



WASHINGTON
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Washington State Court Improvement Program Strategic Plan FFY 2017-2021

The well being of children depends on all of us...



Overall Goal/Mission of CIP:

Improve outcomes for children and families in the child welfare system by increasing collaborative efforts of courts and child welfare partners.

Washington State Court Improvement Program Steering Committee Members

Co-Chairs:

Judge Anne Hirsch, Thurston County Superior Court

Commissioner Michelle Ressa, Spokane County Superior Court

Members:

Jess Lewis, Foster Care Program Supervisor, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Judge Barbara Mack, King County Superior Court

Jill Malat, Washington State Office of Civil Legal Aid

Joanne Moore, Director, Washington State Office of Public Defense

Ron Murphy, Senior Director of Strategic Consulting, Casey Family Programs

Ryan Murrey, Director, Washington State Court Appointed Special Advocates

Judge Kathryn Nelson, Pierce County Superior Court

Dennis Rabidou, Washington Association of Juvenile Court Administrators

Toni Sebastian, Director of Program and Policy, Children's Administration

Shannon Thomas, Staff Attorney, Kalispel Tribe of Indians

Carrie Wayno, Assistant Attorney General

CIP Team:

Cindy Bricker, CIP Director

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Matt Orme, Senior Research Associate, Washington State Center for Court Research

Kelly Warner-King, Co-Director, Court Improvement Training Academy

Rob Wyman, Co-Director, Court Improvement Training Academy

Introduction

The Court Improvement Program (CIP) Steering Committee met on March 28, 2016 and reviewed the mission statement and principles for decision making, the status of recent CIP projects, statewide dependency performance data, and the CIP budget outlook. The committee discussed the need for better dependency training for judicial officers, especially with a large number of retiring judges. The committee also discussed permanency summits as proposed by the Permanency CQI Workgroup. Using information gathered from these activities, the committee identified and prioritized target areas for change.

Due to the severe budget cuts to CIP grant funding, many cuts were made to our original strategic plan. This strategic plan reflects how the Court Improvement Program plans to move forward to improve the dependency process in Washington State, funded only by the CIP Basic Grant.

The Washington State Court Improvement Program staff will continue to improve working relationships with the Children's Administration to improve policies and processes around child welfare, including a focus on the Child and Family Services Review. Availability of shared data is such an important component of CQI, we have chosen to pay for research staff out of the basic grant. Our hope is that future funding will become available for data and training, so that we will have funding for judicial training and CQI projects.

This strategic plan will be the guide by which the Washington State CIP will allocate grant funding and other resources towards improving outcomes for children and families in the child welfare system.

Outcome #1: Timely, thorough and complete court hearings

Need Driving Activities:

- Dependency and termination of parental rights (TPR) filings remain at a steady high when numbers increased in 2010. A total of 4,866 dependency cases were filed in 2015. After a steady increase over the previous three years, termination filings dropped 12% from 2014 through 2015. While improvements have been made with regard to: reducing time to fact-finding, last year the percentage of cases reaching permanency before 15 months of out-of-home care decreased 5%, and the percentage of adoptions within six months of the termination order decreased 4% from the previous year. In an effort to increase the number of children achieving timely reunification/permanency, the CIP Director is co-leading, along with Children's Administration, a team of multi-disciplinary stakeholders to review data, identify targets for performance improvement, and work in a collaborative effort with the stakeholders in areas where improvements are needed.
- In 2008 the Washington State Legislature passed a bill establishing the Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Program (FJCIP) and provided grant funding for 16 counties to participate. Emphasis was placed on the principle of One Family/One Team, specific training for judicial officers, longer judicial rotations in family and juvenile courts, early mediation, and case management. FJCIP Coordinators were hired for each participating county to coordinate cases. Washington State Center for Court Research (WSCCR) was tasked with measuring performance of FJCIP courts using the Dependency Timeliness Report. Data shows that FJCIP courts exceed performance compared to non-FJCIP courts in timeliness measures. FJCIP coordinators also use the interactive dependency timeliness report (IDTR), which is updated monthly, to track their dependency cases.

In March 2015, the CIP Steering Committee was asked to provide oversight of the FJCIP courts in order to provide guidance for continuous quality improvement of the program. The CIP Committee agreed to fulfill the need for oversight. FJCIP expenditures have been used as the match for the CIP grants for several years. The FJCIP Oversight Committee will keep the CIP Director and Steering Committee informed of program needs and progress.

