legislature, and will be working with Children’s Home Society to implement the program.

## ***Parent Services Presented Earlier in the Dependency Process***

Kitsap County is developing a protocol for notifying parties about recommended services for parents earlier in the process. At the 30 day staffing, Children’s Administration will prepare a one-page “services recommended” document for the AAG that will inform parties of the recommended services planned to be presented at the time of fact-finding. Attorneys will be able to discuss recommended services with their clients at an earlier date. Disposition could occur sooner and services can get started, which will improve timeliness. Also, this could possibly eliminate an extended trial hearing which will open up schedules for other hearings.

## ***Permanency Summits***

FJCIP counties will host local permanency summits to provide an opportunity for child welfare system professionals, including line staff, to gather in a forum outside of the courtroom setting to develop an understanding of each other's roles in the child welfare process. This also provides an opportunity to address system issues and share ideas for system improvement in order to increase the number of children achieving timely reunification/permanency.

## ***Protein for All***

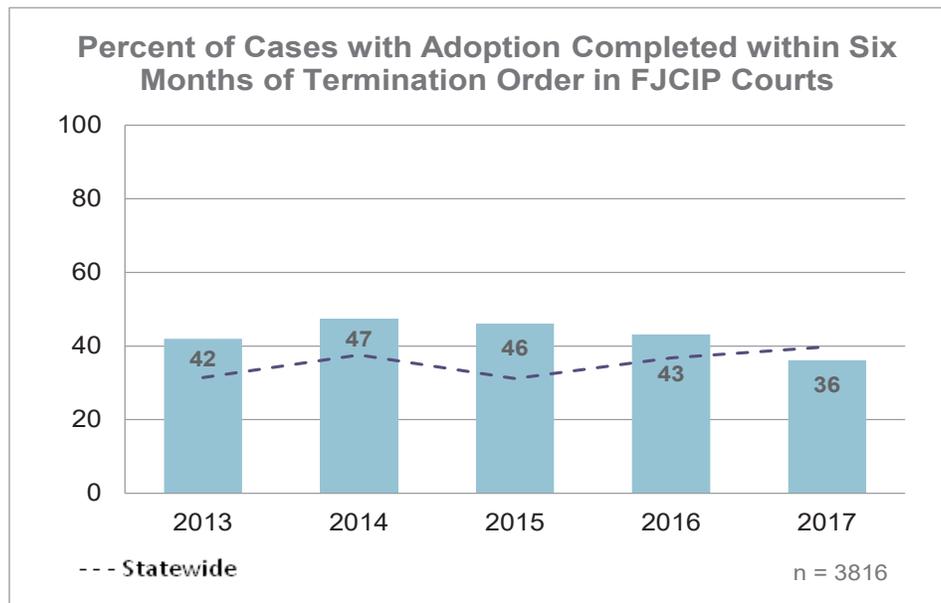
Protein for All provides resources to help individuals and families who find themselves navigating the legal system while experiencing challenges such as food security, homelessness, or high levels of stress. These resources are designed to help optimize brain function during high stake events like going to court, evaluations, visitations, and case meetings. Protein for All projects have been implemented in Chelan, Clallam, King, Pierce, Spokane, and Thurston Counties. Snohomish County is working toward implementation. FJCIP coordinators work together with community partners to provide healthy protein snacks at the court. Chelan County provides handouts in English and Spanish about the importance of protein from the [proteinforall.org](http://proteinforall.org) website. Pierce County provides a flyer with information where food-insufficient families may access help through the foodbank.

## ***Reviewing Cases Where Reunification was not Achieved***

Jefferson County is conducting a case review looking for commonalities or patterns when reunification was not achieved, with the goal of discovering areas for system improvement.



## Adoption within 6 Months



2017 is the first year FJCIP courts have fallen below the statewide average in completing adoptions within six months. FJCIP coordinators noted the following issues slow down the adoption process:

- Changes in adoption workers
- Delays in processing home studies due to staff turnover
- Caregivers slow to complete paperwork
- Adoption units responsible for cases in more than one county
- File redaction must be completed by the social worker to remove any confidential information before the file can be forwarded to the adoption worker

Due to these issues, there is a large home study backlog which is the primary cause of cases not meeting the timeliness measurement of adoption within 6 months.

