



Exemplary Family Court Programs and Practices

Profiles of Innovative and Accountable Court-Connected Programs

AFCC Court Services Task Force
Exemplary Practices Sub-Committee

ASSOCIATION OF FAMILY AND CONCILIATION COURTS

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May 2005

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Exemplary Family Court Programs and Practices

Profiles of innovative and accountable court-connected programs

The Exemplary Practices Sub-Committee of the AFCC Court Services Task Force developed this publication. The sub-committee set out to identify a wide range of court-connected, creative, innovative, effective, and accountable programs. Specifically, the sub-committee sought information about programs that provide services related to the psychological, social, and legal needs of families involved in various family law proceedings, including those in Family Court, Dependency Court, Family Drug Court, Domestic Violence Court, and Unified Family Court.

This AFCC publication presents profiles of 69 programs, including highlights and contact information. The aim is to foster sharing among courts and AFCC's multidisciplinary membership about exemplary practices that meet the critical needs of the courts and the people they serve.

The sub-committee cast a "broad net" in order to elicit program nominations from a wide spectrum of family law professionals. Sub-committee members publicized the project in the AFCC newsletter, followed by an announcement and nomination forms at the AFCC Annual Conference in San Antonio in May 2004. The nomination request was sent to all AFCC members, to members of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, to members of the Association for Conflict Resolution Family Section, and to a number of Canadian audiences.

The call for nominations resulted in eighty program submissions. Sub-committee members identified criteria to use in evaluating the programs. They also developed a methodology to edit and abbreviate the nominations, as well as to identify programs relevant to the missions of AFCC and the courts. The nominations then were organized under the program categories outlined in the original call for nominations. In addition, notations were added regarding particular program strengths, based on representations in the nominations.

While the intent of the request for nominations was to cast a broad net, the sub-committee does not claim that the nominated programs constitute a representative sample of programs. Understandably, many programs were self-nominated by their directors. It also is important to note that the sub-committee has not attempted to authenticate the representations made in the nominations. For example, the committee has made no assessment about whether a program follows accepted standards of practice. Instead, the sub-committee has noted that a program utilizes standards or guidelines if explicitly referenced in the nomination.

The program strengths that the sub-committee identified as significant include the following:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Standards / guidelines**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Serves unrepresented population**
-  **Accessible to remote geographic regions**
-  **Innovative / unique**

If a program's nomination discussed or appeared to encompass one of the above factors, those points were highlighted by notations made at the beginning of each program description.

The nominated programs that the sub-committee considered to fit within the scope of the task force mission were indexed according to the program categories identified in the nomination form:

- Access to Justice (such as services for unrepresented parties or interpreter services).
- Children's Services (such as court-appointed special advocates or specialized support groups).
- Parenting Plan Services (such as supervised visitation, visitation enforcement, or custody evaluation processes).
- Dispute Resolution Services (such as mediation or other alternative dispute resolution processes).
- Parenting Support (such as those programs that assist families in coping with divorce, parent education, or interventions with high conflict families).
- Specialty Courts (domestic violence courts, drug courts, or unified family courts).
- Information Technology (interactive Web sites or technology-based referral services).
- Other Programs.

Some programs appeared to fit into more than one category. In those instances, sub-committee members decided upon a particular placement. Each program nomination was abridged, reformatted, and highlighted, as noted above.

Exemplary Practices Sub-Committee of the AFCC Court Services Task Force

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ACCESS TO JUSTICE

16th Judicial District Court Hearing Officer Program

Program Category: Access to Justice

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Standards / guidelines**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The 16th Judicial District Court (Louisiana) Hearing Officer Program is designed to bring parties in domestic proceedings into a court proceeding quickly, usually within 21 days. At the Hearing Officer Conference (HOC), the parties are given an opportunity to explore settlement possibilities and creative resolutions before a Hearing Officer in the relative privacy of a conference room (versus in open court before complete strangers). The Hearing Officers are attorneys-at-law with prior family law experience who have undergone family mediation training. Procedural and evidentiary rules are somewhat relaxed, and the parties have an opportunity to actively participate in fact-finding, option-building, and resolution of the issues. When a settlement is reached, a joint stipulation and consent judgment is prepared by the Hearing Officer, reviewed and executed by the parties, and everyone is provided with a copy. This also results in the cancellation of the court hearing which would have been necessary if the matter had not settled. When a case does not settle, the Hearing Officer prepares a written report with factual findings and recommendations. If a party files a written objection, the party is still able to go to court to contest the issues in a trial *de novo*.

Evaluation:

No formal evaluation of the program has been performed. The court tracks the cases which come through the HOC Program in order to maintain statistics. Unrepresented and indigent parties have greatly benefited from the opportunity to participate in a more relaxed proceeding where they can voice their positions without having to understand or endure complicated procedural or evidentiary rules. In the three years since the program was implemented, approximately 90% of all cases filed have settled at or before the HOC (in other words, within 21 days of the filing of the case with the court), or as a direct result of the findings and recommendations of the Hearing Officer, without having to go through an adversarial hearing in open court.

Justification as Exemplary:

The 16th Judicial District Court Hearing Officer Program is exemplary for a number of reasons, but the primary reasons are three:

- The parties are always allowed to directly participate in the HOC, either with legal counsel, or in proper person;
- The Hearing Officers are attorneys who have family mediation experience;
- When the parties reach an agreement, a detailed settlement document is prepared in the presence of the parties for their review and execution.

Sources of Funding:

This program is currently funded from two principal sources: the court's general operating fund (which has multiple sources of funding itself) and, to the extent the cases being handled by the Hearing Officers involve issues of child support, from administrative fees collected in Support Enforcement cases. Financial indicators tend to dictate that other sources for funding will probably have to be explored and sought.

Applications for Other Settings:

First and foremost, Louisiana has a statute which authorizes Hearing Officers to conduct HOCs (Louisiana Revised Statute 46:236.5). Depending on the applicable law in any given jurisdiction, new or amended laws might be necessary. Alternatively, or additionally, the individual court may need to adopt local rules to more thoroughly detail the program and procedures in that jurisdiction.

It was found that the success of the program was based upon:

- Direct involvement of all of the attorneys in the judicial district, particularly those who practice largely or exclusively family law;
- Free educational seminars when the program was initially set up;
- Free form discs distributed to attorneys and their support staff;
- Public relations to introduce the program to the general public (newspaper articles, guest speakers at luncheons, etc.);
- This program could be greatly improved if it would be able to have mental health professionals on staff, together with at least one financial professional to assist with tax and complicated financial issues.

Program Contact Person Information:

Paul A. Landry, Family Court Program Director
300 Iberia Street, Suite 220
New Iberia, LA 70560
Phone: (337) 369-4497
Fax: (337) 369-4499
Email: PaulAlbertLandry@hotmail.com

Court/Agency: 16th Judicial District Court, Louisiana

Coconino County Self Help Center

Program Category: Access to Justice

Program Strengths:

-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Standards / guidelines**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Serves unrepresented populations**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Accessible to remote geographic regions**

Program Description and Goals:

The Coconino County Self Help Center provides unrepresented litigants with free legal forms and instructions and access to the Law Library and other legal resources. The program's Web site brings legal resources to the desktop of local and remote patrons with links to interactive versions of the legal packets, free online laws and legal information, and the Web sites of relevant legal agencies and organizations.

Evaluation:

Users are surveyed annually as to their information needs and the program's resources are tailored to meet these needs.

Justification as Exemplary:

The Coconino County Law Library and Self-Help Center recognizes and responds to the unique challenges faced by residents of a rural county, many of whom live far from the courts. The center provides:

- Free, county-specific legal forms to litigants, with detailed step-by-step instructions;
- A Web site that includes interactive access to the legal packets;
- Access to the law library;
- Full-time assistance.

To bring the resources to Spanish-speaking patrons, the program offers over 20% of its legal packets in Spanish.

Sources of Funding:

City-county library district; Court filing fee revenues; Coconino County general fund.

Applications for Other Settings:

Keys to success:

- Coconino County's support of the program's mission and funding, partnerships with external agencies and professionals, and a conveniently located facility.

Desirable improvements:

- Successful outreach to Spanish-speakers;
- Adding a staff member for monitoring changes in legislation, etc. and writing and updating the legal packets accordingly;
- Providing a free, legal consultation program for patrons.

Program Contact Person Information:

Fred Newton, Presiding Judge
Coconino County Superior Court
200 North San Francisco Street
Flagstaff, AZ 86001
Phone: (928) 779-6598
Email: fnewton@courts.sp.state.az.us

Court/Agency: Coconino County Superior Court

Pay or Appear

Program Category: Access to Justice

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The Pay or Appear (POA) program addresses the void in court services in the area of child support collections for non-State Child Support Enforcement (CSE) in cases where the delinquency is greater than 30 days. Goals include:

- Maximizing child support collection with minimal judicial time;
- Behavior modification of payers;
- Avoid public assistance;
- Provide job opportunity information;
- Enrich children's relationship with parents due to reduced conflict.

Payments are due on Wednesday of each week. Failure to make a timely payment requires a court appearance on Friday of the same week.

Evaluation:

Results:

- 91% of obligors are making at least partial payments;
- 76% of obligors are making full payments of current assessments;
- 35% of obligors are making full payments of current assessments while reducing arrearage all or in part;
- Judicial time is less than one hour per week.

Justification as Exemplary:

The most innovative feature of the POA program is its simplicity: Low budget, utilizing one clerk, straight forward requirements and procedures. The effectiveness is significant increase in child support collections, reduction of court time, reduction of judicial assistants' time, participants (obligors and obligees) are more satisfied, burden of enforcement of support lifted from obliges, increased communication (with both family and court system). The program is accountable to funders and an oversight committee.

Sources of Funding:

A grant from the Florida Bar Foundation and the Lee County Clerk of Court has committed to future funding.

Applications for Other Settings:

Any jurisdiction that has the desire and minimal funding could implement a program like POA because of its simplicity.

Program Contact Person Information:

Sandi Sauls, Civil Division Manager
Lee County Clerk of Courts
P.O. Box 310
Fort Myers, FL 33902
Phone: (239) 335-2307
Fax: (239) 335-2425
Email: ssauls@leeclerk.org

Court/Agency: Lee County Clerk of Courts

Legal Information for Families Today

Program Category: Access to Justice

Program Strengths:

- ▣ **Strong evaluation component**
- \$ **Unique or detailed funding sources**
- ✎ **Outreach to special populations**
- **Serves unrepresented populations**
- * **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The mission of Legal Information for Families Today (LIFT) is to ensure access to legal information, support and community-based services for the several hundred thousand litigants who each year proceed *pro se* through the overcrowded and under-resourced New York City Family Court. Located in Family Courts' lobbies citywide, specially trained, bilingual Site Coordinators answer questions about the court process, distribute LIFT's 14 original family court resource guides and materials from over 50 community-based organizations, and make referrals to social and legal service providers.

LIFT provides other educational and supportive services, including a child welfare helpline, the Family Voices program, which addresses the needs of non-English speaking litigants, community-based educational workshops, and an interactive bilingual (English/Spanish) Web site.

Evaluation:

LIFT evaluates all of its programs through the collection of quantitative and qualitative data. Litigants served are racially diverse. The most popular topics asked about at the sites deal with court procedures/navigation, child support, and child custody. Client satisfaction surveys demonstrate that 87% of litigants felt they needed LIFT's assistance in order to navigate the system, and 95% of litigants reported that the help they received from LIFT will have a positive impact on their court proceeding. Ninety-eight percent of all callers to the helpline rate the helpfulness of the call with a "five" for "extremely helpful."

Justification as Exemplary:

Founded in 1996, LIFT was a revolutionary though simple idea: providing services to assist unrepresented petitioners in family court was nonexistent. Never before in New York City had anyone sat in the lobby of the Family Court, ready to answer questions posed by the thousands of people who sought the court's relief. LIFT serves a family

court system that is likely one of the busiest in the country and it manages to do so despite the difficulties inherent in obtaining funding for a public/private enterprise.

Sources of Funding:

Private Foundations: Lily Auchincloss Foundation; Edith C. Blum Foundation; Annie E. Casey Foundation; Child Welfare Fund; Fund for the City of New York; New World Foundation; New York Community Trust; Roche Relief Fund; Staten Island Bank and Trust; Valentine Perry Snyder Fund; Laura B. Vogler Foundation.

Public Funders: Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Field; New York City Council; New York State Assemblymember Richard F. Gottfried.

Corporate Funders and Supporters: Del Labs; Fleet Bank; Skadden Arps Slate Meagher Flom LLP; Sterling Equities; Stroock and Stroock and Lavan LLP.

Applications to Other Settings:

LIFT is an applicable program template for other jurisdictions where the pro se population is high and the availability of no cost and low cost legal services is not adequate to meet the need.

Contact Person:

Melissa M. Beck, Esq., Executive Director
Legal Information for Families Today
350 Broadway, Suite 1211
New York, NY 10013
Phone: (646) 613-9633
Email: mbeck@liftonline.org

Court/Agency: New York City Family Courts

Latino Outreach Program

Program Category: Access to Justice

Program Strengths:

- ☞ **Outreach to special populations**
- ☞ **Serves unrepresented populations**

Program Description and Goals:

The Latino Outreach Program of the Law Foundation of Prince George's County provides free legal advice to the Latino community in Langley Park, Maryland. The Program gives brief legal advice on almost all civil matters, provides a *pro bono* (free) attorney in certain family matters, and offers a domestic violence clinic for assistance in domestic violence matters. The program presently serves approximately 150 walk-in persons per month. The bilingual attorney provides brief legal advice, conducts pre-court settlement negotiation, prepares clients for hearings if a pro bono attorney is not available for the client, refers clients to an appropriate government agency, community agency, or private attorney, and advises clients of the Maryland civil legal process. The bilingual legal assistant orients clients as to our legal services, screens clients' legal issues, and checks for potential conflicts of interest.

Evaluation:

The program has increased Spanish-speaking litigant's access to the Maryland court system; prepared litigants for proceedings, thus contributing to the empowerment of people to exert their rights in court; contributed to the uniform treatment of parties, regardless of income, in family law disputes; and increased public trust and confidence in our legal system.

Justification as Exemplary:

Any English- or Spanish-speaking adult may come to the program and ask for free legal assistance. We are able to adapt the program to best fit the needs of our clients. For example, we adapted our Domestic Violence Clinic from a weekly, stationary courthouse clinic to a flexible telephone link-up clinic where domestic violence clients have a high chance of being matched with a pro bono attorney who can assist them with their legal matter. We comply with the reporting requirements of our grantor, the Court of Appeals of Maryland, and we report to Maryland Legal Services Corporation. We host or participate in legal education fairs in the community.