Data Sources:

Dependent Children in Washington: Case Timeliness and Outcomes 2015 Annual Report:

<http://www.courts.wa.gov/wsccl/docs/DTR2015.pdf>

[RCW 2.56.230](#) – Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Grant Program

Strategic Category: X Capacity Building X Court Function Improvement X Systemic Reform

Measurable Objective #1	Increase the number of children achieving timely reunification/permanency.
<p>Activity or Project Description <i>Specific actions or project that will be completed to produce specific outputs and demonstrate progress toward the outcome.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIP team will participate in the Permanency CQI Workgroup. • Use data to identify issues and engage counties with low percentage of children achieving timely permanency to work with local partners on solutions, including Permanency Summits. • Identify counties with high percentage of children achieving timely permanency and review their process. • FJCIP Oversight Committee will review data regarding FJCIP courts on a semi-annual basis to identify opportunities for learning and improvement.
<p>CIP Funding Stream <i>Grant(s) used to fund activity.</i></p>	Basic
<p>Collaborative Partners <i>Responsible parties and partners involved</i></p>	CIP Director, WSCCR, CITA, Children’s Administration, and dependency court partners, and FJCIP Oversight Committee.
<p>Timeframe <i>Proposed completion date or “ongoing”</i></p>	Ongoing.
<p>Anticipated Outputs and Results of Activity <i>What the CIP intends to produce, provide or accomplish through the activity.</i></p>	Areas for improvement will be identified and work will begin with local stakeholders to develop solutions. Areas of need and responses will be shared with the learning community encompassing FJCIP and FJLC.
<p>Target Improvement <i>Provide specific, projected change in data the CIP intends to achieve.</i></p>	Increased percentage of children achieving timely permanency without increased rates of return to care.
<p>Data Source <i>Specific sources where data will be drawn to measure anticipated changes due to activity</i></p>	FamLink, SCOMIS, and IDTR.
<p>Feedback Vehicle <i>Stakeholders the data will be shared with and methodology/products for dissemination.</i></p>	All of the collaborative partners listed above will be informed throughout the process and monthly data updates will be provided through the IDTR to show progress. The FJCIP Oversight Committee will review data regarding FJCIP Courts on a semi-annual basis. The CIP Steering Committee will review data annually to evaluate and consider further activities to address improvements based on need.

Measurable Objective #2	Provide oversight of the Family and Juvenile Court Improvement Programs
<p>Activity or Project Description <i>Specific actions or project that will be completed to produce specific outputs and demonstrate progress toward the outcome.</i></p>	<p>FJCIP Oversight Committee will review FJCIP program reports and assist in design of program improvement when necessary, stay current on research about best practices, and provide training and program assistance.</p>
<p>CIP Funding Stream <i>Grant(s) used to fund activity.</i></p>	<p>Basic</p>
<p>Collaborative Partners <i>Responsible parties and partners involved</i></p>	<p>FJCIP Oversight Committee: FJCIP Chief Judges, Supervisors and Coordinators, CIP Director, CASA, CITA, and WSCCR.</p>
<p>Timeframe <i>Proposed completion date or “ongoing”</i></p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
<p>Anticipated Outputs and Results of Activity <i>What the CIP intends to produce, provide or accomplish through the activity.</i></p>	<p>Continual court improvement based on developing strategies of best practices.</p>
<p>Target Improvement <i>Provide specific, projected change in data the CIP intends to achieve.</i></p>	<p>FJCIP courts will improve their timeliness measures reported in the Dependency Timeliness Report.</p>
<p>Data Source <i>Specific sources where data will be drawn to measure anticipated changes due to activity</i></p>	<p>Semi-annual reports provided by each FJCIP court. Interactive Dependency Timeliness Report provided by WSCCR.</p>
<p>Feedback Vehicle <i>Stakeholders the data will be shared with and methodology/products for dissemination.</i></p>	<p>An annual report will be prepared about the FJCIP program and presented to the FJCIP Chief Judges, Supervisors and Coordinators, Superior Court Judges’ Association-Family and Juvenile Law Committee (SJCA-FJLC), CASA, CITA, WSCCR, legislators, and CIP Steering Committee.</p>

Outcome #2: High quality legal representation for parents, children and Children's Administration.

