

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: VERMONT

State CFSR

The agency (SRS) took primary responsibility for preparing for the May 2001 CFSR and site visit. Vermont was among the first set of states to go through the CFSR process, so they were not able to draw upon the experiences of other states. During the on-site visit, the feds met with various court personnel, including judges, court administrators, the CIP director, and the CIP committee chair (who was an Associate Justice on the Vermont Supreme Court at the time, and is now the SRS Commissioner).

The agency provided the May 2001 ACF final report to the court administrator and CIP in July 2001, along with a condensed version of the report summarizing court-related findings. To address those issues needing improvement, a subcommittee of approximately eight to ten people was formed, which included two agency representatives. This subcommittee met monthly for several months to draft a strategy for improvement. These steps became the court's portion of the PIP. The agency drafted the agency specific portions of the PIP, into which the court-specific action steps were inserted. The PIP was submitted to ACF in September 2001, and was approved in March 2002.

Collaboration Following the Release of the PIP

A CIP subcommittee that included agency representatives worked on developing a case management protocol intended to address the problem of court delays. Agency representatives are routinely included on subcommittees formed to address court delays. Communication is good between the CIP director and top levels of the agency. In fact, the Chair of the Court Improvement committee, an Associate Justice on the Vermont Supreme Court, resigned from his position on the Court to become Commissioner of SRS in December 2002. This is a unique situation, as the former Justice is able to use his court experiences to address agency problems, and continue a close working relationship between the courts and agency.

Ongoing Collaboration

The Vermont courts and agency are working together to successfully implement the PIP. The PIP addressed a number of court related issues, as set forth in Appendix A.

Case Management Protocol. Almost immediately after the PIP was approved, a subcommittee was formed to establish a case management protocol for abused and neglected children in out-of-home care. The subcommittee, which included court and agency representatives, met for a year and a half to draft and gain approval of a Case Management Protocol. In Spring 2002, this Protocol was piloted in two courts, and in November 2002, it was launched statewide. A one-

day training was conducted, attended by family court judges, court staff, agency caseworkers and supervisors, attorneys, GALs, and service providers. The Vermont Supreme Court Chief Justice and the Agency Commissioner made the conference's opening remarks. Agency management was involved in the conference planning committee.

The same subcommittee is now meeting to assess the effectiveness of the Protocol as a means to reduce court delays. This assessment will occur in conjunction with Vermont's CIP reassessment and findings will be summarized in a report in spring 2004.

Committees. The CIP routinely designates multi-stakeholder subcommittees or work groups to work on specific tasks. For example, in May 2002, SRS and the Vermont CIP jointly sponsored a training on cross-jurisdictional placements. More recently, when SRS updated its policies on kinship placement in the summer of 2003, it received input from CIP members.

Data sharing. The agency and CIP are working together to combine data on outcomes for children and time lines for court decisions. It is expected that agency data will be routinely provided to the court to combine with "Data Warehouse" reports. The reports will provide quarterly data to the courts regarding timeliness of court decisions and permanency.

Conclusion

The courts and agency have a positive working relationship. Major CIP project subcommittees routinely include representation from the legal and agency communities. This has proven to be effective in building a solid working relationship and collaboration between the agency and court CIP.

APPENDIX A: VERMONT’S PIP EXTRACT

PERMANENCY

Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

- Timely assessment of the needs of children entering custody.
- Services and/or resources to promote placement stability.
- Permanency planning decision-making, particularly for older children and youth.
- Court delays in reaching merits findings, original disposition, scheduling of TPR hearings, and issuing TPR orders.
- Use of cross-jurisdictional adoption resources (see Systemic Factor).
- Sufficient number of foster and adoptive homes (see Systemic Factor).

Themes	Areas of Focus
Permanency Planning/Placement Stability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Court Delays</u> • Placement Continuum/Services and Supports for Placement

Theme	Year One Activities	Year Two Activities
Permanency Planning/ Placement Stability	Research placement services and supports for placement.	Implement new systems and placement options.
		Design and implement system to select/review permanency goal.
	<u>Plan to address court delays.</u>	Implement plan.