## Solutions Used to Address Compliance with Adoption within 6 Months

### *Home Studies*

Clallam County is considering requiring the home study process begin with termination of parental rights rather than the guardianship/adoption petition. They are also considering having the FJCIP coordinator assist individuals in filling out paperwork needed for the home study.

Kitsap County is creating a new checklist for termination hearings to include asking if the home study has been requested.

Pierce County created a new checklist to address home studies at an earlier juncture.

## ***Adoption Workgroup***

Kitsap County began an adoption workgroup, consisting of the court commissioner, adoption unit and Division of Licensed Resources (DLR) staff, AAG, and guardians ad litem; to review and examine ways to improve processes between and within agencies to improve timeliness measures.

## ***Legally Free Docket***

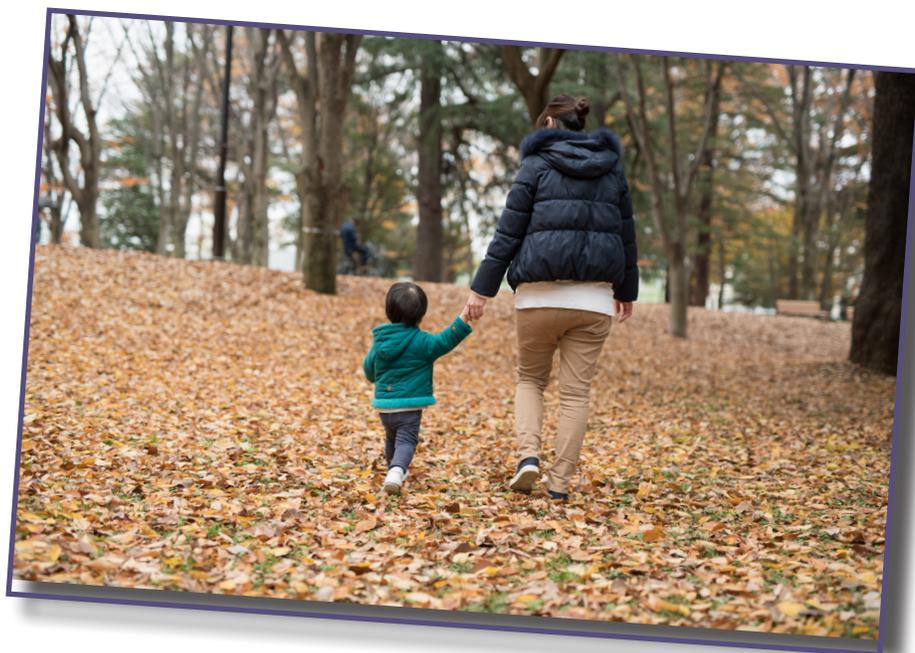
Pierce County recognized an annual increase in legally free children over the past five years and provided an additional legally free docket to help ensure the quality of hearings are maintained.

Snohomish County has an assigned judge to all legally free children, with separately scheduled dockets and more frequent review hearings. All children ages 12 and older are assigned an attorney upon becoming legally free.

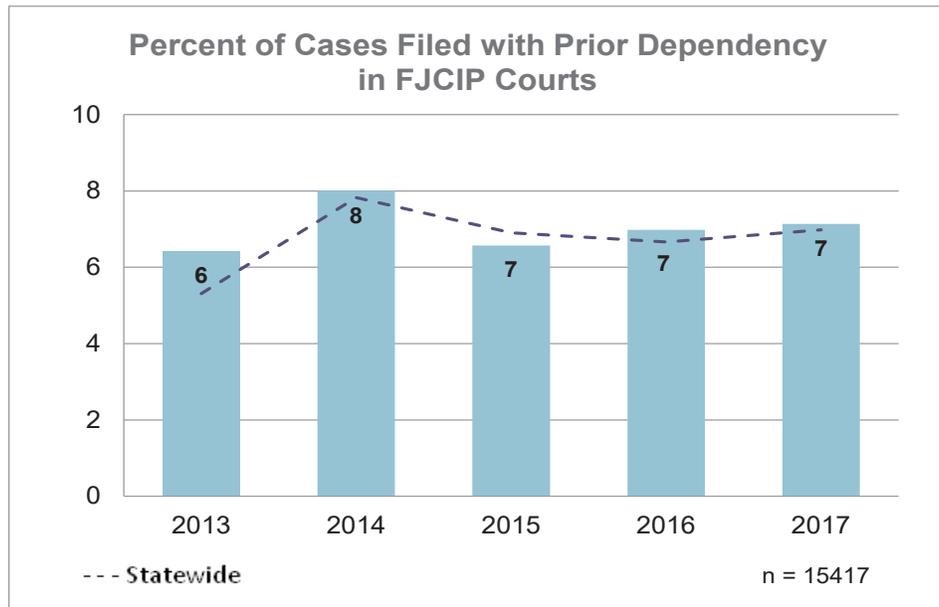
Spokane County has one commissioner working the legally free/adoption cases. The FJCIP coordinator is looking at the process to see how it could be improved.