Need Driving Activities:

- Parents Representation: The Washington State Office of Public Defense (OPD) Parents Representation Program (PRP) provides state-funded attorney representation and case support services to indigent parents, custodians, and legal guardians involved in child dependency and termination of parental rights proceedings. Key elements of the PRP include: the implementation of case load limits and professional attorney standards; access to expert services and independent social workers; OPD oversight; and ongoing training and support. In 2013, the legislature appropriated an additional \$3.4 million to implement the program in more counties, and also provided funding to assist with Children's Administration's permanency initiative. The program operates in 31 of Washington's 39 counties. Since its inception, the PRP has been evaluated numerous times showing positive results. In a recent evaluation of the program, the PRP's enhanced legal representation was shown to reduce the days to establishing permanency for children in foster care by speeding up reunification with parents, or where reunification was not possible by speeding up permanency through guardianship or adoption. This program is operating well with continued funding from the Washington State legislature and will not be an area of focus for the CIP, other than providing funding for continued education. In November 2016, CIP sponsored the Region 10 Parent Representation Leadership Forum. An action plan was developed for raising the bar for parent representation, especially in the area of parent-child visitation.

Data Sources:

Office of Public Defense website: www.opd.wa.gov

Mark E. Courtney & Jennifer L. Hook, Evaluation of the impact of enhanced parental legal representation on the timing of permanency outcomes for children in foster care, Children and Youth Services Review 34, 1337-1343 (2012)

Strategic Category: X Capacity Building X Court Function Improvement X Systemic Reform

Measurable Objective #1	Meaningful discussion of parent-child visitation occurs before and during hearings.
Activity or Project Description <i>Specific actions or project that will be completed to produce specific outputs and demonstrate progress toward the outcome.</i>	Local collaborative stakeholder meetings to work on implementation of the revised parent-child visitation policy, to include education and creation of a shared improvement plan tailored to their community.
CIP Funding Stream <i>Grant(s) used to fund activity.</i>	Basic
Collaborative Partners <i>Responsible parties and partners involved</i>	Children’s Administration, Office of Public Defense, judicial officers, CASAs, Assistant Attorneys General, Office of Civil Legal Aid.
Timeframe <i>Proposed completion date or “ongoing”</i>	2017
Anticipated Outputs and Results of Activity <i>What the CIP intends to produce, provide or accomplish through the activity.</i>	Quality court hearings protecting due process rights for children and parents to spend quality time together.
Target Improvement <i>Provide specific, projected change in data the CIP intends to achieve.</i>	Increased parent-child visitation and reduction in supervised visits where appropriate.
Data Source <i>Specific sources where data will be drawn to measure anticipated changes due to activity</i>	FAMLINK and SCOMIS
Feedback Vehicle <i>Stakeholders the data will be shared with and methodology/products for dissemination.</i>	Visitation data measured before and after implementation meetings, will be provided to the local stakeholders, as well as their statewide leaders. Information will also be shared with the CIP Steering Committee, Commission on Children in Foster Care, and the legislature.

Outcome #3: Engagement of the entire family in child welfare proceedings

Need Driving Activities:

- Parents for Parents (P4P) is a peer outreach and education program provided by parents who have successfully navigated the juvenile dependency court system to parents who have recently become engaged with the dependency system. The program provides early outreach and education about the dependency program through a parent-led Dependency 101 class. The program increases parental court participation and compliance with court orders. P4P programs have used CIP funds for program start-up, with continued funding coming from various sources. In some counties the program is administered by the Superior Court; however in other counties the program is administered by other agencies. In both instances there is strong collaboration with the court system.

P4P programs are currently active in the following counties: Grays Harbor, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, Spokane, Thurston/Mason and Whatcom. Process and outcome evaluations performed by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) of the King County P4P Program, found that participating in the P4P program and attending Dependency 101 training resulted in increased compliance with case plans and visitation, and participants had a greater rate of reunification and lower rate of termination of parental rights compared to non-participants. Due to the success of the P4P programs, the model was used to develop P4P programs in five other counties, using CIP funds. Other counties in Washington State could benefit from this successful intervention. The goal is to implement this program statewide as funding becomes available.

The biggest challenge of the P4P programs has been funding the programs beyond initial implementation. In 2015 the Washington State Legislature passed 2SSB5486 and provided funding for the existing P4P programs, as well as an appropriation to cover an evaluation during the second year funding cycle. The Office of Public Defense will administer the funds as a pass-through to a nonprofit organization to provide administration of the program. The legislation requires a preliminary report to the legislature be provided by December 1, 2016. The preliminary report must include statistics showing rates of attendance at court hearings and compliance with court-ordered services and visitation. The report must also address whether participation in the program affected participants' overall understanding of the dependency court process. A subsequent report must be delivered to the legislature by December 1, 2019. In addition to the information required in the preliminary report, this report must include statistics demonstrating the effect of the program on reunification rates and lengths of time families were engaged in the dependency court system before achieving permanency. State funding has been provided for the second evaluation/report, but not for the first year. CIP will continue to monitor with no specific project due to funding cuts.

