

*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: NORTH CAROLINA**

**State CFSR**

The courts had frequent meetings with agency personnel during the CFSR review in May, 2001. CIP representatives were involved in the on site visit, while judges and GAL staff were involved in individual case reviews and stakeholder interviews.

CIP provided suggestions and input regarding the PIP. The Manager of the CIP Project and the head of the GAL program represented the courts as the CFSR was being planned and was underway.

Once the CFSR final report was sent back to the state, the agency engaged the court to provide feedback for implementing various portions of the PIP. Unfortunately, it was difficult to coordinate schedules and meetings were infrequent. CIP staff had the option to send in written comments.

After the agency drafted sections of a proposed PIP, such as about older youth in foster care, court representatives provided feedback and suggestions, many of which were incorporated into the PIP. To facilitate this process, subcommittees were formed to review the topic areas.

**Collaboration Following the Release of the PIP**

A shortage of funding and manpower due to cutbacks has contributed to difficulties collaborating on the PIP. For example, the position of head of Children's Services was eliminated. Many people who were integral members in drafting and submitting the PIP had their positions eliminated due to the budget deficit, which has been ongoing for almost three years.

**Ongoing Collaboration**

Despite these difficulties, there are areas where the courts and agency remain involved in the implementation of the PIP. The PIP addressed some court related issues, as set forth in Appendix A.

*CIP Advisory Committee.* Agency representatives have long been members of the committee, but not as active as the courts would like them to be. To solve this problem, the courts have reached out to local agencies to become new members of the CIP Advisory Committee. For example, they have contacted individuals such as local directors of social services and attorneys who have clients who are youths in foster care. The hope is that these new members are highly motivated to be more involved.

*Information System.* The courts and agency are working to develop a computer data system. Agency representatives work with the courts in this process. The state agency has had their own information system for a while. The goal of the current project is to create a system that will coordinate the court and agency systems, and make information easier to access and share.

*Legislation.* Earlier this year, the CIP recommended changes to the state's juvenile code (H.B. 1048, passed in June). The CIP juvenile statutes subcommittee, an established work group, drafted the recommended changes, and were able to get an member of the state House to sponsor the bill for introduction on the floor of the General Assembly. Members of the work group included agency representatives. The group engaged in phone and email correspondence, as well as face-to-face and conference meetings. Although the court requested agency participation late in 2002, the agency did not fully participate, including providing feedback on suggested changes in the state laws, until late March, weeks before the cut off dates for submission of proposed legislation. Therefore, the court had to resolve any disagreement with the agency within one month's time.

## **Conclusion**

North Carolina struggles to coordinate activities between the state agency and the court, but a few recent developments signal a positive sign. The court hopes that it will be more involved in preparation for next year's review after September, and beyond.

## APPENDIX A: NORTH CAROLINA'S PIP EXTRACT

Outcome S1: CHILDREN ARE, FIRST AND FOREMEOST, PROTECTED FROM ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Outcome S2:..CHILDREN ARE SAFELY MAINTAINED IN THEIR HOMES WHENEVER POSSIBLE AND APPROPRIATE

| STRATEGIES AND STEPS   | IMPACTS ITEMS# AND NATIONAL STDS#  | TIME FRAMES FOR COMPLETION                         | INTENDED EFFECTS  |
|--|--|--|---|
| <b>Develop or Clarify State Policies</b>   |  |  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Design a structured decision-making model for safety assessments.</u></li> </ul>   | Impacts Items # 1,2,3,4,5,7<br><br>National Standards-See Attached Sheet | 02/01/02<br><br><b>Policy and Initiatives Team</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide structure to reduce instances of repeated maltreatment and greater consistency in screening reports of abuse and neglect.</li> </ul>                       |
| <b>Redesign Risk Assessment/Safety Assessment/Family Assessment</b>  |  |  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Develop assessment structure that addresses critical family issues such as child well being measures, educational needs, domestic violence, substance abuse, and other safety and risk factors.</u></li> </ul> | Impacts All Outcomes and Items   | 3/01/02<br><br><b>Policy and Initiatives Team</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To ensure that all areas impacting child safety and well being are examined in depth so that services are focused on family needs and family strengths.</li> </ul> |

Outcome P1: CHILDREN HAVE PERMANENCY AND STABILITY IN THEIR LIVING SITUATIONS.

Outcome P2: THE CONTINUITY OF FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTIONS IS PRESERVED FOR CHILDREN

| STRATEGIES AND STEPS  | IMPACTS ITEMS# AND NATIONAL STDS#             | TIME FRAMES FOR COMPLETION                                       | INTENDED EFFECTS   |
|---|---|--|--|
| <b>Develop or Clarify State Policies</b>  |   |  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Clarify standard and practice regarding visitation (e.g. not denying visitation as a punishment) and Life Books for children in foster care.</u></li> </ul> | 13, 14, 16                                    | 11/01/01<br><br><b>Policy and Initiatives Team</b>               | Strengthen visitation between children and families/significant others to build their personal support networks<br>Develop appropriate means of discipline   |
| <b>Implement the System of Care (SOC) Concept in Child Welfare</b>  |   |  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Continue to build SOC in partnership with Division of Mental Health, Department of Juvenile Justice and Department of Public Instruction.</u></li> </ul>    | 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23 | Ongoing<br><br><b>Policy and Initiatives and colleagues from</b> | Wraparound services for children and youth who are at the highest risk of placement due to mental health issues and/or delinquent behaviors.<br>Keep children out of DSS custody and reduce the number of children entering out-of-home placements |

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|--|--|--|---|
|  |  | <b>Department of<br/>Mental Health,<br/>Department of<br/>Juvenile Justice,<br/>Department of<br/>Public Instruction</b> | Promote placement and permanency for children with behavioral mental health needs in family settings in the community |
|--|--|--|---|