Sources of Funding:

Our program is currently funded by a grant of the Maryland Administrative Office of the Courts.

Applications for Other Settings:

We utilize volunteers to assist us in various programs. We have a corps of sixteen volunteer interpreters who are on-call to interpret communications between a Spanish-speaking client and an English-speaking attorney. We also maintain a database of 250 pro bono attorneys who are on-call to accept pro bono cases from our clinic. Our Domestic Violence Telephone Link-Up Clinic continues to successfully use nine volunteer pro bono attorneys. We utilize staff and volunteers to overcome cultural and language barriers and assist clients with their legal issues.

Program Contact Person Information:

Karin Dalichow
Law Foundation of Prince George's County
PO Box 329
Hyattsville, MD 20781
Phone: (301) 864-4907, ext. 105
Fax: (301) 864-8352
Email: karin_lawfoundation@msn.com

Project Hope

Program Category: Access to Justice

Program Strengths:

- ☒ **Strong evaluation component**
- ✋ **Agency collaboration**
- 👥 **Outreach to special populations**
- * **Innovative / unique**
- \$ **Collaborative funding**

Program Description and Goals:

The Southern Maryland Center for Family Advocacy provides no-cost advocacy and legal services to domestic violence victims in the southern region of Maryland. The program takes a multi-disciplinary approach to helping victims of family violence. The program creates an empowering team comprised of the client, a caseworker, an attorney, and other experts who address the primary issues that contribute to and/or result from domestic violence. Each team works intensively with each client to assist with both immediate, short-term crisis and longer-term socioeconomic and other challenges.

Evaluation:

The program was recently evaluated by the Administrative Office of the Courts and received an excellent evaluation. Other evaluations and feedback have come from clients themselves (available upon request) who credit the program with providing an innovative, respectful and well-rounded approach to ending family violence.

Justification as Exemplary:

Project Hope is both creative and innovative; it expands the base of services to clients through community partnerships—without incurring any additional cost—while focusing on empowerment and personal accountability. By providing clients with a full range of services discussed above, the program puts the impetus for success in the client’s hands, while providing a support structure via the caseworker and the services in order to make success a viable outcome.

Sources of Funding:

State of Maryland: Administrative Office of Courts; Governor’s Office on Crime Control and Prevention; Department of Human Resources; Maryland Legal Service Corporation.

United Way: Calvert and St. Mary’s Counties.

Local: St. Mary's and Calvert County governments.
Private: Marjorie Cook Foundation; fundraising; donations.

Applications for Other Settings:

Keys to Success:

- The primary key is that this program is based on the client's needs, versus a program's view of the client's needs. Thus, clients are involved in every facet of identifying and planning responses to areas of need.
- It is also critical to remember that this program's success is entirely dependent on the ability of the program to develop and sustain community partnerships with doctors, attorneys, mental health specialists, housing providers, and the like.

Program Contact Person Information:

Laura Joyce, M.A., Executive Director
Southern Maryland Center for Family Advocacy
23918 Mervell Dean Rd.
Hollywood, MD 20636
Phone: (301) 373-4141
Fax: (301) 373-4147
Email: smcfa@gmpexpress.net

Court/Agency: Serves Maryland's Seventh Circuit

“Poverty and Access to Courts,” “Joe’s Journey” and “What Would YOU Do?”

Program Category: Access to Justice

Program Strengths:

*** Innovative / unique**

Program Description:

A video-based education program for family judges designed to improve judicial awareness about the effects of poverty and overcome preconceived ideas about impoverished individuals and their struggles. The program aims to help participants identify and respond effectively to poverty issues when they arise in court. The program integrates the use of a video that demonstrates the experience of an indigent litigant before the court and the use of a “Poverty Game” where judges have the opportunity to experience difficult life choices when limited by severe poverty.

Evaluation:

Participant evaluations have been extremely positive. Many judges understood for the first time the fear, nervousness and intimidation the indigent feel. Judges learned the impact of the tone of their voice, the choice of words and space in which court is conducted, and how it may affect those who appear before them. Materials were also rated highly.

Justification as Exemplary:

The program is creative. The video is powerful and effective. It was created by Justice C. Philip Clarke with assistance from community members. The program is innovative in its use of judge-led, judicial social context training. The program is effective. Finally the program is accountable, and was grounded in the reflections and feedback provided by members of the poverty law community and other agencies serving the poor.

Applications for Other Settings:

The training module and video can be used for other audiences in other jurisdictions. It can be easily adapted for use with other court staff, attorneys, and agencies.

Program Contact Person Information:

Justice C. Philip Clarke
Sixth floor, Law Courts Building
Edmonton, AB T5J OR2
Canada
Phone: (780) 422-2296
Fax: (780) 427-0334
Email: brenda.friesen@qbmail.just.gov.ab.ca

Court/Agency: Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta

Fresno County Family Law Judge *Pro Tempore*

Program Type: Access to Justice

Program Strengths:

- \$ **Unique or detailed funding sources**
- 👤 **Agency collaboration**

Program Description:

This program was designed to permit the court to hear domestic violence cases within statutory time limits despite a shortage of judges available to hear these cases. Trained family law practitioners sit one-half calendar day each Wednesday, and depending on the caseload, one or two full-day calendars each Friday. Participating attorneys undergo an intensive day-long training program provided by the court. Quarterly trainings are held thereafter. The presiding family law judge provides oversight to the pro tempore judges.

Evaluation:

Anecdotal evidence suggests the program is effective.

Justification as Exemplary:

The program represents a partnership between the court and the family law bar. It is a creative solution to a difficult problem of handling sensitive cases in a timely fashion despite the lack of sufficient judicial resources. The program has been established without increasing the cost to the court.

Sources of Funding:

There are no public costs and no sources of funding, although the court does provide courtroom clerks and deputies to staff the courtrooms. The program is primarily volunteer-based.

Applications for Other Settings:

Keys to Success:

- A partnership between the family law bench and bar based on mutual respect and a willingness to work together;
- Family law practitioners willing to work for the court on a *pro bono* basis.

Challenges: These include the difficulty of finding space and courtroom staff to assist the judges pro tempore.

Program Contact Person Information:

Hon. James Michael Petrucelli, Judge
Fresno County Superior Court
1100 Van Ness Avenue
Fresno, CA 93724
Phone: (559) 488-3463
Fax: (559) 488-1774
Email: knystgeist@lsnqlaw.com

Court/Agency: Fresno County Superior Court

Practice Note 8: Allegations of Sexual Abuse

Program Category: Access to Justice

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Standards / guidelines**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

This program was put into place to deal with allegations of sexual abuse made by one parent against the other with respect to their children. It is a partnership between the court, Children's Services and the Edmonton City Police. Before an allegation of sexual abuse can be made in a family law proceeding, notice must be given to the court and to a specialized investigator from Children's Services, who works with the Child At Risk Response Team of the city police. The investigator and police conduct an investigation and a report is given to the court in 30 days. Rather than having matters dragged on in family court for years, the allegations are dealt with in a timely manner.

Evaluation:

The program was evaluated by Children's Services and found to be very effective. Both parties and lawyers have been happy with the program. It saved time for Children's Services and prevented files from becoming chronic. It is inexpensive to run because it uses existing resources in a more collaborative approach.

Justification as Exemplary:

This joint project has been recommended for expansion to the rest of the province. The number of allegations has dropped considerably. Children's Services also has picked up other child welfare issues and are able to provide resources for the parties. Court files are being resolved, particularly without trial, much quicker.

Sources of Funding:

There is no funding for the project. The court provides the two judges from existing pool of judges. The court clerk processes the paper work as part of her duties. Children's Services created the position of special investigator and hired the social worker who has other duties aside from the program. The city police already have the staff in place.

Applications for Other Settings:

The program, successful because of cooperation between agencies, is easily adaptable to other places. The biggest barrier to implementation was selling it to Children's Services in the first place.

Program Contact Person Information:

Hon. Marguerite Trussler, Justice
1A Sir Winston Churchill Square
Edmonton, AB T5J 0R2
Canada
Phone: (780) 427-1162
Fax: (780) 427-0334
Email: trussm@just.gov.ab.ca

Court/Agency: Queen's Bench

Family Law Self-Help Centers

Program Category: Access to Justice

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Standards / guidelines**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Accessible to remote geographic regions**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

Family Law *Pro Se* Assistance Projects are free walk-in clinics that provide forms, information and assistance to self-represented persons involved in family cases in Maryland Circuit Courts. Attorney providers interview litigants to determine whether their case is appropriate for self-representation, assist them in completing forms and in planning for the next step in their litigation. Referrals for more in-depth legal assistance are made when the party is in need of full representation.

Evaluation:

The project collects basic case information and demographic data on all program users. The data reflects that program usage has peaked at just under 38,000 users per year, largely as a result of restricted growth in funding over the last two years. The Maryland Administrative Office of Courts (AOC) Department of Family Administration is nearing completion of a study of self-help projects nationwide, including five projects in Maryland. The Maryland assessments have generated a list of recommendations to improve the projects.

Justification as Exemplary:

These programs are exemplary for their quality of service and their ability to provide uniformity of practice around the state. Other strengths include strong state level support and reliable state funding.

Sources of Funding:

Family Division/Family Services Program grants, administered by the AOC, are provided to individual jurisdictions.

Applications for Other Settings:

- A key success in implementing the program has been the presence in every jurisdiction of Family Support Services Coordinators, individuals who are charged with developing programs to enhance the experience of families and children that come before the court.
- Because of the “fragile” consensus in the state regarding the need to assist the self-represented, it is essential that these programs be operated ethically, economically and in a manner that is above reproach.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Court/Agency: Maryland Judiciary

Protective Order Advocacy Representation Projects

Program Category: Access to Justice

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Standards / guidelines**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Accessible to remote geographic regions**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The Maryland Judiciary has established a multi-jurisdictional safety net of programs to address the safety and legal needs of victims of family violence. The Protective Order Advocacy Representation Project (POARP) offers on-site safety planning, legal advice, referrals and legal representation for victims of family violence. Over 3000 victims each year receive assistance through the programs.

Evaluation:

The AOC tracks the performance of these programs and this information is compiled in the Annual Report of the Maryland Circuit Court Family Divisions and Family Services Programs.

Justification as Exemplary:

This is a statewide initiative to develop a broad multi-court, multi-jurisdictional safety net of programs for victims and has been successful because of the close working relationship between the courts, advocates and founders.

Sources of Funding:

Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) STOP funds and state general funds are used to fund these programs.

Applications for Other Settings:

It is key to work with local domestic violence advocates who already are established in the jurisdiction. It is also key that administrative judges support the program, provide space and make referrals.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Court/Agency: Maryland Judiciary

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

The Children of Divorce Intervention Program (CODIP)

Program Category: Children's Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Standards / guidelines**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The Children of Divorce Intervention Program (CODIP) is a preventive program designed specifically to help children of different ages cope with the emotional and behavioral challenges associated with divorce. The goal of the program is to reduce the risks associated with parental divorce on children's adjustment, ease the stress of family transitions and to teach children skills to enhance their capacity to cope and foster their resilience.

Evaluation:

Six clinical trials documenting the effectiveness of the program have been conducted. Parents report improvements in children's ability to talk about their feelings and family circumstances, deal effectively with program and cope with family changes. Teachers report program children were better adjusted in the classroom, more able to tolerate frustration, get along with peers and ask for help when needed.

Justification as Exemplary:

CODIP has received awards and designation as a model program by the New York State Department of Education and several national organizations (Department of Health and Human Services, National Mental Health Association). CODIP, originally school-based, is a transportable model that has been adapted in hundreds of settings around the world, including mental health centers, after school care program and health care clinics. It has been implemented in other countries, including Germany, Canada, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.

Sources of Funding:

Funding sources are varied and diversified, including private foundations, local, state and national organizations.

Applications for Other Settings:

- CODIP has been shown to be effective in numerous settings around the world.
- Effective partnerships and collaboration between key groups will help ensure sustainability of the program.
- Commitment to Best Practice Standards Pedro-Carroll, January 2005 *Family Court Review* (“Fostering Resilience in the Aftermath of Divorce”), in conducting children’s programs will help ensure success.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Court/Agency: Children’s Institute, University of Rochester

Neighborhood Partnership Program

Program Category: Children's Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
- \$ Unique or detailed funding sources**
- * Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The Neighborhood Partnership Program is a family-centered, strength-based, community-based child protection initiative, utilizing a Family Team Conference approach. The three main goals of the program are:

1. To change child welfare frontline practice so that families are heard, empowered, and underlying needs are addressed;
2. Improve interagency communication;
3. Community development activities that encourage making neighborhoods safer for all children and families that reside there.

Evaluation:

In Jacksonville, Florida, data from 1999 to 2002 showed a 27% reduction in the number of abuse reports with verified findings in the five targeted neighborhoods that had Neighborhood Partnership programs operating in them. At the same time, the district and county data reflected significant increases of 60 to 94% in the number of verified reports of abuse and neglect. In Tampa, an independent evaluation showed that 93% of the families working with the agency had no further incidents of verified abuse or neglect compared to the state average of only a 67% success rate.

Justification as Exemplary:

Creativity:

- Our slogan is “none of us is as smart as all of us.” Family led brainstorming is used for coming up with unique, individualized solutions to address the needs of the children and family.

Innovation:

- We hold Family Team Conferences at neutral sites and at times (in the evenings) convenient for the family and their friends to attend.

Effectiveness:

- Families know what they want and need and simply listening to them produces results far removed from what traditional interventions are able to demonstrate.

Accountability:

- During the Family Team Conference participants, both family and service agency personnel, volunteer to accomplish identified tasks and a written plan is developed.

Sources of Funding:

Edna Clark McConnell Foundation Promoting Safe and Stable Families Funds (PSSF).

Applications for Other Settings:

Key to success:

- Getting “middle management” of social service programs to buy into it and not just the line employees or upper management.

Challenges and barriers:

- The misperception that Family Team Conferencing takes more time than the old way of doing casework for already overworked staff.

Improvements to be made:

- Educating judges to not “order” parents to attend Family Team Conferences (it goes against the whole empowering and ownership ideals fostered by Family Team Conferencing).

Program Contact Person Information:

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Court/Agency: Florida Department of Children and Families

Lawyers For Children, Inc.