- The courts need a system with reliable, fast and inexpensive paternity test results which will allow fathers to engage earlier in the dependency processes. Research shows nonresident fathers who are engaged early in the dependency process are more likely to become involved fathers. Nonresident fathers' involvement with their children is associated with a higher likelihood of a reunification outcome and lower likelihood of an adoption outcome. Children with highly involved nonresident fathers are also discharged from foster care more quickly than those with less or no involvement. A father's involvement is also associated with children's well-being and with lower levels of behavior problems. Not resolving paternity early in dependency cases increases costs associated with assigning counsel, as well as costs for evaluations and remedial services and publication costs. Additionally, stakeholders might not be as open to engaging alleged fathers (some counties may not offer services until paternity is established or may not be as focused on engaging alleged fathers until they know they are the biological father) and fathers may be less receptive to the process because they are not interested in participating unless they are the biological parent. Additionally relative placement exploration is delayed, potentially increasing foster care cost and delaying a placement where the child might be more comfortable with family. Timely resolution of paternity issues is both in the best interests of the child and essential to avoiding delays at subsequent points in the court process. Reports from the pilot project have been submitted and preliminary results show significant cost savings. There is a need for information regarding this project to be disseminated to all courts in Washington State.

Data Sources:

Dependent Children in Washington: Case Timeliness and Outcomes 2014 Annual Report:

<http://www.courts.wa.gov/wscct/docs/DTR2015.pdf>

Duarte, "King County Model Court Final Report", p. 5, October 17, 2013

[2SSB 5486](#) – 2015 legislation creating the Parents for Parents Program

Harris, Leslie Joan. "[Involving Nonresident Fathers in Dependency Cases: New Efforts, New Problems, New Solutions.](#)" *Journal of Family Studies* 9, 2007, 281, 307.

Henry Chen, Karin Malm, & Erica Zielewski, [More about the Dads: Exploring Associations between Non-resident Father Involvement and Child Welfare Case Outcomes.](#) (2008), available at

Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, U.S. Children's Bureau Rosenberg, Jeffrey, Wilcox, W. Bradford, [The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children](#) (2006)

[National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges Adoption Guidelines](#), 2000.

Strategic Category: X Capacity Building X Court Function Improvement X Systemic Reform

Measurable Objective #1	Early establishment of biological paternity to facilitate engagement of paternal family
Activity or Project Description <i>Specific actions or project that will be completed to produce specific outputs and demonstrate progress toward the outcome.</i>	CIP Director and staff from Office of Public Defense, will work with Washington State Center for Court Research to prepare a project report to be disseminated to courts statewide.
CIP Funding Stream <i>Grant(s) used to fund activity.</i>	Basic
Collaborative Partners <i>Responsible parties and partners involved</i>	CIP Director, Office of Public Defense, and Washington State Center for Court Research.
Timeframe <i>Proposed completion date or "ongoing"</i>	2017
Anticipated Outputs and Results of Activity <i>What the CIP intends to produce, provide or accomplish through the activity.</i>	Early identification of the biological father increases opportunities for the child to engage with relatives and decreases time to permanency.
Target Improvement <i>Provide specific, projected change in data the CIP intends to achieve.</i>	Provide the system with reliable, fast and inexpensive paternity test results which will allow fathers to engage earlier in the dependency process. Early identification and engagement of fathers will enable courts to better meet dependency timelines, reduce costs associated with multiple alleged-fathers and foster care costs associated with delayed relative placements, reunification and permanency planning.
Data Source <i>Specific sources where data will be drawn to measure anticipated changes due to activity</i>	SCOMIS
Feedback Vehicle <i>Stakeholders the data will be shared with and methodology/products for dissemination.</i>	Results from the pilot project will be shared with the CIP Steering Committee, SCJA-FJLC, Commission on Children in Foster Care, and juvenile court partners throughout Washington State to determine if this project should be replicated statewide.

Outcome #4: Physical, social and emotional well-being needs of children and youth

Need Driving Activities & Data Source:

- The Commission on Children in Foster Care supports the annual Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit, where foster youth are given a voice and an opportunity to exchange concerns, challenges and suggestions for foster care system improvements. Policymakers, advocates and community members work alongside youth to address the proposed reforms. Several legislative and policy reforms have been implemented based upon proposals from past summits. The summit is funded by contributions from Casey Family Programs, Center for Children and Youth Justice, Children's Administration and CIP grant funds. Funding is needed in order for the Mockingbird Society to continue to host this event as a form of continuous quality improvement in the foster care system.
- To gain competence and requisite knowledge to effectively handle dependency and termination cases, judges and attorneys must be educated in a variety of specialized topics. Local, expansive and inexpensive training opportunities are relatively rare for many jurisdictions. The Children's Justice Conference affords judicial officers and attorneys an opportunity to receive education on topics as diverse as childhood development, effects of trauma, substance abuse treatment, domestic violence, child abuse, homeless youth, and racial disparity and disproportionality. Funding is needed to pay for registration and travel expenses for judicial officers to attend.