## ***File Redaction***

The Court Improvement Program (CIP) director contacted Children's Administration regarding file redaction. Previously Children's Administration only had six licenses for the software program to assist with redaction. Recently, every adoption worker received the redaction software, which should assist with improving movement of these cases.



## Re-dependency



This graph depicts dependency cases filed during the year that had a prior dependency case for the child that ended with a documented dismissal. Based on a review of dependency petitions, Snohomish County believes that relapse, particularly heroin, is a major contributing factor to re-dependency.

### Solutions Used to Address Re-dependency

#### *Community Engagement*

Island County established a Table of Ten stakeholder group to identify and expand resources for families going through dependency by engaging their community to assist families in reunification that is sustainable. This approach will not only integrate them into the community, but should also reduce the usual stigma and isolation, and support the bond with their children.

#### *Reunification Celebrations*

King, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, and Thurston Counties hold a family reunification celebration to recognize the accomplishments of parents and many professionals that support them in getting their children home safely.

## CONCLUSION

FJCIP courts provide meaningful assistance and services to families and other stakeholders involved in dependency court. These services can impact several kinds of outcomes, ranging from a parent's understanding of court processes to decision-makers receiving more relevant information. Contributions of FJCIP courts to both legal and real-life outcomes are similarly influenced by court environment and by the range of services and benefit programs available in the jurisdiction.

FJCIP courts are working more collaboratively not only with their court partners, but also community partners in order to connect youth and families with community resources. Because these FJCIP courts are able to provide dedicated staff to manage court processes for dependency cases, and under judicial leadership, provide assistance to convene stakeholder groups to work collaboratively on systemic improvements, overall, dependency outcomes are improving in these courts compared to courts that do not have FJCIP support.

The data provided in Appendix A and in the [Dependency Timeliness Report](#) demonstrates that FJCIP courts generally perform better than other courts on timeliness measures. This is due, in part, to a court's focus on improving the dependency processes with dedicated staff to monitor and bring attention to areas that need to be addressed.

The FJCIP coordinators support and collaborate with each other through a Community of Practice, which allows the coordinators to meet online once per month and at site visits twice per year. These sessions allow coordinators to share their innovative ideas, ask questions, and work together toward continuous quality improvement.

Despite the FJCIP benefits, two items impacting dependency cases, caseloads, and timeliness more than anything else is social worker turnover and the lack of substance abuse treatment programs/facilities, especially inpatient treatment for mothers with infants. The majority of dependency cases involve addiction, primarily heroin/opioids. Without adequate and appropriate treatment programs available at the local level, counties are experiencing more cases with infants, longer times to permanency, and a commensurate increase in rates of re-entry into out-of-home care. We encourage the Legislature to continue to address these challenges.