Program Category: Children's Services

Program Strengths:

- \$ Unique or detailed funding sources**
- ☛ Outreach to special populations**
- ☛ Serves unrepresented populations**

Program Description and Goals:

Lawyers For Children (LFC) provides free legal advocacy and social work services to children voluntarily placed in foster care and to children who are the subjects of abuse, neglect, termination of parental rights, custody, visitation, guardianship and other Family Court proceedings. In every case assigned to LFC, a social worker and a lawyer work together, enabling the court to reach a resolution that is precisely honed to reflect the wishes and needs of the affected children. LFC's goal is to use our interdisciplinary model to help find safe, permanent and loving homes for each child we represent, and to pursue positive reform of the foster care system.

LFC is committed to our service projects that provide specialized advocacy to underserved youths in foster care such as victims of sexual abuse; undocumented immigrants; gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth; and witnesses to domestic violence.

Justification as Exemplary:

Lawyers For Children stands as a successful model for innovative representation of children based on three unique aspects of our practice:

- Every child receives the expert services of both an attorney and a social worker;
- Our special projects target underserved children in foster care and provide them with specialized information for self advocacy as well as direct support;
- Our policy work has pioneered the successful blending of direct services and system wide reform efforts in one child centered advocacy office.

Sources of Funding:

- Government: New York State Office of Court Administration, Unified Court System.
- Foundations and Corporations over \$1,000: Annie E. Casey Foundation; Lassar and Fanny Agoos Charity Fund; The Ayco Charitable Foundation; Edith C. Blum Foundation; Blumenthal Foundation; Shirley C. Burden Charitable Lead Trust; Charina Foundation, Inc.; Ira DeCamp Foundation; Dreitzer Foundation; Fidelity

Investments Charitable Gift Fund; FJC: A Community Foundation of Donor Advised Funds; Beatrice S. and Lloyd Frank Philanthropic Fund; Susan K. Freedman and Rabbi Richard Jacobs Family Fund; Richard S. Fuld, Jr. Foundation, Inc.; Bernard F. and Alva B. Gimbel Foundation; Leslie Gimbel Fund; Horace W. Goldsmith Foundation; Bob and Trudy Gottesman Philanthropic Fund; Stephen and Myrna Greenberg Philanthropic Fund; Hyde and Watson Foundation; IOLA Jewish Communal Fund; The Joelson Foundation; The Jordan Company, LLP; JPMorgan Chase Foundation; Abby and Mitch Leigh Foundation; Parker Foundation; Peninsula Community Foundation; Pumpkin Foundation; Lewis Family Charitable Fund; Liebowitz and Greenway Family Foundation; Marks Family Foundation; The Mitzvah Foundation; New York Community Trust; New York Mercantile Exchange Foundation; Arthur Ross Foundation; Silverweed Foundation; Scherman Foundation; Thomas D. and Denise R. Stern Family Foundation; Studio One; Laurie Tisch Sussman Foundation; James S. and Merryl H. Tisch Philanthropic Fund; Tides Foundation; Linda J. Vester and Glenn H. Greenberg Philanthropic Fund; Lawrence and Idell Weisberg Foundation.

- Law Firms: Skadden Arps Foundation; Weil, Gotshal and Manges LLP; Dickstein and Shapiro; Loeb and Loeb.

Applications for Other Settings:

The keys to Lawyers For Children's successful representation of children in foster care are the effectiveness of our interdisciplinary team approach and our ability to use the information we gather from our direct service practice to inform our special projects and policy work.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Court/Agency: Practice confined to New York City Family Courts

Children’s Law Center of Washington, D.C. Pro Bono GAL Project

Program Category: Children’s Services

Program Strengths:

- \$ Unique or detailed funding sources**
- ### Outreach to special populations**
- Serves unrepresented populations**

Program Description and Goals:

The Pro Bono GAL Project gives a voice to children in custody cases that involve domestic violence, allegations of abuse and other complex issues by simplifying the referral and appointment process for D.C. Superior Court judges. The project conducts two trainings per year and mentors pro bono attorneys. Every attorney who attends the training commits to taking at least two cases that year. When CLC receives a case referral from a Superior Court judge, the coordinator sends an email to a list of eligible trained attorney volunteers. Upon receiving a response, CLC directs the attorney volunteer to contact the judges’ chambers directly to accept the case. The CLC is available for ongoing mentoring in the cases taken by the volunteer attorneys.

Evaluation:

The project currently does no formal follow-up or evaluation.

Justification as Exemplary:

The D.C. Children’s Law Center Pro Bono Guardian *Ad Litem* Program is one of a few programs nation-wide that focuses on providing representation for children in private custody cases and civil protection cases involving domestic violence. Because the appointment of a guardian ad litem is discretionary and because a significant number of these cases involve low income situations, without a program like this these children would receive no representation.

Sources of Funding:

The first year and second year, the coordinator for the project was part of a Skadden Fellowship Project and the other expenses were part of general operating budget. The second year the program also received an ABA Child Custody Mini Grant of \$10,000. After the start up period, the program costs are approximately 10% of a staff attorney and related overhead. The D.C. Bar and individual major law firms sponsor the trainings.

Applications for Other Settings:

The keys to success are a good relationship with local bar organization and support from large law firms. These entities sponsor and provide the location, the food, and the cost of training materials for two all-day trainings a year. A significant amount of time was expended developing relationships with the court and working with the courts on the benefits of having a GAL appointed. Cases are very time consuming and it can be very difficult for sole practitioners to take on pro bono assignments. The model is applicable anywhere where the local bar and large law firms can collaborate for funding. Helping children is a very attractive and fulfilling pro bono opportunity.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Put Something Back

Program Category: Children's Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Serves unrepresented populations**

Program Description and Goals:

Put Something Back (PSB), a joint *pro bono* project of the Dade County Bar Association and 11th Judicial Circuit, marshals the private bar to provide free civil legal services to low-income individuals, children and families in Miami-Dade County. Over 225 firms and 6,500 volunteers have participated in this program. PSB coordinates a wide range of projects and provides free CLE trainings, malpractice coverage, mentors, mediators and law student assistance. Approximately 5,000 clients are served by PSB annually. When the Court needs a GAL, the court judicial assistant emails the PSB paralegal. The paralegal emails the judicial assistant three names and the court appoints one of the volunteer attorneys. In 2003, PSB, in response to numerous requests for GAL's in domestic violence cases for children who were victims of or witnesses to domestic violence, expanded its existing GAL pro bono program.

Evaluation:

The project currently does no formal follow-up or evaluation.

Justification as Exemplary:

PBS's partners are significantly involved and committed to its success. The 11th Judicial Circuit Court is actively involved in the planning of the project and training of the GALs. PSB utilizes the local bar association in its recruiting. The PBS training has always been a key part of the project. Training includes talks from judges, mental health professionals, and experienced guardians ad litem on topics such as: effective guardian ad litem work and laws that regulate the role; the effect of high conflict on children; domestic violence allegations; protective orders and visitation and parenting; and how to speak to a child.

Sources of Funding:

PSB is a well-supported project that has existed since 1987. The general operating funds come from private attorney donations and a grant from The Florida Bar. All attorneys in Florida are strongly urged to either accept one pro bono case per year or make a \$350.00 "buy-in." On occasion, PSB receives small grants for one of its projects, which specifically targets a population or group. Part of the funding for PSB expansion into the

domestic violence area came from an ABA Child Custody Mini-Grant. Additionally, Mellon Bank underwrites many of the project's activities and trainings.

Applications for Other Settings:

PSB is successful due to the collaboration between the circuit court and local bar as joint sponsors. Because PSB actually coordinates five different projects, a certain synergy exists that helps to recruit and make all the programs visible. Florida has a mandatory pro bono reporting requirement. At the end of the year, some firms donate money on behalf of its attorneys who have not provided any pro bono hours during the year.

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Children's Law Center, Inc

Program Category: Children's Services

Program Strengths:

- ☒ **Strong evaluation component**
- ✋ **Agency collaboration**
- 👥 **Outreach to special populations**
- * **Innovative / unique**
- \$ **Collaborative funding**

Program Description and Goals:

The Children's Law Center, Inc. was founded in May 1989 to protect and enhance the legal rights and entitlements of children in Kentucky through quality legal representation, research and policy development, and training and education to attorneys and others regarding the rights of children. Through a staff attorney, the Center provides legal representation to approximately 50-80 children per year in cases involving children in custody and visitation cases wherein there are significant high risk factors. In 2003 the Center implemented a *pro bono* panel of 28 local attorneys who committed to represent indigent or needy children in two cases of divorce, guardianship, adoption and/or parentage proceedings as well as child witness representation. The majority of the cases involve issues of sexual and physical abuse, dependency and neglect. Law students have assisted with individual cases and assisted in preparation of the attorney training manuals.

Evaluation:

A questionnaire is sent every six months to the pro bono panel members to gather information on the disposition and details of their cases. In addition, the project provides detailed annual reports to its funders, including statistical and evaluative self-assessment. One finding has been that the cases take more time than expected by the volunteer.

Justification as Exemplary:

The Center has done an excellent job of working in coalition with other organizations, and utilizes law students and social work student interns. The Center developed a training manual for the pro bono project. The Center has received very positive response to its manual and a number of courts have asked the Center to provide training on the issues presented in the manual.

Sources of Funding:

The Northern Kentucky Children's Law Center is funded through numerous grants, special events, United Way funds, and IOLTA. The Center received ABA Child Custody

Pro Bono Project Grants in 2002 and 2003 that supported the expansion of the Center's work in representing children in private custody matters.

Applications for Other Settings:

Keys to Success:

- Staff Attorney who is able to oversee and coordinate various parts of project;
- The Pro Bono Coordinator, who coordinates assignment of cases between court and pro bono attorneys;
- Relationship with local law and social work schools;
- Good relationship and credibility with judiciary;
- The Guardian Ad Litem manual is a resource both for the volunteer attorneys and the judiciary.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Children's Law Center Custody Advocate Program

Program Category: Children's Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Innovative / unique**
-  **Collaborative funding**

Program Description and Goals:

The focus of the Custody Advocate Program (CAP) of the Children's Law Center in Charlotte, North Carolina, is to effectively represent the best interests of children in custody and visitation cases. The primary goals of this representation are:

- To resolve the conflicts between the parties outside of court;
- To ensure optimal placement and promote effective co-parenting of children;
- To minimize the victimization of children involved in custody disputes.

The program effectively fulfills these objectives by:

- Identifying and advocating for the child's needs while coordinating services and information to meet those needs;
- Identifying specific needs and services for the parents; setting up facilitation among the parties;
- Teaching and enhancing effective parenting and communication once court-ordered mediation has been unsuccessful;
- Negotiating a parenting agreement which serves the child's best interests;
- Reducing hostilities between the parties;
- Providing investigative powers to ensure optimal representation of the child's best interest.

Evaluation:

Although the project currently does no formal follow-up or evaluation, the Center does receive informal feedback from its significant on-going contact with the judges and court clerks and with the team members. In addition, the project provides detailed annual reports to its funders, including statistical and evaluative self-assessment.

Justification as Exemplary:

The CAP program was created in 1987 in response to the number of high conflict custody cases. These cases had been unresolved for an extended period of time, due to additional issues such as domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health problems. The children involved in these cases frequently endured emotional trauma and unstable living environments. The CAP team concept of a staff attorney, a program coordinator, a volunteer attorney from the local bar and a trained custody advocate is both unique and effective.

Sources of Funding:

The Children's Law Center is funded through attorney's fees, IOLTA, United Way, private donations and annual fundraisers. In CAP cases, a minimum fee based on a sliding scale is ordered by the court to be paid to the program if the family makes less than \$45,000 in combined income. If the family makes more than \$45,000, the court orders a retainer based on a sliding scale of combined income to be paid to the program.

Applications for Other Settings:

Keys to Success:

- Team approach: CAP uses a structured team approach to investigate each case, consisting of a staff attorney, a program coordinator, a volunteer attorney from the local bar and a trained custody advocate from the community.
- Good relationship with local bar organization and support from large law firms through sponsorship of custody advocates and pro bono hours from firm attorneys and paralegals.
- Good relationship and credibility with judiciary.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Kids' Voice

Program Category: Children's Services

Program Strengths:

- ☒ **Strong evaluation component**
- ☒ **Outreach to special populations**
- * **Innovative / unique**
- \$ **Collaborative funding**

Program Description and Goals:

Goals and Objectives:

- To provide children and their parents with skills, including communication, coping and problem solving skills, to help them through the divorce process;
- To demystify the divorce process in order to promote a healthier perspective;
- To provide a safe place for children to discuss their thoughts and feelings about their experience;
- To build community resources for the families' participation in the program.

The peer relationship is a very powerful component of Kids' Voice. Parents and children attend the six-week program at the same time, meeting once a week for an hour and a half. The children are placed in groups of ten according to age with two trained facilitators. The parents participate in discussions about how to focus on their children and the best way to help them through the process. At the end of each session, the facilitators come together to debrief each family in order to assess what resources they may need.

Evaluation:

Each Kids' Voice facilitator uses an evaluative tool at the end of the six-week sessions, asking children questions about what they have retained from the classes and recording their responses. Parents are given an evaluation form asking whether they better understand their children's needs and whether they feel their communication skills have been improved.

Justification as Exemplary:

The program offers a safe place for children to express their feelings about the changes their families are going through. At the same time, parents are being taught co-parenting and communication skills to use with their children as well as with the other parent. Evaluations and feedback from the community inform us of appreciation felt by parents, children, school counselors, therapists, attorneys and judges.

Sources of Funding:

National Council of Jewish Women of Greater Kansas City; Village Presbyterian Church; The Variety Club of Greater Kansas City; Target Community Giving Program; Junior League of Wyandotte and Johnson County, Kansas; Capitol Federal Foundation; Program fees account for 10% of program expenses.