Data Sources:

Mockingbird Society: <http://www.mockingbirdsociety.org/>

Children's Justice Conference: <http://www.dshscjc.com/>

University of Washington Court Improvement Training Academy: <http://www.uwcita.org/>

Strategic Category: X Capacity Building X Court Function Improvement X Systemic Reform

Measurable Objective #1	Give youth a meaningful voice at both policy and practice level.
<p>Activity or Project Description <i>Specific actions or project that will be completed to produce specific outputs and demonstrate progress toward the outcome.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIP funds will assist the Mockingbird Society with hosting the annual Foster Youth and Alumni Leadership Summit where youth are able to articulate their thoughts and ideas for improving the foster care system. • Former foster youth will be invited to participate as presenters in training sessions for judicial officers and encourage local dependency teams to invite foster youth representatives to participate in Permanency Summits.
<p>CIP Funding Stream <i>Grant(s) used to fund activity.</i></p>	Basic
<p>Collaborative Partners <i>Responsible parties and partners involved</i></p>	Mockingbird Society youth chapters and leadership, Commission on Children in Foster Care, Casey Family Programs, Center for Children and Youth Justice, Children’s Administration, and CIP Director
<p>Timeframe <i>Proposed completion date or “ongoing”</i></p>	Ongoing.
<p>Anticipated Outputs and Results of Activity <i>What the CIP intends to produce, provide or accomplish through the activity.</i></p>	Policymakers, advocates and community members will work alongside youth to address proposed reforms. Judicial officers and other child welfare partners will have a better understanding of the needs of foster youth as they share their stories in a training environment.
<p>Target Improvement <i>Provide specific, projected change in data the CIP intends to achieve.</i></p>	Foster youth feel they have been heard. Policies and laws are changed to improve physical, social and well-being needs of youth in foster care.
<p>Data Source <i>Specific sources where data will be drawn to measure anticipated changes due to activity</i></p>	Annual newsletter produced by Mockingbird Society.
<p>Feedback Vehicle <i>Stakeholders the data will be shared with and methodology/products for dissemination.</i></p>	A summit report is produced by Mockingbird Society to memorialize the proposals presented at the youth summit. This report is shared with CCFC, legislators, and child welfare partners. Changes made in policy and legislation as a result of the proposals are reported in the annual Mockingbird Society newsletter. Training attendees will evaluate the impact of the youth participation and share thoughts with CIP Director.

Measurable Objective #2	Increase judicial officer and other court partners' awareness of physical, social and emotional well-being needs of children and youth.
Activity or Project Description <i>Specific actions or project that will be completed to produce specific outputs and demonstrate progress toward the outcome.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CIP funds will support attendance of judicial officers to the Children's Justice Conference (CJC). CIP Director will inform judicial officers, FJCIP Coordinators, and attorneys of other trainings/webinars/educational literature that become available on relevant topics.
CIP Funding Stream <i>Grant(s) used to fund activity.</i>	Basic
Collaborative Partners <i>Responsible parties and partners involved</i>	Children's Administration, CIP Director, state and tribal judicial officers, FJCIP Coordinators, Office of Public Defense, and Office of Civil Legal Aid.
Timeframe <i>Proposed completion date or "ongoing"</i>	Ongoing.
Anticipated Outputs and Results of Activity <i>What the CIP intends to produce, provide or accomplish through the activity.</i>	Provide judicial officers and FJCIP Coordinators with high quality education through the CJC training about childhood development, effects of trauma, substance abuse treatment, domestic violence, child abuse, homeless youth, trafficking, and racial and ethnic disparity, etc.
Target Improvement <i>Provide specific, projected change in data the CIP intends to achieve.</i>	Timeliness measures will continue to improve with appropriate and consistent judicial education.
Data Source <i>Specific sources where data will be drawn to measure anticipated changes due to activity</i>	FamLink and SCOMIS
Feedback Vehicle <i>Stakeholders the data will be shared with and methodology/products for dissemination.</i>	CJC evaluations are completed by attendees, including requests for future session topics and shared with the Children's Justice Task Force (CJTF), for which CIP Director serves as consultant. CJTF analyzes evaluations for future session topics to verify and plan for identified needed training. Feedback will be shared with the SCJA-FJLC and CIP Steering Committee to receive comments and suggestions for future CJs.