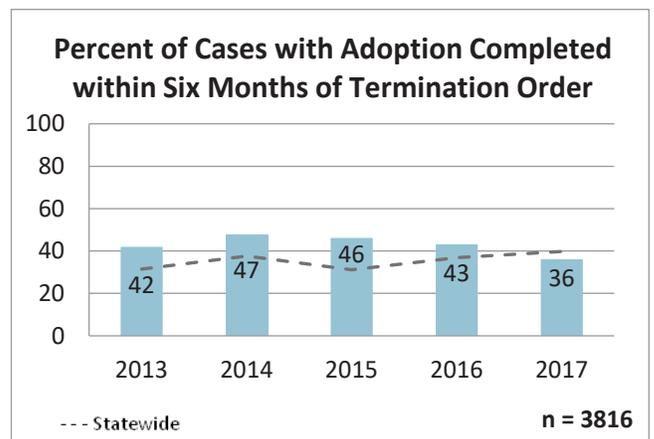
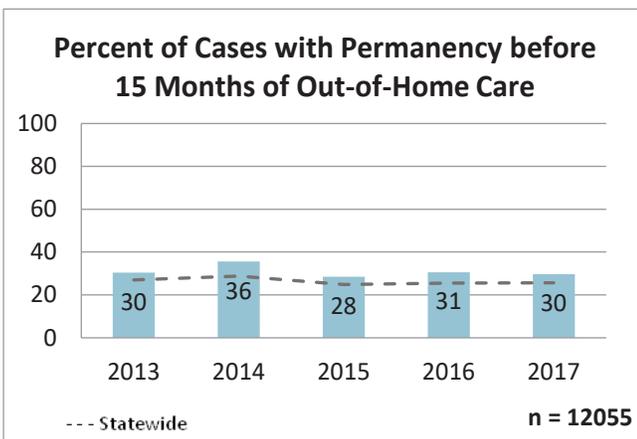
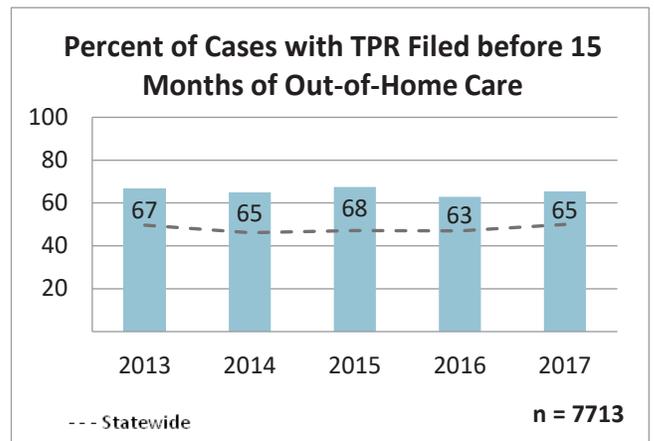
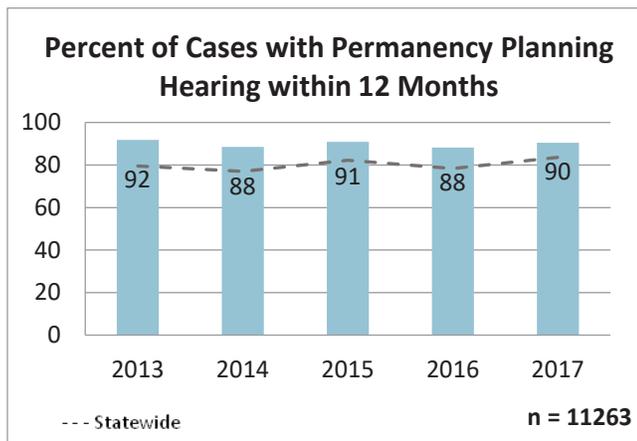
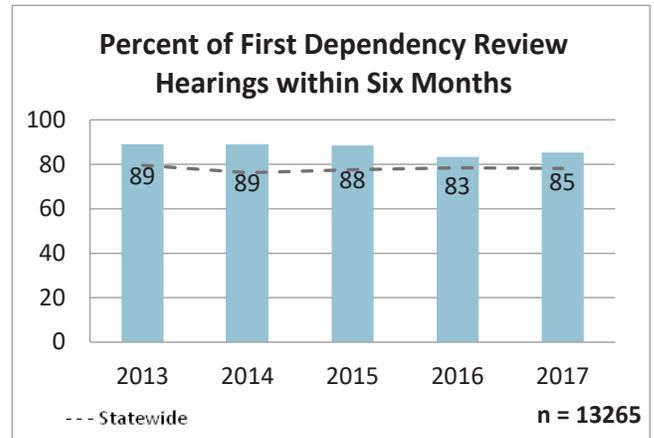
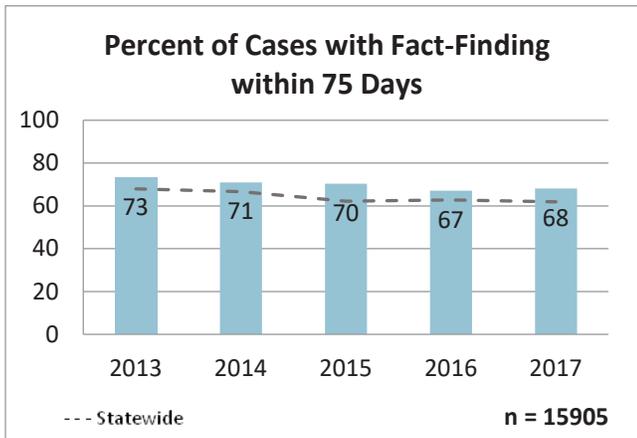
Continued funding for the FJCIP is critical. Full funding for the FJCIP coordinator positions would also make a huge difference. The ultimate goal is for all dependency courts in Washington State to have funds available to support an FJCIP coordinator so that all could benefit from improved outcomes.