Applications for Other Settings:

- The Kids' Voice curriculum can be easily duplicated regardless of geographic location because the issues being addressed with the children are universally common to families experiencing separation and divorce.
- A committed group of facilitators is essential.
- The program can also be conducted in other languages in working with minority populations.
- Program materials and evaluation tools are available upon request through the Johnson County, Kansas CASA Kids' Voice program.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Court/Agency: Johnson County CASA, Kansas

Families in Transition

Family Service Association of Toronto

Program Category: Children's Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Innovative / unique**
-  **Collaborative funding**

Program Description and Goals:

Since 1977, Families in Transition (FIT), a Canadian pioneer in services for changing families, has provided specialized clinical programs that focus on supporting child adjustment when parents separate, divorce, or remarry. We also engage in social advocacy on behalf of children, conduct research, train students, and provide consultation to professionals. FIT interventions are focused on how parents can contribute to child adjustment. The interventions that comprise our evidence-based service array are based on variables that research identifies as critical for child adjustment. Programming includes individual and family counseling, group work, educational seminars, and mediation. This approach permits us to create individualized intervention plans that reflect each family's unique circumstances. The goals of our work with separating and divorcing families are:

- To teach strategies for reducing parental conflict;
- To create effective co-parental relationships;
- To support children's grief process;
- To improve parent /child relationships.

The goals of our work with blending families are:

- Teach strategies for resolving the past;
- Strengthen stepfamily relationships;
- Define roles and boundaries
- Establish parenting style and discipline strategy;
- Develop stepfamily routines and traditions;
- Create effective parenting coalitions.

Evaluation:

FIT has conducted two major Canadian research studies to investigate treatment effectiveness. In addition to confirming that reducing parent conflict and creating effective co-parental partnerships support child adjustment, the results demonstrated that preventive interventions foster resiliency and help children increase their coping skills. In July 2004, *Family Court Review* published a paper describing our work to build an evidenced-based model for reconnecting a child with an absent parent. In addition to formal research, clients complete written service evaluations that provide data for program reviews and helps to link them to other service when required.

Justification as Exemplary:

To the best of our knowledge, FIT is the only centre of its kind in Canada. Our specialized approach integrates practice with research and policy initiatives. We are known for developing creative and innovative strategies to resolve divorce-related issues. For example, in partnership with Boundless Adventures, a group of single parent families and a FIT social worker spent a week in an outdoor program designed to build family strengths.

Sources of Funding:

United Way of Toronto, Client fees (sliding scale), donations and bequests, foundation grants (project-specific), fundraising initiatives, and research grants.

Applications for Other Settings:

- Our social policy work demonstrates that similar concerns are expressed by children coping with family change regardless of locale. While approaches and programming may vary between jurisdictions, the principles underlying successful interventions are consistent. Interventions need to be evidence-based and to provide opportunities for providing information as well as teaching communication and conflict resolution skills.
- Service providers need to take into account that there are multiple pathways to adjustment.
- The challenges facing developing and small service providers include generating sufficient service requests to fill group-based interventions, attracting experienced staff with a range of skills and a willingness to work non-traditional hours, and managing systemic barriers such as language or literacy difficulties, fees, and child care. Sustainable funding is always a significant issue.
- Program challenges range from developing critical community partnerships with the other mental health professionals, lawyers, and the judiciary, implementing and consistently using policies about consent to treatment and confidentiality, creating interventions that reflect variables mediating change, and incorporating outcome measures to monitor progress.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Court/Agency: Family Service Association of Toronto

Family Law CASA of King County

Program Category: Children's Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The mission of the Family Law CASA of King County is to recruit, screen, train, supervise and support community volunteers who are appointed to investigate custody and visitation disputes in order to give children a voice in court. The program is assigned to work on cases involving low and moderate-income families in contested dissolution, paternity, third-party custody and modification disputes. The program does not charge a fee for its services.

Evaluation:

The program provides the court officers with judicial feedback forms. It provides volunteers with feedback forms at the completion of each case. The court has indicated a desire to assign more cases if the program has the capacity.

Justification as Exemplary:

The program was created as a non-profit corporation after the county-funded version was closed due to budget cuts in December 2002. The program has grown to 114 volunteers, who have been assigned to 116 cases involving 164 children. The program uses volunteers from all walks of life and backgrounds, not just lawyers.

Sources of Funding:

The program receives no government funding. All funding is from private donations and grants.

Applications for Other Settings:

- This program could be replicated in any other county.
- The challenge is finding and sustaining a source of funding.
- The program could be replicated through the court system if there were government/court funds available.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Court/Agency: Non-Profit

PARENTING PLAN SERVICES

Access Facilitation

Program Category: Parenting Plan Services

Program Strengths:

-  Evidence-based**
-  Strong evaluation component**
-  Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

In order to promote parental cooperation, something that adversarial litigation does not do, a new paradigm was needed. Parents are now able meet with an access facilitator very early in the legal process, before emotions spin out of control. Through access facilitation, parents learn how to resolve their own disputes regarding access and how to be effective co-parents. A mandatory orientation program is provided weekly and counseling and parenting education referrals are made.

Judges refer almost all contested custody and access cases to the access facilitator prior to hearings or social studies. If they cannot reach a facilitated agreement, the facilitator makes a recommendation to the parents, which the court encourages them to try in good faith. The access facilitator communicates with the parents and their attorneys, continuously reinforcing the court's philosophy that both parents need and deserve access to the children, in a safe environment, and both parents must share responsibility for making the child feel that access with the other parent is important and desired.

Evaluation:

Client feedback from program evaluations has been overwhelmingly positive. Additionally, we are conducting a longitudinal study in which every access facilitation case is matched with a similar control case that is going through the traditional course of social study and litigation. The cases are tracked to see when they finalize and whether or not they return for further litigation. So far, it appears that the facilitated cases return for further litigation half as often as the control cases. A study being conducted by a professor at Texas Christian University is also currently underway.

Justification as Exemplary:

The Access Facilitation program is exemplary for the following reasons:

1. Creativity. We were able to initiate this project by taking a currently existing caseworker position (a custody investigator) and changing that position to full-time access facilitation. Because access facilitation is ordered before a social

study is ordered, the number of social studies being ordered went down and did not cause undo hardship on the remaining caseworkers.

2. Innovation. We are one of the only programs that we are aware of that is set up to reach the parents at the very beginning of litigation, unlike mediation which usually takes place somewhere in the middle or near the end before trial. Reaching the parents early is a key component of the program.
3. The program has been highly effective. Feedback from participants is highly positive. Our judges have fully embraced the program, as have most of our local attorneys. Statistics kept for the past four years show that the facilitated cases return for litigation far less frequently than cases handled in the traditional way with a social study.
4. Accountability is required, as this is a grant-funded program. We must be accountable financially and statistically.

Sources of Funding:

The Office of the Attorney General of the State of Texas Access and Visitation Grant;
Tarrant County Government.

Applications for Other Settings:

The keys to success are:

- Having at least one court willing to give the program a try.
- Having well-qualified staff as facilitators.
- Keeping attorneys informed and unthreatened.
- Making sure the program is arranged so that parents meet the facilitator at the beginning of litigation.
- One improvement would be to make the program available to parties pre-litigation, so that litigation could possibly be avoided.

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Court/Agency: Tarrant County Superior Court

Vermont Family Court Mediation Program

Program Category: Parenting Plan Services

Program Strengths:

- ☒ Strong evaluation component**
- \$ Unique or detailed funding sources**
- ☒ Outreach to special populations**

Program Description and Goals:

Parent coordination is a process designed to assist parents in arranging safe and constructive parent child contact while protecting children from adult conflict. Vermont offers subsidized parent coordination services to income eligible married or never married parents, before, during or after a separation or divorce. The goal of the process is a detailed and documented parenting plan. Data show a significant drop in court involvement for Vermont families who have completed the parent coordination process.

Evaluation:

The program data collected to date has shown that in 56 cases that have completed the Parent Coordination process, only 22 have had any post decree filings with the court. These cases, prior to receiving Parent Coordination services, were historically cases with multiple post decree filings (averaging five filings per case).

Justification as Exemplary:

Because we provide subsidized services to income eligible parents, low income Vermont families access the same private practice professional Parent Coordinators as the wealthy. Our program was one of the first institutionally established Parent Coordination programs in the nation (established in 1995). We have established program protocols, standards of practice and procedure for the Parent Coordinators in Vermont.

Sources of Funding:

The primary source of funding for the Vermont Family Court Mediation program is the State judiciary budget, which is approved by the Vermont legislature. However, the program has also received a small grant as part of the Violence Against Women Act, specifically to be put toward the subsidy we provide for Parent Coordination services.

Applications for Other Settings:

Characteristics needed to replicate the program are:

- A core group of individuals dedicated to working with high conflict families;
- Obtaining the funding needed to offer subsidized services to low-income families;
- Quality training;
- Development of comprehensive protocols, training requirements, and administrative forms that could be incorporated into almost any community.

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VISITS (Visiting Interactions Supervised in Trusted Surroundings)

Program Category: Parenting Plan Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Collaborative funding**

Program Description and Goals:

The philosophy of the Family Nurturing Center's VISITS program is that children have a right and a need to healthy relationships with both parents. The purpose of the program is to provide a safe setting for adults and children to meet, play, and develop healthy relationships. The goal of the program is to provide high quality access and visitation services that support and facilitate safe and nurturing relationships between children and non-custodial parents ad relatives. Visitations generally occur for one sixty-minute session per week (fifty minutes for supervised visitation and ten minutes for processing/feedback), but the program is flexible and can provide for the unique needs of families as well.

Evaluation:

In FY 2004, there were a total of 275 participating individuals: 123 children, 79 non-custodial parents and other relatives (60 visiting parents - 19 guests) and 73 custodial parents. One hundred percent of children participating had access to their non-resident parent, as measured by program participation. Ninety-two percent of visiting parents participating in a telephone survey "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that they experienced positive interactions with their children while participating in the VISITS program. Positive interactions between children and non-residential parents occurred in 95% of visits in the past year as demonstrated by an audit of observation forms. Eighty-two of non-resident parents noted an increase in knowledge of appropriate parenting skills.

Justification as Exemplary:

To our knowledge, Family Nurturing Center® is the only supervised visitation center in the state that is able to promote and maintain safety without reliance on the use of either a security guard or a metal detector. We have developed the framework for quality supervised visitation services in the area. Based on a solid assessment and sound guidelines, we are able to serve individuals with very challenging histories. It is not uncommon for a visiting parent to remark, "this was the only place where I was not treated as a criminal."

Sources of Funding:

Access and visitation federal grant; United Way; fiscal courts in Boone, Campbell, and Kenton Counties; program fees and private contributions.

Applications for Other Settings:

- One of the keys to our success is due to the underlying philosophy and vision of Family Nurturing Center. Staff consistently and genuinely interact in a manner that promotes the dignity and well-being of others.
- Program guidelines and protocols are based on sound social work practice and the National Supervised Visitation Network.
- An additional key to our success is a broad network of funders and referring workers.
- The program structure could easily be replicated in other settings.
- Improvements we would recommend would be related primarily to structural design. We would recommend larger rooms and outdoor play areas if at all possible.

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Court/Agency: Family Nurturing Center

The Oregon Family Institute Collaborative Evaluation/Mediation Model

Program Category: Parenting Plan Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Standards / guidelines**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

Oregon Family Institute (OFI) evaluations make the parents and their attorneys the first users of information by focusing on the needs of the children, the parents' capacity to parent and a detailed parenting plan matching the children's needs with parental capacities. Evaluations include interviews with home visits with each parent, interviews with minor children and contact with appropriate collaterals. At a mediation session, the parents and their attorneys discuss the recommendations to develop the best parenting plan.

Evaluation:

Several jurisdictions have developed panels of OFI-trained practitioners and have requested that OFI provide training in the more rural parts of the state. OFI would like to do a study to review the durability of agreements reached through this process.

Justification as Exemplary:

The process is unique in meeting the needs of both the judge who must make the decisions and the needs of the parents to understand what their children need. It also puts accountability back on parents to make their own best plans and avoid resorting to adjudication.

Sources of Funding:

Some jurisdictions use discretionary court funds available to judges to subsidize services for those cases that need it. The court sets a standard fee amount that is relatively low (\$800) and has OFI-trained panel members who agree to accept these cases for that fee. If the clients can pay, they do. If they can't, the court will pay and the practitioner is insured of the fee. In other jurisdictions, clients self-pay, finding that the OFI process is usually significantly less expensive (ranging from \$1,250 to \$2,500) than standard custody evaluation models, which cost between \$2,000 and \$7,500.

Applications for Other Settings:

Key to successes include:

- Professionals provide better quality evaluations within a mediation process that keeps the law and child at the center;
- Parents do not feel closed out the process and appreciate the subsequent reduction in attorney's fees and frustration;
- Judges like the evaluations because they are written with the most relevant legal information in mind.

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Court/Agency: Oregon Family Institute

DISPUTE RESOLUTION SERVICES

Collaborative Professionals Group of Louisiana

Program Category: Dispute Resolution Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Standards / guidelines**
-  **Agency collaboration**
- * Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

This is a court-sponsored interdisciplinary collaborative divorce program. Trained lawyers, mental health coaches and financial specialists work as a team to resolve divorce and custody out of court. The goal is to reduce impact on litigants and children and develop long term parenting plans at less cost.

Evaluation:

This is a new program, so findings are still coming in. The program has had many reconciliations (approximately 10%).

Justification as Exemplary:

The innovation of this program is having a judge design a non-court-based dispute, guide through the supreme court, administer program and develop judicial protocols for involvement. The judicial control at the start was effective because of inherent judicial persuasion over lawyers. Having a judge trained and member of international board gives credence to program. The program has also trained a local Mental Health Agency to provide services to lower income families in need.

Sources of Funding:

This program was originally funded by the Rapides Foundation, a local health-based foundation. They paid for design, training, printing and educational travel. The local Mental Health Agency received training to provide for lower income coaching. The group is developing trainers to conduct seminars to continue self-funding.

Applications for Other Settings:

Key to success:

- Interest of local court in persuading lawyers and mental health disciplines to overcome difficulties and form teams.
- Having a judge oversee and streamline the judicial process helped.
- Time to create the interdisciplinary trust before providing the service was essential.
- A barrier is attorney fee reduction. This has caused some resistance from the bar.
- Improvements could be better, early structural work to get Web page and public education in place first.

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Child Protection Mediation Program

Program Category: Dispute Resolution Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Standards / guidelines**

Program Description and Goals:

The Child Protection Mediation Program allows parents (or other persons) and social workers to refer disputes about the care of a child to mediation. Interest-based mediation services are provided by qualified, trained mediators on contract to the Ministry of Attorney General. Participation in mediation is voluntary.

The overall goals of the program are to see fewer contested cases proceed to the court and to promote early decision making about children. Objectives include offering parents a viable option to going to court to resolve disputes, encouraging social workers to incorporate collaborative processes in their practice, and promoting more efficient use of court time.

