

SUMMARY OF THE CENTER'S WORK WITH JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURTS

Technical Support to State and Local Courts

-- Lecture and train, at dozens of conferences annually, on state family and juvenile court improvement issues concerning child welfare proceedings (to judicial, legal, and non-legal audiences).

-- Provide technical assistance to judicial personnel on improved functioning of courts throughout the U.S. The Center has provided family courts in Hawaii, South Carolina, Delaware, New Jersey and Rhode Island (just as examples) with intensive, hands-on assistance in improving their systems.

-- Provide nationwide technical assistance to local courts on assessments of child welfare case handling.

-- Conducted a series of state court dependency case processing assessments, including the first one completed – a study of the Rhode Island Family Court.

-- Developed, working closely with state trial and appellate judges, judicial benchbooks on child welfare court proceedings for the States of Colorado and Maryland.

-- Continue long-term work for the NY State Office of Children and Family Services focused on both removing barriers to prompt initiation/resolution of termination of parental rights cases and on training attorneys and caseworkers who handle child abuse/neglect-related cases in the state's family courts.

-- Develop and promote standards of practice for judges and attorneys in child maltreatment cases to increase the quality of representation and improve outcomes for abused and neglected children, in collaboration with local courts, state court improvement projects, and other national organizations.

-- Developed measures to determine judicial process performance in child abuse and neglect cases for use in automated court data systems. These measures address such issues as timeliness of hearings/decisions, harm to children who were under court jurisdiction, and compliance with due process requirements.

-- Developing workload measurements to determine the number of judges, attorneys, and court staff needed for the proper handling of child abuse and neglect cases.

-- Manage a national child welfare "court improvement listserv" with almost a thousand subscribers.

Development of Written Materials

-- Prepared, and now disseminate, a four-volume summary of state family and juvenile court improvement assessments and proposed reforms (with separate volumes on representing clients, quality of hearings, judicial training and workload conditions, and timeliness of judicial decision-making).

-- Produce and disseminate to over 1,500 recipients a bimonthly newsletter, *ABA Child CourtWorks*, which highlights dependency court improvement activities from across the country.

-- Collect and distribute a national catalogue of state materials on child welfare court improvement.

-- Publish a detailed annual "progress report" and national summary of court improvement activities.

-- Publish over 50 books, articles, and curricula on law and practice affecting children in family and juvenile courts, including many practical guides for judges, attorneys, and caseworkers. Subjects include the roles of attorneys in child abuse and neglect proceedings, children's rights in the judicial process, child support enforcement, foster care case review, adoption of children with special needs, custody/visitation conflicts, parental child abduction, mediation issues in family violence cases, case record privacy, and many others.

-- Produced book of proposed court rules for local/state use, with extensive commentary, on handling child abuse and neglect, foster care and termination of parental rights cases.

-- Developing publication for family court judges (supported by State Justice Institute) on improving child custody decision-making consistent with "best interests of the child" principles. Developed (for SJI) a *Judicial Benchbook on Drugs and Families* and a *Judge's Guide to Improving Legal Representation of Children*, and we continue to work and write on related issues.

-- Developing a publication for juvenile court judges on addressing the health and mental health needs of children and adolescents who are before the court.

Research Leading To Court Practice Reforms

-- Prepared data collection instruments and accompanying manual to guide state court "self-assessments" on handling child abuse and neglect cases. Nearly every state court system has used these materials in conducting their assessments and in planning for further reforms.

-- Produced seminal studies on two excellent urban trial courts ("Courts That Work") that hear child abuse and neglect, foster care, and adoption cases, which help shape state and local court reforms.

-- Conduct research activities related to juvenile and family courts, including studies of parental involvement practices of juvenile courts and judicial training/education needs in high-conflict domestic relations child-focused disputes that may lead to cases of custodial interference.

-- Completed several major national research studies on the civil and criminal justice aspects of both domestic and international parental kidnapping of children.

-- Have studied, evaluated for one court (Washington, DC), and written publications and other materials on alternative dispute resolution mechanisms in family/juvenile cases, such as Family Group Conferences and the use of mediation in child abuse/neglect proceedings

-- Study, analyze, write about, and provide expert technical assistance on judicial system coordination, including related criminal and civil child abuse and neglect cases, legal guardianships that emerge from abuse and neglect proceedings, and the linking of dependency and delinquency matters.

National Legislation, Policy, and Practice Reform

-- Proposed a federal bill to improve state trial court judicial performance in child abuse and neglect cases and, in close cooperation with ABA Government Affairs Office, led efforts to shape its passage. Five years of Center effort led to enactment of the legislation, now providing millions of dollars annually for state family and juvenile court system improvement. More recently, helped conceptualize and strengthen a federal bill, just signed into law, the *Strengthening Abuse and Neglect Courts Act of 2000*.

-- Helped guide federal policy on court improvement, including extensive comments on new federal regulations governing implementation of the *Adoption and Safe Families Act*.

-- Provide key assistance in the planning and execution of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' annual national court improvement conference, called the "Permanency Partnership Forum."

-- Played key drafting role in developing federal *Guidelines for Public Policy and State Legislation Governing Permanency for Children*, which include major provisions for court process reform.

The Center supports all the above work through fundraising efforts in which federal, state, and private foundation grant/contract funds to the Center total well over a million dollars a year. Fundraising for these purposes has been conducted since the Center's establishment 22 years ago. Our outside funding typically includes collaborations with many national groups, including the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and the National Center for State Courts.