We are hopeful that the new Department of Children, Youth, and Families will provide an increased awareness of the resources needed by our most vulnerable families. FJCIP courts can shine a light on barriers that prevent dependency cases from moving forward. But, if the necessary resources are not available for families to address underlying causes, delays in timeliness and permanency outcomes are the result.

In 2008 the Legislature and the judicial branch joined together to implement the FJCIP project which has proven to be a life enhancing, effective measure for many children in the foster care system in 13 counties. Ten years later, it is hoped that in 2018 additional state funds can be found to expand this program to other areas of the state, along with needed local resources for children and families, so that Washington State can truly have a UFC approach to permanency for some of our most vulnerable children.



## APPENDIX A PERFORMANCE OF THE FJCIP COURTS ON THE DEPENDENCY TIMELINESS INDICATORS



## **APPENDIX B**

### **TRAINING BEYOND THE 30 HOURS REQUIRED FOR JUDICIAL OFFICERS**

#### TRAINING OF FJCIP JUDICIAL OFFICERS OCTOBER 2016-SEPTEMBER 2017

- 18 judicial officers attended the three-day Child Abuse and Neglect Institute (CANI) training developed by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ)
- 7 judicial officers attended the Children's Justice Conference offering a variety of courses related to child welfare and well-being
- 5 judicial officers attended the Washington State Judicial College for new judicial officers, which includes a session on dependency
- 3 judicial officers attended the annual Becca Conference
- 3 judicial officers attended Bully, the Bullied and the Bystander
- 2 judicial officers attended Civility Project Workshop
- 2 judicial officers attended Infant Development & Dependency: How do these go together?
- 2 judicial officers attended the annual Domestic Violence Symposium
- 2 judicial officers attended Immigration Rights and Issues for Court
- 2 judicial officers participated in the two-day Region 10 Parent Representation Leadership Forum, and additional day of Families Matter: Supporting and Humanizing Parents training
- 2 judicial officers attended Protein for All regarding optimizing decision making
- 2 judicial officers attended Substance Abuse Testing

FJCIP judicial officers attended the following array of training sessions individually:

- 30 Years of Convictions under *Batson*
- Americans with Disabilities Act Basics for Judicial Officers
- Civil Rights Then and Now
- Complexities of Domestic Violence
- Enhanced Judicial Skills in DV Cases
- Family Law Update and Best Practices
- Family Youth and System Partner Round Table Trainings
- Guardianship Attorney Fees
- Indian Child Welfare Act Focus Group
- Infant Mental Health: An Early Start!
- Judicial Ethics Brownbag
- Juvenile Mental Health
- Lizard or Wizard? Brain Function/Optimization in Court

- NCJFCJ Annual Conference
- NCJFCJ Enhancing Judicial Skills in DV Cases
- Non-parental Custody Proceedings
- Parentage and Plain Language Forms
- Perils of Diminished Capacity Clients
- Permanent Placement: Guardianship/Non-parental/Adoption
- Pierce County Juvenile Court Summit
- Role of Judicial Officers in Self-representation Issues
- Special Immigrant Juvenile Status
- Transgender Rights and Reasonable Accommodations
- Transgender Youth
- What Can We Learn from the Past: The Chinese Expulsion from Tacoma and Our City's Reconciliation Efforts