Goal 4: Design and implement an approach to increase stability and improve permanency including strategies to address court delays which will address:

- Screening and assessment of strengths and needs for children entering or in substitute care (see also Goal #3 on Structured Decision-Making)
- Additional services and/or supports to promote placement stability.
- Decision-making protocol for identifying and reviewing permanency goals.
- Delays in court time frames and decisions that impact permanency planning.

GOAL: IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS COURT DELAYS AT ALL STAGES OF THE COURT PROCESS LEAD PERSON/UNIT: DIVISION DIRECTOR/COMMISSIONER; COURT ADMINISTRATOR			
ACTION STEP	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	QTR	EVALUATION METHOD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and implement a strategy to reduce backlog of TPR cases pending more than four months 	Court Administrator, Chief Administrative Judge, PPIC Chair	1	Strategy developed. Implementation begun.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Identify needs and request TA from ACF's Court Improvement Program</u> 	Court Improvement Project Mgr	1	TA requests submitted.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Identify training needs for judges, court staff, and attorneys (including AAG) as needed to implement the Case Management Protocol</u> 	Court Administrator, Director of Judicial Education, Employee Education Manager, CIP Project Mgr	1	Training needs identified. Training dates set.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Design and distribute quarterly Data Warehouse reports to court managers and presiding judges, to be used to assess performance (with copies to Admin. Judge, PPIC, & SRS)</u> 	Court Administrator	2	Juvenile court judge and court manager review data warehouse reports. Delays addressed on local level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Train court managers and juvenile docket clerks on using Data Warehouse reports as a case management tool</u> 	Data Warehouse Project Mgr., CIP Manager; Employee Education Manager	3	Training delivered
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a case management protocol for abused and neglected children placed outside of the home, with focus on children under 6. 	Court Administrator, Chief Administrative Judge; PPIC Chair Court Managers	2	Case management protocol designed and ready for implementation.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Train court and legal personnel on new protocol at Judicial College, Defender General's annual institute, and State's Attorneys' annual training.</u> 	Court Administrator, Judicial Education Committee; Director of Judicial Education; Defender General; State's Atty. Dept.	2	Training held by the Judiciary, the Defender General, and the Dept. of State's Attorneys
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Case management protocol is introduced to pilot courts (and any receptive courts).</u> 	Court Administrator; Chief Administrative Judge	3	Some courts begin using case management protocol
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <u>Case Management Protocol is introduced to all courts and is being fully used by pilot courts.</u> 	Court Administrator, Chief Admin. Judge, PPIC Chair	3	Protocol used to some extent in every court. Courts needing assistance identify needs to CIP Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan and deliver TA and training, with particular focus on the Case Management Protocol. May include system-wide training (regional or statewide). 	Court Administrator, Exec. Dir. of State's Attorneys Dept., Defender General, PPIC	4	Training to stakeholder groups held
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submit proposed changes to Vermont's Title 15A (Adoption Act) to expedite foster care adoptions. 	SRS Assistant Attorney General	4	Draft language submitted to sponsoring legislator

GOAL: IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS COURT DELAYS AT ALL STAGES OF THE COURT PROCESS LEAD PERSON/UNIT: DIVISION DIRECTOR/COMMISSIONER; COURT ADMINISTRATOR			4B
ACTION STEP	PERSON RESPONSIBLE	QTR	EVALUATION METHOD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review TPR backlog & assess effectiveness of strategies for reducing backlog. 	Court Administrator, Chief Admin. Judge, CIP Manager	5	Dialog with courts working on backlogs. Assess progress and strategies.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop a plan to asses the effectiveness of the 0-6 Permanency Protocol as a strategy to achieve more timely permanence. 	Shari Young; PPIC 0-6 Protocol Assessment Committee	June 2003	A plan is drafted.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collect data. ▪ Develop quarterly reports ▪ Meet with four courts. 	Shari Young; PPIC 0-6 Protocol Assessment Committee	June 2003 - Mar 2004	First quarterly report is released in Oct 2003. Court meetings occur by March 2004
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Analyze data & report findings 	Shari Young; PPIC 0-6 Protocol Assessment Committee	8	Analysis is done in conjunction with Phase II of the re-assessment. Findings are reported in the re-assessment.