In 2001 the Ministry of the Attorney General, in collaboration with the Ministry of Children and Family Development and other partners in the family justice system, designed and implemented a more effective and efficient child protection mediation model in order to better meet these goals and objectives. The Facilitated Planning Meeting process requires mediators to conduct orientation sessions separately with the parties before a focused planning meeting (mediation) is held, and a senior social worker (Court Work Supervisor) dedicated to the project attends the mediation with the authority to agree to a settlement and make decisions about resources. One result of the pilot project is increased uptake of mediation throughout the province as well as the dedication of additional resources in every region of the province to promote the use of the mediation and utilize elements of the facilitated planning meeting process.

Evaluation:

Results from the Facilitated Planning Meeting Project are as follows:

- 92% of all issues referred to mediation were resolved;
- 83% of cases had all issues settled;
- 12% had some issues resolved;
- 5% had no issues resolved;
- 100% of the cases in a comparison group that were not referred to mediation proceeded to a contested protection hearing;

- 14% of the cases in the pilot project went to a contested protection hearing and in the vast majority of cases, social workers appeared in court for a few minutes to confirm the agreement;
- The average time from removal of a child to final disposition of the case is significantly shorter for cases that go to a planning meeting (mediation);
- A number of issues are resolved at mediation that would otherwise have required at least two court orders;
- Combined satisfaction ratings for parents, social workers, lawyers and judges about the Facilitated Planning Meeting process was 6.2 on a scale of 1-7;
- Trial dates were vacated as a result of cases settling in mediation;
- Preliminary evaluation suggested child in care costs were reduced by one third when cases were referred to mediation;
- Mediation could be scheduled quickly;
- Ongoing monitoring of the Child Protection Mediation Program suggests high satisfaction with the mediation service.

Justification as Exemplary:

The Facilitated Planning Meeting project was conceived because of concern about delay and backlog of child protection cases in the Provincial Court. Creative and innovative solutions were required to overcome resistance from social workers about choosing this option, to ensure parents learned of this option, and to design a system that would be supported by legal counsel and consistent with court procedures and rules.

A court work supervisor position was created to support mediation on the ground; to review cases to determine which would be appropriate for mediation; to promote mediation with staff, and to attend mediation with authority to agree to a negotiated settlement. An administrative coordinator position was created to be an information resource and to schedule cases. These features quickly reduced or managed the time the social workers spent in mediation and had the result of cases being managed more quickly in order to prepare for mediation.

Mediators are required to conduct orientation sessions separately with the parties with the result that parents have an understanding of the process and are encouraged to think about next steps; social workers are encouraged to consider other options for resolving a dispute; and issues/interests to be negotiated in a planning meeting are listed.

Significant consultation with legal counsel who represent parents and social workers, the judiciary, community groups who represent parents and families, social workers, and, as much as possible, parents. The result of consultation was procedures and processes that utilized existing practices and “buy-in” from key stakeholders.

Sources of Funding:

All funding for the Facilitated Planning Meeting project and the Child Protection Mediation Program comes from the Government of British Columbia. This service is free to parents.

Applications for Other Settings:

- Facilitated planning meetings continue to be a mediation option, and four more areas of the province offer this service. Other regions of the province are considering how key elements can be incorporated into the mediation process they wish to promote in their area.
- Consulting with key stakeholders early and often is critical. An Implementation Team was struck to fine-tune the project design. A Steering Committee of key stakeholders was assembled to be available to problem solve, to speak at information sessions and so on.
- It is important to consider the context in which a project will be implemented. The implementation site was one where court delay was seen as significant, and the project was designed in a way to emphasize referral of cases early in the court process. Where court backlog is seen as being less significant, the design takes into account other factors, such as a desire to use mediation as early as possible in the dispute in order to prevent the removal of a child and the need for court involvement.
- Legal counsel may not be inclined to recommend mediation. Parents may simply not know such an option is available to them.
- An ongoing evaluation or reference group for the program would be useful and some mediation initiatives are being established with this feature.
- Ongoing training for mediation service providers is important.

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Court/Agency: Ministry of the Attorney General

Permanency Planning Mediation Program

Program Category: Dispute Resolution Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Standards / guidelines**
-  **Agency collaboration**
- * Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The Permanency Planning Mediation Program (PPMP) was designed to test whether trained volunteer mediators could help parties in contested child abuse and neglect cases reach collaboratively-derived agreements that would expedite determination of a safe, permanent home for children. Each referral is reviewed by a project coordinator to determine appropriateness for mediation, to identify parties who should be present for mediation, and to screen for domestic violence. Referrals are made by any stakeholder. Mediation can be introduced into the court process prior to adjudication, post-adjudication, permanency planning, and post-termination. The same case may be mediated at several different points in the court process. Importantly, the courts working with the mediation center retain oversight over the projects. Eight of Michigan's 21 Community Dispute Resolution Program centers participated in the pilot.

Evaluation:

The evaluation by the Michigan State University School of Social Work found that:

- Mediation decreased the time for child protection cases to reach permanency an average of 12.5 months. Mediated cases reached permanency in an average of 17 months, compared to the non-mediated case average of 29.5 months.
- Party satisfaction with the mediation process was generally rated high.
- Mediation had a constructive impact on relationships between various child welfare system stakeholders.
- Higher levels of judges' experience using mediation corresponds to more positive endorsements and better assessments of the service.
- A variety of positive implications for cost and time savings were noted in mediated cases.

The report concluded, “Michigan’s pilot program evaluation affirms the usefulness and cost effectiveness of mediation in child protection cases.” The complete study is available at:

<http://courts.michigan.gov/scao/resources/publications/reports/PPMPEvaluation2004.pdf>

While not encompassed in the evaluation, centers and courts in three locales report that mediation has shifted the culture in managing child protection cases from an adversarial mode to a more collaborative mode.

Justification as Exemplary:

By taking advantage of the pre-existing structure of a network of volunteer-based community mediation centers, we were able to build on the foundation of their work to extend services to the more complex child protection cases. This provided a ready mechanism for coordinating the pilot, developing data collection tools, establishing a network of coordinators, and ensuring accountability for financial management of the local grant.

Sources of Funding:

The underlying capability of the eight pilot centers to provide mediation services in general was provided through the Community Dispute Resolution Program. These funds are derived from an assessment on civil court filings and are made available to all 21 centers in Michigan on a grant basis. The added functionality of permanency planning mediation was supported chiefly by annual grants of the federally derived State Court Improvement Program, administered by the Michigan State Court Administrative Office. Additional funding for program evaluation was provided by a federal Children’s Justice Act grant to the Governor’s Task Force on Children’s Justice, administered through the Family Independence Agency, under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act.

Applications for Other Settings:

Keys to success: It is essential to have the strong support of judges who will routinely refer cases. It is near equally important to have, in a coordinator’s role, someone with mediation skills and expertise in child welfare issues.

Challenges:

- Early resistance on the part of attorneys and social work supervisors was overcome once they participated in mediation. Some judges referred cases only occasionally, making the work of the coordinator less predictable.
- Reassignment of judges during the pilot phase thwarted some pilots’ ability to continually receive referrals.
- Funding. At the very low level of financial support to the pilot program, it is difficult to attract and retain qualified persons to serve as local coordinators.

Improvements that could be made: While the evaluation clearly documented qualitative outcomes of mediation in the child welfare area, such as an earlier determination of a permanency outcome, further work needs to be done to identify cost savings to courts and county and state funding sources.

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Court/Agency: Michigan State Court Administrative Office

Abuse, Neglect and Dependency Mediation Program

Program Category: Dispute Resolution Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

In Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, Family Court was established to expedite the family dispute resolution process and reach more favorable outcomes for children and families in dependency cases. Parents are provided orientation to the mediation process, then attorneys and social workers are included for a portion of the mediation session. Mediation was utilized to offer the opportunity for everyone to make input into a case plan tailored to the parents' individual needs, to make the Department of Social Service's expectations clearer to all parents early in the life of the case, and to assure judges that any failures to comply with case plans was not the result of miscommunication, failure to understand, or the lack of an individualized case plan (allowing the court to move to an alternative permanent plan for the children within a year or less).

Evaluation:

An evaluation procedure was developed by the University of South Carolina, which included the collection of specific data on baseline cases, mediated cases, and comparison cases; an information management system for managing the data; professional panel reviews to evaluate the quality of case plans developed in mediation; and exit surveys to determine participant satisfaction with the mediation process. Mecklenburg County is one of the few known sites that uses a panel of experts to ascertain the appropriateness or quality of case plans in abuse and neglect cases.

Justification as Exemplary:

There was extensive collaboration between the family court and the local dispute resolution program, the GAL program, DSS and USC. A flexible mediation model was developed, there is ongoing training for stakeholders, and a strong evaluation component.

Sources of Funding:

Total grant fund is almost \$400,000. The current annual operating budget of the program is \$120,000. Funds were obtained from: The Mecklenburg County Court Services

Department; the Sisters of Mercy of North Carolina Foundation, Inc.; the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, Inc.; and the Duke Endowment.

Applications for Other Settings:

Key elements for success:

- Collaboration in planning the specifics of the program for the specific area, and collaboration in funding the needs of the program;
- Specific training for the mediators, as well as for the stakeholders and other participants in the mediation process;
- Judicial support and commitment;
- Co-mediation model;
- Participation of attorneys in the mediation process;
- Process for ongoing evaluation.

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Court/Agency: 26th Judicial District, North Carolina

Jefferson County Mediation Service

Program Category: Dispute Resolution Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Agency collaboration**
- * Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

This is a shuttle mediation program for selected cases in which Permanent Restraining Orders are sought. A pool of specially trained PRO shuttle conference facilitators (trained in Domestic Violence issues), working when possible as a male/female facilitator team, shuttle between the parties to explore areas that require attention and to explore areas of agreement. The violence itself is never mediated; rather, the conditions of the restraining order are mediated. Safety of the parties is always in the forefront in our processes. The parties never leave the courtroom at the same time.

Evaluation:

The PRO cases that are appropriate for this process find that the shuttle mediation has a significant impact on the quality of life for those directly affected by the restraining order. Appreciation is often offered by participants as well as by judges and domestic violence victim advocates.

Justification as Exemplary:

The program tackled a sticky issue involving domestic violence and achieved consensus with those who had doubts and concerns with such an initiative. Innovation can be seen through requiring participants to have Domestic Violence training in addition to their mediation backgrounds, the program's willingness to work with DV advocates to improve comfort levels and quality of service, implementing shuttle conference protocol to assure safety, comfort and to prevent revictimization by the process.

Sources of Funding:

County, and *pro bono* efforts.

Applications for Other Settings:

With large case loads of Permanent Restraining Orders, judges rarely address the conditions that allow for the PRO to be truly successful in cases where an ongoing relationship is required either on a temporary basis or long term such as parenting time, supervised/unsupervised visitation and retrieval of personal items. A safe negotiation process allows parties to develop the detailed arrangements that their situations require.

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Children’s Services of Roxbury/ Massachusetts Families For Kids

Program Category: Dispute Resolution Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Serves unrepresented populations**

Program Description and Goals:

Since 1995, Massachusetts Families for Kids [MFFK] has developed, piloted, implemented and trained its Permanency Mediation model comprised of two distinct approaches: Family Consultation Team and Cooperative Adoption Planning. Both approaches combine principles of concurrent planning, family group conferencing and mediation. The primary goals are:

- To reduce time spent by children in foster care;
- Decrease the number of moves children experience while in care;
- Increase the number of children in legalized permanent living arrangements;
- Maintain significant connections in the life of a child.

Resolving permanency for a child in foster care through a contested legal process takes an average of three years in Massachusetts. The average time required to achieve a mediated agreement is three to five months.

Evaluation:

A formal evaluation of MFFK was completed in 2000 by the University of Massachusetts Center for Adoption Research and Policy, concluding “The majority of participants from the various systems (court, social services, mediation services, birth parents) were very much in favor of the program’s continuance and expansion.”

Justification as Exemplary:

In 2000 legislative appropriation was secured to expand Permanency Mediation services statewide. MFFK’s model was unanimously endorsed as the best practice model for Massachusetts.

All mediators meet and exceed the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court standards for mediators. MFFK mediators have received a minimum of 30 hours of basic mediation

training, 23 hours of specialized Permanency Mediation training, and mentoring on at least one mediation case.

Sources of Funding:

- W.K. Kellogg Foundation funding (1995-1998);
- Massachusetts Department of Social Services and the Massachusetts Trial Courts funding (1998-2000);
- Massachusetts Legislative appropriation (2000-2005).

Currently, the program is sustained primarily by an appropriation through a budget line item placed in the Trial Court budget and earmarked for Permanency Mediation services. The program also accepts private pay referrals of mediation cases statewide.

Applications for Other Settings:

Keys to Success include:

- Commitment of and collaboration between key stakeholders – the courts, state welfare agencies and public and private bar.
- Qualified mediators.
- MFFK’s experience has demonstrated that when parents are respectfully invited into a process, they are capable of making good, sound decisions for their child based on the child’s best interest.

Given the core characteristics—child-centered and family-focused, collaborative, strength-based and relationship-building—MFFK’s Permanency Mediation model has the depth of flexibility to be replicated in other jurisdictions as well as the breadth to be responsive to child welfare cases along the continuum of court involvement.

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Court/Agency: Children’s Services of Roxbury/Massachusetts Families for Kids

Child in Need of Aid Mediation and Family Group Conferencing Program

Program Category: Dispute Resolution Services

Program Strengths:

- 🏠 Outreach to special populations**
- 🗺️ Accessible to remote geographic regions**
- 👤 Serves unrepresented populations**

Program Description and Goals:

This state court-connected program offers mediation and Family Group Conferencing (FGC) in child protection cases in which a petition has been filed with the court alleging a child is in need of aid. The goals of this program are:

- To improve and increase the voluntary resolution of contested issues;
- Encourage early development of a written case plan and facilitate timely permanency for children.

Objectives for the program include:

- Genuine engagement of parents and all parties in these decision-making processes;
- Increased exchange and understanding of information among all parties;
- Improved quality of agreements or plans;
- Empowerment of family;
- Increased sense of ownership in agreements;
- Increased compliance with agreements and plans;
- Reduced conflict among parties;
- Redefinition of roles and relationships among parties;
- Savings of judicial resources;
- Increased understanding of cultural needs and issues;
- Children achieve permanency earlier.

