

WHAT ARE THE STRATEGIES, IF ANY, THAT STATES ACROSS THE NATION EMPLOY WITH THEIR RESPECTIVE FAMILY COURTS TO WORK COLLABORATIVELY ON BEHALF OF CHILDREN IN CARE?

STATE SUMMARY: KANSAS

State CFSR

Representatives from the Office of Judicial Administration (OJA; the administrative arm of the Kansas Supreme Court) sat on the CFSR planning group with the Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS). The OJA is primarily responsible for keeping judges informed and trained on new developments and issues. Members of the Supreme Court Taskforce on Permanency Planning (Taskforce; the advisory committee to the Supreme Court), which includes SRS representatives, also helped prepare for the CFSR.

In addition, a juvenile judge was a team member of the CFSR preparation team and personally participated in the CFSR. This worked very well, as the judge brought first-hand knowledge to the table, as well as judicial expertise. The judge reviewed case files, and participated in evening meetings to prepare for the CFSR.

The PIP was approved in 2002. Court personnel did not participate in the actual drafting of the PIP, but were part of and attended the stakeholders group meetings. The stakeholders meetings included various participants within the child welfare system. The Supreme Court Task Force on Permanency Planning (SCTFPP) was identified as one stakeholders group. SRS had a representative attend a SCTFPP meeting to brainstorm about what works and what does not work within the child welfare system. The feedback from the SCTFPP meeting was then combined with information from other stakeholder meetings and used to create the PIP.

Collaboration Following the Release of the PIP

Soon after the PIP was approved, the courts conducted a training session on concurrent planning (an area which was identified as needing improvement). SRS workers and policy staff were invited to plan and participate in the training. This joint effort set a positive tone to the working relationship between the courts and agency.

There are differences of opinion between agency and court personnel due to how differently the OJA and the state agency function. OJA is an arm of the state Supreme Court, while the state agency is an entirely different and separate entity. These differences, though, have not hindered court and agency work on implementing the PIP plan. A court representative commented that although there are differences, they know communication is required to be successful and to be ASFA compliant.

Ongoing Collaboration

The PIP is not a static agenda. Goals, methods of achieving goals, and those involved are always changing. The state and the feds have made requests for changes. Various changes, though, have not prevented court and agency collaboration on various areas of the PIP, as set forth in Appendix A.

Committee work: The Taskforce, which includes agency and court representatives, works on a variety of issues included in the PIP. The group meets once a month, except the summer months (June to August). In addition, there is an Independent Living Stakeholders meeting once every three months. This is a multidisciplinary committee required by the Chaffee Act to improve Independent Living Services.

There is also a Child and Safety and Permanency Panel, one of the federally required advisory committees formed by SRS. Panel members include judges, social workers, doctors, CASAs, and mental health providers.

Working together on various committees has forged the positive working relationship between the courts and agency.

PIP Review Committee. Until recently, the courts got periodic updates on PIP progress through the Assistant Deputy of SRS. Starting in July, though, a court representative now attends the PIP review meetings, the results of which are written in quarterly reports. The regional office suggested that the courts have representation on the review committee, and the agency agreed. This is an example of the mutual respect the courts and agency have for each other.

Training. The Taskforce is doing a training session on Best Practices of ASFA on February 24 and 26, 2004. The training will address topics such as ASFA and teenagers and substance abuse issues in child welfare cases. The Taskforce includes agency representatives.

Concurrent Case Planning Training took place in April 2003. SRS policy workers and court staff worked together to provide the training, which included a morning session on concurrent planning (how to use, what cases and families are best suited for such planning), and an afternoon session on permanency hearings. The training was primarily targeted towards the legal community, with close to 300 participants, including SRS workers.

Court processes. The Taskforce, which includes SRS representatives, worked together to evaluate the impact of standardized forms and procedures implemented pursuant to a Supreme Court Administrative Order. This is an ongoing, internal evaluation. In addition, Taskforce members review the recommendations and findings from the evaluation. Standardized forms can be downloaded from <http://www.kscourts.org/formsndx.htm>.

Management. OJA is in the process of implementing the Child in Care (CINC) module for the new judicial branch accounting and case management system. This CINC module will meet all

ASFA and state requirements including notification of permanency hearings. The system is under review and will likely be distributed to the judicial districts by July 2005.

Title IV-E. The courts and SRS have also collaborated on the Title IV-E audit. For the initial audit done in 1999, the courts were not involved. The state did not pass due to factors such as non-documentation. After this initial failure, the courts and agency decided to partner up for the next audit, which took place in 2002. First, they pulled files to determine what the feds were seeing when they gave the state a failing grade. Then, to address the problems, the courts and agency conducted joint trainings. In addition, a court representative was on-site during the 2002 audit in case any questions or problems arose.

Conclusion

Overall, the courts and agency have a cordial working relationship. They do engage in many of their own activities, but they know they have to work together on some areas to successfully implement the PIP, in time for the next review in 2005.