#### TRAINING OF FJCIP COORDINATORS OCTOBER 2016-SEPTEMBER 2017

- 10 FJCIP coordinators attended the 2017 Children's Justice Conference offering a variety of courses related to child welfare and well-being.
- 2 FJCIP coordinators attended the annual CASA/GAL conference
- 2 FJCIP coordinators attended the annual Domestic Violence Symposium
- 2 FJCIP coordinators attended the 2016 Indian Child Welfare Summit

FJCIP coordinators attended the following array of training sessions individually:

- Case Management Assessment Process
- Case Management Training
- Child Abuse and Neglect
- Civility Project Workshop
- Compassion Fatigue
- Creating a Holistic Response for Domestic Violence Litigants through Civil Legal Services
- Establishing Effective Drug Testing Protocols in Treatment Webinar
- Everything you Need to Know about THC Testing Webinar
- Hope Theory Presentation
- Human Trafficking
- Infant Development & Dependency: How do these go together?
- Infant Mental Health: An Early Start!
- Instant Devices Versus Lab Testing Webinar
- Intergenerational Trauma in Native American Families
- Interpreting Opiate Drug Test Results Webinar
- Lizard or Wizard? Brain Function/Optimization in Court
- Motivational Interviewing

- National Adoption Month Webinar
- Perinatal Collaborative of Pierce County Conference
- Resiliency in Action
- Results Count – Annie E. Casey Foundation
- Reunification
- Rite Track Case Management System Training
- Substance Abuse Testing
- Supporting Attachments to Promote Children’s Emotional Well-being
- THC Testing and More Webinar
- The Changing Terrain of THC Webinar
- Trends in Opioid Abuse and Testing Webinar
- Washington State Hospital Association – Safe Deliveries Roadmap
- Working Together for Children’s Success – Enriching Supportive Relationships
- Zero to Three Cross Sites Meeting

**APPENDIX C**  
**UNIFIED FAMILY COURT BEST PRACTICES**

Adopted by the Board for Judicial Administration  
March 18, 2005

1. One Family, One Judicial Team. Perhaps the hallmark of a UFC is the concept of one judicial team, comprised of dedicated and specially trained judges and commissioners, hearing all of a family's legal matters. Recommendations include:
  - Assignment of one judicial team to one family. Require assignment of one judicial team to one family in cases under UFC management, so far as practical.
  - Types of cases under UFC management. Require adoption of local rules identifying types of cases to be included under UFC management, including actions from among Title 13 actions (dependency and termination, juvenile offender, CHINS, ARY), dissolution, modification, nonparental custody, parentage, domestic violence, adoption, and truancy.
2. Case Management. A process to resolve multiple case types through centralized case management is an essential UFC element. Recommendations include:
  - Case screening criteria. Require local courts to develop criteria for screening and coordinating cases included in UFC management.
  - Case management objectives. Design case management to reduce protracted litigation and achieve compliance with court orders.
  - Case planning conferences. Implement case planning conferences where appropriate.
3. Specialized Education. A knowledgeable and dedicated judiciary is vital. Recommendations include:
  - Specialized training. Require that judicial officers serving in UFC receive specialized training in areas of judicial leadership, child development, cultural awareness, child abuse and neglect, chemical dependency, domestic violence, and mental illness.
  - Statewide training opportunities. Provide frequent and regular opportunities for judicial officers to receive required specialized training.
4. Dedicated Judiciary. Longer-term judicial assignments provide continuity to families and ensure experienced and dedicated judicial officers. The UFC Workgroup recommends:
  - Long-term assignment of judicial officers. UFC assignments should be a minimum of two years.
5. Mandatory Mediation. UFC is a problem-solving court. Use of non-adversarial methods to resolve family disputes during the life of a case is critical. In addition to an overall problem solving-approach, the UFC Workgroup recommends:
  - Mandatory early mediation. Require mediation of parenting disputes within 120 days of filing an action and before an opportunity for trial, as far as practical with available mediation resources. Court communities are encouraged to develop mediation opportunities.