Evaluation:

Formal evaluation of the program's first four years is being concluded at this time. Findings include:

- Agreement on some or all of the issues was reached over 85% of the time;
- Agreement rate for cases subject to the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) was the same as for non-ICWA cases;

- Even when agreement was not reached the process usually helped move the case forward;
- Mediations in which parents attended a pre-joint session orientation meeting with the mediator were more likely to result in agreement than those in which no pre-joint session meeting occurred.

Justification as Exemplary:

Alaska Native and American Indian families (ICWA) are only 15% of the population, yet comprise over half the CINA caseload. There are few tribal courts and most child protection proceedings are in state court, from which many Natives feel quite alienated. Mediators integrate traditional and tribal processes into the mediation process by:

- Including extended family, tribal members and elders;
- Holding mediations in the villages as often as possible;
- Utilizing co-mediators to be with groups in different locations;
- Including by teleconference those who cannot travel to participate;
- Encouraging child protection staff to travel to a villages for mediation to create better cultural understanding;
- Having a council member participate in the mediation and take information back to the council, bringing council input back to mediation;
- Mediator caucusing with tribal council;
- Mediating between a tribal council and non-native prospective adoptive parents to arrive at an agreement for the adoptive child's ongoing contact with tribe and culture, if the adoption occurs.

Sources of Funding:

Court Improvement Grant; Children's Bureau Adoption Opportunities Grant (three-year grant that has concluded); and Access and Visitation funds.

Applications for Other Settings:

We initially modified our model in response to cultural and traditional needs of Alaska's Native families, but at the core were considerations we applied to all mediations anywhere:

- Find out who is needed to solve the problem and include in them in the process;
- Understand who all the decision-makers are and find ways to include them;
- Consider what it could mean to not include them;
- Learn what other decision-making processes might be operating and consider incorporating them into the mediation process;
- Find or create models that meet needs. In addition to expanding our mediation model, we also added Family Group Conferencing (FGC) as an additional option;
- Prioritize quality of process over quantity.

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Court/Agency: Alaska Court System

Comprehensive Co-Mediation Service

Program Category: Dispute Resolution Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The primary goal of the program was to make comprehensive mediation services available to separating families in Winnipeg. The Comprehensive Co-Mediation and Mediation Internship Pilot Project was developed to provide separating parents an opportunity for early resolution of their separation issues in order to minimize ongoing conflict and to limit their use of the court system, and to minimize costs for both clients and the justice system. No fees for services were required. Following referral and completion of “For the Sake of the Children” (a parent education program), a family relations mediator from Family Conciliation, and the lawyer/mediator from the Family Law Branch of the Government of Manitoba, Justice Department are then assigned as their co-mediation team. The parties then meet with the team for up to six joint mediation sessions in order to address their child-related, support and financial issues.

Evaluation:

Evaluation of the pilot project by the University of Manitoba School of Social Work found:

- Cases proceeding to mediation reached full or partial agreements 83% of the time;
- Positive change in post-separation parenting outcomes was reported;
- Decreased court usage for those who reached agreements;
- A high level of satisfaction reported by participants with the program, including the use of the co-mediation model for all sessions.

Justification as Exemplary:

The use of the co-mediation model is beneficial in assisting the client to address all issues, especially where there has been higher conflict. The Comprehensive Co-Mediation Program continues to offer an opportunity for mediators to complete a practicum. It also provides the opportunity for social science professionals and lawyers to work more cooperatively in assisting separating families.

Recent statistics continue to indicate that there are a high number of participants in comprehensive mediation who reach a full or partial agreement on all issues relating to their separation. In 2003, 84% of those cases that proceeded to mediation reached some form of agreement, with 74% reaching a full agreement. For the first quarter of 2004, 72% of the co-mediation cases reached full or partial agreements with 40% of those being full agreements. This has been consistently higher than for than for child-focused mediation. In addition, those who reach full comprehensive agreements make less use of the court.

Sources of Funding:

In addition to existing staff of Family Conciliation (funded by Manitoba Department of Family Services), financial support has been provided by the Child-Centered Family Justice Fund of Justice Canada.

Applications for Other Settings:

The key to success is cooperation of the judiciary and the family law bar, established in this case through a consultation committee that met on a regular basis throughout the pilot project phase. It is vital that the program is viewed as a resource for the clients that lawyers represent, so that their attendance is encouraged and that the process is not undermined.

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Court/Agency: Family Conciliation

Family Access Enforcement

Program Category: Dispute Resolution Services

Program Strengths:

- ## Outreach to special populations**
- * Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The Family Access Enforcement Program was established to provide a flexible and informal forum for families to resolve disputes about parenting time with their children. A combination of mediation and arbitration services is utilized to assist families in resolving scheduling disputes and/or reach agreement on helpful modifications to the court-ordered parenting plan. Approximately 75% of the motions filed are resolved informally and 25% move on to a formal court appearance. Through a series of conferences, education and other services parents are supported to determine what options are within their own control and what changes they can make that will positively affect the situation. Focus is on the best interest of the children and what is mutually workable for both parents.

Evaluation:

Never married parents make up 10-15% of the family court docket but compose more than 50% of the family access docket. Most parents self-report “irresolvable” or “unmanageable” conflicts with the other parent in exchanging their children, obtaining compliance with the court-ordered schedule, and negotiating changes to the parenting schedule. Problems with legal interpretations of court orders are identified as an issue about 20% of the time. Parents agree to voluntarily complete the Parenting Alliance Measure (Abidin/Konold) to gauge parental cooperativeness. More than half of the families involved in family access disputes score in the low end of normal to marginal, problematic and dysfunctional percentiles

Justification as Exemplary:

The Family Access Dispute Resolution Program encourages the highest level of parental involvement in problem solving (use of mediation). At the same time, these families often find it impossible to resolve all their disputes at once. Arbitration services assist families to manage their disagreements when a timely resolution is highly valued. Arbitration of schedule changes and holiday plans are particularly appreciated.

Sources of Funding:

Administration of the program is handled by court staff. Mediators and arbitrators contract with the program to provide services at a below market rate. Funding is provided from the local court budget.

Applications for Other Settings:

- This program is recommended for court systems when non-legal access issues are presented in the adversarial arena in a way that over-utilizes the court's time.
- The results show that repetitive filings with the court decrease over time as parents gain skills in dealing with these issues and realize the limits of third parties to "fix" interpersonal conflicts.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Court/Agency: Seventh Judicial Circuit, Missouri

Vermont Family Court Mediation Program

Program Category: Dispute Resolution Services

Program Strengths:

 **Accessible to remote geographic regions**

Program Description:

The Vermont Family Court offers subsidized mediation services to income-eligible married or never married parents. Services may be offered before, during or after separation or divorce. Parents do not have to have an active court case to take advantage of the service. Issues discussed can include child access issues, parent communication, marital property and debt, and financial support for a spouse or child.

Evaluation:

Client satisfaction forms are used to obtain participant feedback. Mediators report the history of the case at the conclusion of each case including the types of issues resolved and whether or not the case is likely to return to court for resolution. The program is currently developing a system to track mediated cases by docket number to more effectively study the long-term impact of mediation.

Justification as Exemplary:

While mediators remain otherwise unregulated in Vermont, the program has established training criteria for mediators working with the program. Program protocols, standards of practice and procedures have also been developed. The program provides equal access to mediation services by offering subsidized services for income-eligible clients.

Sources of Funding:

The state's judiciary budget is the primary source of funding for the program.

Applications for Other Settings:

Keys to success: One key component is finding a dynamic group of professionals who are dedicated to helping families. Public outreach is equally important and can be accomplished through pamphlets, flyers and by describing the program in a parenting education course.

Challenges: One challenge for the program has been the rural character of Vermont. This has often meant that there have been few qualified providers in some areas. Additional funding would enable the program to serve more families.

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Court/Agency: Vermont Family Court

Domestic Violence Video Conferencing Mediation

Program Category: Dispute Resolution Services

Program Description and Goals:

Concerning domestic violence cases, the goal of the program is to provide a safe environment to mediate through video conference custody and visitation disputes while allowing the parties to communicate face-to-face in a controlled setting.

Evaluation:

Although a formal evaluation has not been conducted, the family law bench, bar and domestic violence victim advocates support the program. The agreement rate for video conference mediations is significantly higher (59%) than separate sessions at separate times (24%).

Justification as Exemplary:

Video conferencing is relatively new to the field of custody litigation. This program, however, uses it to provide safety for the alleged victim of domestic violence and a controlled environment for high conflict custody matters within which parties may communicate about their children and reach agreements regarding their children's best interest.

Sources of Funding:

The equipment was funded by grants and dedicated to court technology funds.

Applications for Other Settings:

- Training in equipment operation is essential.
- A secure arrival, waiting and exit for the protected party is essential.
- This program is adaptable in other jurisdictions as long as a secured area for the protected party is available and there is available staffing to ensure safety.

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Court/Agency: Contra Costa County Superior Court, Family Court Services

Early Intervention Special Masters

Program Category: Dispute Resolution Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Agency collaboration**
- * Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The goal is to reach parents before they become entrenched in contested custody battles. The parents meet with a volunteer Special Masters team made up of a therapist and a family law attorney to resolve the outstanding issues and draft a comprehensive parenting plan. If agreement is reached, the custody issues go to judgment that day and outstanding financial issues are “fast-tracked” and streamlined for trial, if necessary.

Evaluation:

The last evaluation was in 2000 and almost 85% of the cases diverted to the program settled that day or shortly thereafter. An examination of court files revealed the agreements were upheld as there was little post judgment activity a year out.

Justification as Exemplary:

The resolution figures show the program is a success. And the fact that parties do not return to the court is evidence that the program is working. The best interest of the children is kept at the forefront and the parents understand this.

Sources of Funding:

This program costs nothing for the participants. There is no funding. The costs to the court are court personnel time in coordinating the case referrals. A member of the family bar does coordination of the scheduling of the Masters on a volunteer basis. The Masters donate their time.

Applications for Other Settings:

The primary challenge to the program was getting the Family Court judge and attorneys on board. Finding Masters willing to donate a day of their time was another hurdle. This program would be applicable to any jurisdiction that has a custody court.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Court/Agency: New London Judicial District, Connecticut

Domestic Abuse Issues: Training for Mediators and other Professionals

Program Category: Dispute Resolution Services (Training)

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Standards / guidelines**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

Goal is to ensure court mediators have a comprehensive understanding of the impact of domestic abuse on clients and are able to provide high-quality, appropriate and safe services. The training program offers an overview of mediation, an overview of domestic abuse and substantial information on screening protocol and procedures to enhance the safety for all parties.

Evaluation:

Attendees complete a training evaluation form on which they identify themselves by profession. A major revelation for all groups is that victims may not tell their attorney there has been abuse. As a result, each professional understands the need for additional mechanisms to screen for abuse. Attendees have ranged from court personnel, attorneys and judges to parent education coordinators and school personnel.

Justification as Exemplary:

The training on domestic abuse issues for mediators models collaborative and inclusive values of mediation. The participants begin to see themselves as a team that can improve court systems and improve systems that impact the court rather than as adversaries pointing fingers at each other.

Sources of Funding:

The program is funded through General Revenue Funds to the Dispute Resolution Section, Judicial and Court Services Division of the Supreme Court of Ohio.

Applications for Other Settings:

- Keys to success included organizing a work group of respected advocates and skilled mediators who drafted guiding principles for the project.
- For developing the content of training, it was critical to hire nationally known consultants with superb rapport-building skills.
- We also selected skilled mediators with excellent facilitation skills and knowledge of domestic violence as well as highly regarded advocates with a solid knowledge of mediation.

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Court/Agency: The Supreme Court of Ohio – Dispute Resolution Section

PARENTING SUPPORT

Parents Equally Allied to Co-parent Effectively (PEACE)

Program Category: Parenting Support
Cross Reference: Dispute Resolution Services

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Standards / guidelines**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The mission of PEACE, a specialized program for parents in high-conflict separations and divorces, is to help Parents become Equally Allied to Co-Parent Effectively. The PEACE Program's primary goals are to teach high-conflict divorced parents the skills they need to reduce conflict, resolve their disputes, and increase successful communication and problem-solving. The program focuses on creating a healthy post-divorce environment for children, preserving a sense of "family" even after the demise of the marriage.

How the Program Works:

From the outset of the program parents are seen jointly to begin to establish their position as co-parents. Most parents complete the program in six to eight weeks.

Evaluation and Results:

In a follow-up survey of 321 families who were enrolled in the program there were 209 respondents. Of note, at the time of survey, 56% of the respondents had not returned to court. Additionally, 31% of the respondents had been back to court one to three times. However, some of these appearances were for the final judgment. Respondents also reported that they had continued to progress following participation in the program such that while 37% reported they had decreased conflict at the end of participation in the program, 50% reported decreased conflict at the time of follow-up.

Justification as Exemplary:

This program is the first of its kind in Connecticut. The founders of the program established the program in collaboration with guardians *ad litem* and attorneys for minor children. The program is effective because parents often view the program as a continuing resource; the problems of that specific family are addressed; the program is viewed as a prevention program; and the program is accountable to the children of divorce, to the parents, and to the Court, guardians *ad litem* and the "system" at large.

Sources of Funding: No information provided.

Applications for Other Settings:

Keys to success:

- The counselors' approach;
- Relationship with the legal system;
- Staff skills;
- Staff supervision.

Challenges and barriers:

- Attorneys have to be willing to give the program a chance to work;
- Protecting the parent counseling environment;
- Addressing the perception that the program adds more cost to the divorce process (the PEACE program does have a fee associated with it).

Features that make it applicable in other jurisdictions:

- An organized training program with clearly defined concepts and skill sets;
- Materials that are already developed and freely shared;
- A track record of training others in their techniques.

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Better Life Counseling Center: Divorce Transitions

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Accessible to remote geographic regions**
- * Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

Better Life Counseling Center's Divorce Transitions program is a 3½ hour workshop for divorced and divorcing parents. Attendees learn a "Cooperative Co-Parenting" model of post-divorce parenting. BLCC's Divorce Transitions workshop provides parents with information on:

- Taking care of their own emotional needs;
- Taking care of the kids and protecting them from the negative effects of divorce;
- Creating a businesslike parenting arrangement.

Evaluation:

As this program is very new (beginning June 2004), there have been no findings as yet. However, evaluation will take place in three areas: parents' satisfaction with their parenting relationship, children's post-divorce experience, and future court appearances by attendees.

Justification as Exemplary:

Better Life Counseling Center's Divorce Transitions workshop is the only program of its kind in the Northeast Arkansas region. Since parental conflict is the number one predictor for poor outcome among children of divorce, this program is precisely targeted at the primary factor in helping children have a positive post-divorce experience. The Divorce Transitions program is designed to provide the judges involved with reports regarding the attendance of specific parents. In addition, the Divorce Transitions program will gather data on future court appearances by parents who attend.

Sources of Funding:

The program is funded by the Better Life Counseling Center and by participants' fees.

Applications for Other Settings:

The primary keys to the success of a program of this type are:

- Ensure that the program is a mandated part of the divorce process for all divorcing parents;
- Choose and acquire a proven curriculum and establish an appropriate venue;
- This program could be improved by including optional “follow-up” workshops for parents who wish to become more proficient at Cooperative Co-Parenting;
- This program is easily applicable to all jurisdictions because of the universal need for education on the unique challenges of parenting after divorce.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Kids First Program for Stepparents

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths

 **Evidence-based**

 **Strong evaluation component**

Program Description and Goals:

The Kids First Center is a resource for divorcing parents where they can learn how to meet the needs of their children, how to address their own needs effectively, and how to access other resources, both legal and mental health related. This program empowers people to deal successfully with the problems associated with being part of a stepfamily. This is a psycho-educational four-hour program scheduled on Saturday mornings. Through handouts, overheads, videos, role-play demonstrations, and discussion, participants learn ways to ease the process so that each person will get their needs met and can grow to feel comfortable in their new roles and relationships.

Evaluation:

Participants are asked to fill out an evaluation questionnaire at the end of each program that includes demographic data, ratings scales for the various portions of the program, and room for subjective comments and suggestions for improvements. To date, the evaluations have been, for the most part, extremely positive. Several improvements to the program have also been made based on participant comments. The program is relatively new, so long-range follow-up evaluation is not yet appropriate. The Center hopes to design and implement some form of follow-up evaluation commencing within the next year, if available funding allows.

Justification as Exemplary:

To the creators' knowledge, this is the only course of its type in the country. There are always two presenters, one male and one female, and the program requires that both have had direct personal experience with stepfamily issues as a stepparent, a biological parent, or a child in a stepfamily, so they can talk from their personal experience as well as based on their expertise. All presenters are either lawyers or therapists who are also experienced presenters in the basic Kids First programs for divorcing parents. The mix of written material, videos (including interviews with stepchildren), and role play presentations helps participants to understand the issues and process on many levels. The participants form relationships among themselves, learn a great deal from each other, and feel supported by realizing that others are going through the same difficulties as themselves.

Sources of Funding:

Funding for this program has come from private foundations and from course fees for the program. Fees are \$45 for a person or \$70 for a couple.

Applications for Other Settings:

One important key to the program's success has been utilizing presenters who have some mental health expertise and who have also personally experienced the struggles unique to stepfamilies. A major challenge has been marketing the program. The popular culture does not strongly support pre-marital programs for anyone, let alone programs designed for specific types of families. We believe that this program could be replicated anywhere in the country, and presented to similar audiences of people who are forming or have formed stepfamilies.

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Court/Agency: This is an independent, private non-profit agency.

Family Court Initiative

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths:

- \$ Unique or detailed funding sources**
- 👤 Agency collaboration**
- 👥 Outreach to special populations**
- * Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The Family Court Initiative is a public/private collaboration of four partners: the Superior Court of California, a funding agency, and two community-based non-profit organizations. The objectives and goals are:

- Creation of a network of quality services;
- Securing access to services when needed;
- Diverting families from Dependency Court where appropriate;
- Being a major catalyst for systemic change within the Family Court System.

The program includes:

- A team of nine courthouse-based bilingual/bicultural Care Managers and Resource Specialists who assist families with securing services and resources;
- A Supplemental Fund that provides payment for services as ordered by the court for indigent FIRST 5 families;
- A New Skills and Choices Parenting Program that consists of four psycho-educational and therapeutic components:
 - An eight-week group intervention class for court ordered High Conflict parents;
 - Six-week classes held in separate sessions for children and for both parents to improve family relations and coping skills needed for separation and divorce;
 - Co-parenting, parallel parenting and individual counseling;
 - Therapeutic and supportive supervised visitation.

Evaluation:

Over 200 contacts with families are made by the Care Manager/Resource Specialist team each month, with services ranging from information and referral to comprehensive intake interviews. The Supplemental Fund has helped pay approximately \$100,000 in a year for the cost of services the Superior Court has ordered for FIRST 5 eligible/qualifying families. The first class in the New Skills and Choices Program began in late 2004. Pre-

and post-surveys for each parent will focus on the current well-being and safety of their children and the status of conflict between the parents.

Justification as Exemplary:

The Family Court Initiative is a comprehensive and integrated continuum of care consisting of three levels: prevention, intervention, and intensive intervention. There are multiple doors for a family to enter into the services provided within the Initiative and the levels of assistance vary according to the current need of the parent or child served. The coordination and interactive development of the services has created a unique program that is innovative to the court and has effectively changed the face of the system.

Sources of Funding:

Primary funding for the Family Court Initiative is from a grant awarded by FIRST 5 Santa Clara County (source is a tax on tobacco products). All other funding sources are in-kind services by the court and by funded services provided by the two non-profit agencies that are in addition to the FIRST 5 grant. Families who do not qualify for FIRST 5 funded services pay on a sliding scale.

Applications for Other Settings:

- The critical element was funding for services.
- The elements of the Family Court Initiative all are considered appropriate for other jurisdictions and may be applicable in parts or as a whole.
- The funding source is limited to California, but there may be equivalent sources in other states.
- The size of this grant and Initiative is for a large population (Santa Clara County); smaller counties (or states) may find that selecting one or more of the services is more appropriate.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Court/Agency: Superior Court of California, Santa Clara County

Parents Forever

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths:

-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Standards / guidelines**
-  **Innovative / unique**
-  **Outreach to special populations**

Program Description and Goals:

Parents Forever is a 12-hour curriculum-based parent education program for individuals experiencing divorce or issues related to paternity developed by the University of Minnesota Extension Service and its partners in the legal and family education communities. Instructors are trained to teach the program in six two-hour sessions, on the topics of:

- The impact of divorce on adults;
- The impact of divorce on children;
- Money issues in divorce;
- Legal issues and the role of mediation;
- Pathways to a new life.

The program seeks to develop skills in parents to support their children through divorce transition and reduce the potential for long-term problems in children.

Evaluation:

University of Minnesota researchers conducted follow-up telephone interviews at intervals of six and twelve months after completion of the class. Parents reported improvement in behaviors indicative of:

- Eliminating parent conflict in front of the children;
- Keeping the children out of the middle of parent issues;
- Providing access to both parents;
- Putting the best interest of the children first.

Three-fourths of Parents Forever participants reported that the course helped them eliminate conflict situations in front of their children. Participants also mentioned that Parents Forever made them more aware of such community resources as parenting classes, school counselors, financial services and mental health providers.

Justification as Exemplary:

The Parents Forever program is research-based and child-focused, and with the 12-hour format provides a depth and range of topics not possible with a shorter format. This program also uses a “community collaborative” approach to delivery that utilizes a local steering committee and trained instructors in the community to deliver the program. This delivery approach has allowed the program to expand to 65 of 87 counties in Minnesota. Local delivery of the program has enabled communities to use local resources to sustain the program and keep it affordable for parents. The program also maintains a Web site and online train-the-trainer course.

Sources of Funding:

The University of Minnesota Extension Service provided funding for the development, piloting, training and staff to implement the initial curriculum. The Minnesota Supreme Court initially provided a small amount of start-up funds to each new local program. Revenue from the sales of materials supports the printing and distribution of publications and revisions of materials as needed. The University of Minnesota continues to pay staff salaries for the educators involved with the program, while training costs are paid by registration fees. Parent fees and some local small grants sustain the program at the local level.

Applications for Other Settings:

Successful programs have a committed program staff (paid or volunteer) that are trained and have the appropriate background and professional expertise. Challenges and barriers to the program include funding sources where there is no state or legislative funding. In rural jurisdictions, it is difficult to get enough participants to hold the class in a timely fashion. It is also important to make sure that instructors are trained in the content, but also in group dynamics and adult learning styles. Parents Forever is applicable to other jurisdictions as it includes minimal state-specific information.

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Collaborative Family Therapy

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths:

 **Evidence-based**

 **Outreach to special populations**

 **Accessible to remote geographic regions**

Program Description and Goals:

Collaborative Family Therapy is a brief therapy model for children. For the first two-hour meeting, the entire family participates to assess family strengths, parenting and conflict messages from childhood, and current problems. Family members complete written materials as well as review a graphic picture of the entire family system. Children above age six are interviewed privately by the therapist. Before the second meeting, each parent spends one and a half to two hours reviewing a written handbook, “Co-Parenting Resources,” and a videotape, “Children: The Experts on Divorce.” The parents meet with the family therapist a second time for two to three hours. In this mediation meeting, the parents decide how to improve their ability to co-parent their children in a way that meets the needs of the children and minimizes parental conflicts. Additional sessions can be scheduled to reach agreement. Specific change goals and resources are identified in writing.

Evaluation:

Descriptive analysis of pilot project revealed the following:

- 82% post-judgment families reached partial or full resolution with 17% needing no further court intervention;
- Time with family therapist averaged 4.55 hours over span of 14.09 days;
- A survey indicated attorneys believed it was a good program and would recommend to other clients, attorneys, and judges;
- A two year follow-up study of litigation rates is planned to determine reduction in litigation patterns of these very high conflict families.

Conclusion: the model works well for moderate to high conflict families when serious mental illness/addiction is not present.

Justification as Exemplary:

The key unique characteristic of this model is inclusion of the child in the process. We were concerned that many children in divorce are highly traumatized by the State of Texas legal system’s use of the child signing an affidavit to choose between parents. We

wanted to verify that children can speak their needs to parents in a way that is not harmful if properly managed by a skilled family therapist. When the child looks at the parent and says, “Stop fighting so I don’t have to hide in the closet,” it makes an impact on parents. We have not had any experiences of children putting themselves in danger because of what they said to a parent; they consistently said what we expected—stop fighting and let me spend as much time as possible with each of you.

Sources of Funding:

The initial pilot study was funded by a state-provided Family Trust Fund grant. Current funding is self-pay by clients based on a sliding fee scale.

Applications for Other Settings:

Keys to success:

- Therapists need to be well trained in family therapy, family violence assessment, and family mediation in order to carry out this model.
- Skills for interviewing children and for managing communication with the entire family are critical. These procedures are what make the program work in such a brief intervention.
- Using video and written educational materials during the first session and outside the sessions helped encourage effective decision-making by providing role models. The eight-minute video “I Know How You Feel” was especially powerful in focusing on the needs of children.

This program is applicable to other jurisdictions because:

- It is based on commonly accepted family therapy principles;
- The intervention model is structured so that it can be taught and replicated readily;
- A demonstration tape has been made to accompany the detailed model description;
- This model is used with a wide range of conflicted families:
 - Brief court-ordered family therapy for high-conflict families;
 - Voluntarily requested family therapy services referred by attorneys or other clients;
 - Longer-term court-ordered parenting plan implementation with parenting coordination;
 - Collaborative law mental health family specialist services.

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Court/Agency: Dallas County Family Courts

Wyoming Children's Access Network (WyCAN)

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths:

- \$ Unique or detailed funding sources**
- ☰ Outreach to special populations**
- 📍 Accessible to remote geographic regions**

Program Description and Goals:

WyCAN's objectives are to assist families in transition through parent education, and in putting together developmentally appropriate parenting plans. WyCAN aims to provide services to all parents in Wyoming who have minor children and do not live together. WyCAN has found the impact of successful implementation of this program to include:

- Effective, strong, two-parent families;
- Better performance in school;
- A reduction in litigated and relitigated custody and visitation problems;
- Regular child support payments;
- An increase in access for the non-custodial parent;
- Reduction in abuse and neglect;
- Financial self-sufficiency on the part of the parents;
- Fewer child care issues;
- Children who are more confident, responsible, competent and emotionally stable.

Current programs are a parent education program and mediation services.

Evaluation:

Immediately following each parent education seminar, parents complete an evaluation of the class. A follow-up survey is also completed by the parents six months after they attend the class. Out of the parents surveyed, 82% have received or provided regular child support payments, 73% believed the seminar helped them personally, and 78% would refer this seminar to others. Parents who have attended the classes support the statement that parent education should be mandatory.

Justification as Exemplary:

The program is a conceptual replication of best practices models drawn from many programs across the nation. The program allows parents to take a non-adversarial approach to custody and visitation and ultimately form a strong two-parent family in the face of difficult domestic situations. The WyCAN program offers services such as mediation and parent education classes on a sliding fee scale and it provides the opportunities for

disadvantaged families to receive the support and information that they may not otherwise be able to obtain. All of these services are efficiently operated from one location covering nine communities across the state thereby reducing administrative overhead costs.

Sources of Funding:

Wyoming Children's Trust Fund Parent Education Network Community Services Block Grant; Wyoming Community Foundation Access/Visitation Grant; Tonkin Foundation; Daniels Fund; McMurry Foundation; Joe and Arlene Watt Foundation; Family Support and Preservation; Napier Foundation; State Farm Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF); Department of Education Corporation for National and Community Services; Department of Workforce Services (anticipated); and the Department of Health (anticipated).

Applications for Other Settings:

WyCAN uses best practices and research-based models from across the nation, fine-tuning the program to meet the unique needs of Wyoming. The most difficult challenge to overcome has been individuals' mentalities to accept a different approach in processing these types of matters. Funding is always a challenge for non-profit agencies and though WyCAN does not receive the traditional funding from the courts, it looks towards other non-traditional sources for funding. Through continuous efforts and proven statistics, it is recognized as a valuable service to all the communities. There is a gap in publicizing the services, due to a low budget, to those who do not have access to resources, such as the Internet or e-mail. The infrastructure of low administrative overhead costs allows for the extensive services offered to rural communities. It can be made applicable especially to rural communities or areas in which the court systems are not large enough to support programs similar to those offered in larger cities or districts.

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Parenting After Separation Program

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths:

-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Innovative / unique**
-  **Collaborative funding**

Program Description and Goals:

The Parenting After Separation Seminars (PASS) Program is a free course intended to provide separating or divorcing parents with information about the divorce process, its effects on their children, techniques for improving communication, legal issues, and to encourage the use of mediation and parenting plans. The stated objectives of the PASS program are to provide information regarding:

- The stages and experiences of separation and their effects on parents;
- The effects of separation on children;
- The changes in family relationships;
- How to communicate more effectively;
- The legal aspects of separation and divorce when there are children involved;
- Parenting plans—how they are formed, what is included, and the benefits;
- Mediation—how it works, who goes, why, and what resources are available.

Evaluation:

Three data collection instruments were designed for the evaluation. The findings suggest that PASS is a well-organized, professionally-delivered program that offers relevant content to its participants. After completing the seminar, most participants strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that the seminar offered clear information (94%), was easy to understand (96.4%) and was well organized (94.8%).

Justification as Exemplary:

Creativity and Innovation:

- Currently, across all regions over 200 seminars are given per year, and over 8000 people attend the program annually.

Effectiveness:

- Only a small number of participants (8.9%) had ever attempted to use a parenting plan. After attending the seminar, however, most (77.3%) said they would be willing to consider using a parenting plan.
- Parents who were less than pleased with the mandatory nature of the seminars indicated in the exit survey that they are glad that they took the course and have gained very important, useful information that will assist them in helping their children.

Sources of Funding:

Canadian Federal Government, Alberta Justice and Attorney General.

Applications for Other Settings:

Keys to success:

- PASS seminars are available across the province in sixteen locations;
- Remote areas of the province have access to the PASS program video. Participants who live in remote areas of the province can view the video but do not have an opportunity to benefit from the participation in a group setting.

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Court/Agency: Alberta Justice

Focus on Kids

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths:

-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Innovative / unique**
-  **Collaborative funding**

Program Description and Goals:

Currently, the Focus on Kids (FOK) program is implemented in 32 counties in Missouri to over 3,000 parents each year. Focus on Kids emphasizes conflict management and co-parenting strategies that assist children in adjusting to their parents' divorce. Focus on Kids is a one-session, 2.5 hour video- and discussion-based program. Participants view a video in which children share their feelings and experiences regarding their parents' divorce and series of video segments that depict common situations faced by divorcing parents and their children. Following each video segment, the facilitator leads a group discussion about the behaviors viewed on the tape, their effects on children, and better alternatives. Key points covered in each video segment are then reviewed.

Evaluation:

Post-test evaluations show that most participants better understand the benefits of cooperating with the other parent in support of their children (average rating of 4.3 on a 5-point scale; 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree), understand more about how children are affected by divorce (4.3/5.0) and plan to avoid arguing with the other parent in front of the children (4.6/5.0). Six months after attending FOK, over 90% of participants reported that the program helped them to understand the impact of divorce on their children and 94% said the program influenced the decisions they made about parenting their children. Sixty-three percent reported they were more cooperative with their ex-spouses as a result of the program and 78% reported acting in ways to assure that their ex-spouse continued to have a positive, ongoing relationship with the children.

Justification as Exemplary:

The partnership, video-based curriculum, faculty expertise and training, and thorough evaluation of FOK make this an exemplary program. The strong partnership between the University and Missouri Circuit Courts helps us reach a large number of divorcing parents in Missouri. The video-based approach is an innovative method that makes the program accessible and engaging for audiences with a wide range of education levels. Further, Focus on Kids uses a research-based curriculum and is taught by Human Development and

Family Studies (HDFS) campus and extension faculty who have a master's or doctoral degree in HDFS or a related field. The expertise of the instructors contributes to the high quality of the program.

Sources of Funding:

Participant Fees.

Applications for Other Settings:

Keys to success:

- Strong partnership with Missouri Circuit Courts and the training of the instructors. Support from judges and attorneys is critical for program success.
- Instructors who have strong background knowledge of family dynamics and child development will be better prepared to answer participants' questions.

The FOK curriculum is focused on issues that are of central importance to all divorcing parents and their children, so FOK would be beneficial for parents in any state.

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Court/Agency: University of Missouri

In the Best Interests of the Children: Growing Through Conflict

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths:

- ☒ Strong evaluation component**
- ☒ Outreach to special populations**
- * Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

This program offers high conflict parents an effective, skill-building class that is solution-focused in a four hour format. It has been developed as an exciting, interactive workshop format class that involves the participants while teaching them the realities of communication after divorce. The class provides them with practiced tools the participants can take with them, which help them communicate more effectively. The facilitators bring experiential interventions on a dramatic stage to grab the participants' attention and move them to "do a different dance" with the other parent. They blend topics such as "Loving What Is," the work of Byron Katie, brief, solution-focused approaches to co-parenting, and experiential exercises that demonstrate to the participant a "better way of living in the world of divorce."

Evaluation:

Exit evaluations over the last three years with 540 participants yield results as follows:

- 51% - Excellent [5];
- 45% - Very Helpful [4];
- 4% - Helpful;
- 98% said "yes" to "Would you recommend this class?"
- To "What is the one thing that you will remember the most?" the most common answers were, "fighting hurts my children," and "knowing I can make a different choice."

Justification as Exemplary:

I have seen the facilitators actually transform many of the participants. They often call to recommend this class to the other parent. The evaluations for this class are excellent. There are many referrals into this class from participants who recommended it to those that have not been court-mandated to attend the class with no action before the court.

Sources of Funding:

No funding; run as a non-profit arm of an ADR firm.

Applications for Other Settings:

- Facilitators who have lived through high conflict divorce;
- Creative development of the program;
- Participants are court-mandated to attend. If it were on video it could be sent out to other jurisdictions.

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Court/Agency: Parenting Education Partners

National Family Resiliency Center

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths:

-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Innovative / unique**
-  **Collaborative funding**

Program Description and Goals:

The National Family Resiliency Center (NFRC) helps families adjust constructively during times of transition such as pre-marriage, separation, divorce and remarriage. NFRC focuses on the impact parents' decisions have on the developmental and emotional needs of the children involved. Parents and children are empowered by learning strategies to develop loving relationships and constructive communication required to maintain them. NFRC offers adults, parents and children:

- Clinical, educational and mediation services;
- Individual, family, multiple family and group therapy;
- Parent education programs;
- Children's educational programs;
- At-risk youth and parent programs;
- Co-parent counseling;
- Child focused access planning.

Follow-up services to systematically re-negotiate children's needs and parenting are included in parenting agreements that result from NFRC's holistic approach. These programs reach families across the continuum of the family life cycle.

Evaluation:

Through assessments for children and parents, measures are used to assess the following factors pre-, post-test and follow up one to two years post enrollment:

- Parents will improve and maintain the quality of their relationship with their children. The degree of closeness and coping skills will be measured.
- Parents will acquire coping skills to communicate with each other, resolve differences and will be able to set aside consistent time, away from their children, to focus on and discuss each child's needs and responsible parenting.

- Parents will craft parenting agreements for each child that are detailed and specific, contain mechanisms for renegotiation and anticipate present and future needs.

Justification as Exemplary:

In partnership with attorneys, judges, mediators and other specialists, parents and children are made aware that services will be provided throughout the process of divorce adjustment. This program is a constellation of mental health, medical, legal and judicial professionals working together to promote a healthy family transition.

Sources of Funding:

Fees for service from clients; Howard County Community Initiative funding; Columbia Foundation; Operational Funding; The Freeman Family Foundation; The Mead Family Foundation; The Peck Family Foundation; The Rouse Co. Foundation; Individual and corporate contributions.

Applications for Other Settings:

The key to NFRC’s success:

- Listening to the needs of children and parents and implementing dynamic and creative programs to address those needs.
- Through continual outreach and education, NFRC staff and volunteers educate parents, the faith, school and legal communities as well as small and large corporations about the needs of families in transition and how to support families.
- The NFRC program, with its documented guidelines and research protocols is applicable to any community.
- Recently a father said at a multiple family session, “this program is not just for divorcing families, it’s a model for all families to teach them to be healthy and resilient.”

NFRC faces the challenges of securing funding support and the fact that our culture minimizes the damaging effects of separation and divorce on children and parents.

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Court/Agency: National Family Resiliency Center

NFRC Parenting Seminars

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths:

-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description:

An interdisciplinary educational team offers state-mandated parent education to newly separated parents. The goal of the course is to teach parents to be child-focused, putting aside their own needs. Parents are challenged to recognize the co-parent's positive traits, in the hopes that it will enhance their children's self-image and permit both parents to model good parental behavior.

Evaluation:

Participating parents complete evaluation forms before and after the two, three-hour sessions. While many participants begin the program resenting that they were court-ordered to attend, exit surveys demonstrate that they are grateful to have had the opportunity to participate.

Justification as Exemplary:

It has a unique, interdisciplinary delivery model and is taught by a team of domestic trial lawyers, judges, and mental health practitioners. It also features "live" parent panelists who share their experiences. Finally it incorporates videotaped reflections of children who have experienced divorce and/or separation. Maryland law requires courts to order co-parenting education. The legislation that was passed requiring the course was largely the result of the efforts of the Executive Director and the organization. The program has continued to evolve and is now offered in Spanish in one county with a large Hispanic population.

Sources of Funding:

Parents are court-ordered to pay the fee of \$100 for a total of six hours of instruction. Provisions are made for low-income participants.

Application to Other Settings:

Keys to Success:

- The role of the Judiciary, which has recognized the critical role co-parenting education can play in resolving family conflict.
- The interdisciplinary approach has also made the program extremely popular and effective.

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Court/Agency: National Family Resiliency Center

14th JDC Access and Visitation Program

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths:

\$ Unique or detailed funding sources

🤝 Agency collaboration

Program Description:

The program provides a safe and child-friendly location for access to children at the Whistle Stop supervised visitation. Parents receive education on how to co-parent children through the “Successful Partners in Parenting” course, mediation services to assist parents in reaching a mutually agreeable visitation plan, and legal services to help them obtain enforceable access and visitation plans if necessary. Referrals are made by the State’s child support enforcement office, the court, and attorneys. Self-referrals are also accepted.

Evaluation:

The program is new and has not been completely evaluated yet. During the first eight months of operation, the program opened 152 cases and served over 300 clients. Evaluation data to date suggests that 82% of cases received intake services, and 18% are awaiting intake. During the intake process, 25% developed a visitation plan; a total of 64% have developed plans to date. Supervised visitation has been ordered in 7% of cases; 14% have been referred to legal services. An increase in visitation has been experienced by 66%.

Justification as Exemplary:

The program offers a comprehensive approach to addressing access and visitation issues by integrating case management, mediation, education and legal services. The program is enforced through the contempt power of the court, when necessary.

Sources of Funding:

Funding is provided from a grant from the Louisiana Department of Social Services, Office of Family Support, Support Enforcement Services. Matching funds for legal services are provided by the Southwest Louisiana Legal Services. The court provides in-kind services including office space, furniture, telephone, copying, etc.

Application for Other Settings:

Keys to Success:

- Bi-monthly partner meetings ensure adequate communication and cooperation between program partners.
- Use of the court's contempt power.
- Use of a case manager to coordinate the program also makes the program a success.

Challenges:

- Cases are limited to those with a child support case with the State enforcement agency because of the source of funding. Expanding the program to serve others who do not fit that criteria is challenging.

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Court/Agency: Family and Juvenile Court, 14th JDC, Louisiana

Workplace Parent Education Program

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths:

- 📄 **Standards / guidelines**
- \$ **Unique or detailed funding sources**
- 👥 **Outreach to special populations**
- * **Innovative / unique**

Program Description:

The Workplace Parent Education Program is a program of two eight-week courses provided during “brown bag” lunch sessions at the parents’ place of employment. The program is designed to address the unique needs of working parents and is tailored to meet the specific needs of the hosting company and its employees. The courses aim to reduce stress and strengthen bonds in the family so that children are protected against negative behavior and parents are better able to handle the stress of parenting. The program draws on the curriculum of the Northern Illinois Council of Alcohol and Substance Abuse’s (NICASA) Parent Project and the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) T Early Years. The NICASA curriculum has been named a model program in preventing juvenile delinquency and youth drug abuse.

Evaluation:

Participant exit surveys have been positive.

Justification as Exemplary:

The program is uniquely designed to meet the needs of working parents and does not add to the stress those parents already experience by requiring additional time. Many parenting support groups have been developed at the workplace as a result of this program.

Sources of Funding:

Funding for staff and supplies is currently provided by the Kronkosky Charitable Foundation. Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has provided twice-yearly Parent/Child Activity Days at a local state park to encourage and model healthy outdoor activities for families. Wildlife Department funds have been provided to pay for fishing poles, t-shirts, water bottles and other premiums for participants.

Applications for Other Settings:

Keys to Success: The program has been successful in part because of partnerships developed with businesses through the Human Resource and Employee Assistance Program offices, and by the ability to provide devoted staff, highly qualified parent educators, and ongoing training.

Challenges and Barriers: It is challenging to introduce the concept of “social services” into “corporate culture.” It is also difficult to find workplace environments large enough to accommodate the program.

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Court/Agency: San Antonio Kids Exchange

UpToParents.Org

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Accessible to remote geographic regions**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

These free Web sites give parents the opportunity to focus on understanding their children's needs and to see that meeting those needs can be their own best path out of conflict. Parents typically require three hours to complete work on the Web site. When parents finish separate work, they can merge their commitments into a set of common, agreed commitments to guide future interaction. The Web sites available are:

- www.UpToParents.org, for divorcing and divorced parents;
- www.ProudToParent.org, for never-married parents;
- www.WhileWeHeal.org, for married parents remembering their children's needs as they work through marital problems.

Evaluation:

While no formal evaluation has been undertaken, the Web sites have been shown to be of overwhelming benefit in creating a healing child focus among parents who used them. Feedback from parents has been positive, with parents saying they wished they had been sent to this resource earlier.

Justification as Exemplary:

The Web sites' creative interactivity allows parents to receive feedback at 18 different places on the Web site. The Web sites also divide important parent tasks into understandable categories, such as specific dangers of parent conflict to children. The Web sites offer free articles and newsletters to parents and professionals, all aimed at reducing conflict in difficult family transitions.

Sources of Funding:

Web sites are free and are funded by Freedom 22 Foundation, a small family charity.

Applications for Other Settings:

The creators of the resource believe the optimal referral would be broader use of court rules and standing orders referring parents to the Web sites. They profitably can be incorporated into the work of courts, attorneys, mediators, counselors, co-parenting education and others. The Web sites are being translated into other languages.

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Court/Agency: Freedom 22 Foundation

Court Care Center for Divorcing Families

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Standards / guidelines**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The Court Care Center for Divorcing Families (CCCDF) has goals to provide services that increase parenting skills and decrease conflict; increase post-divorce coping and adjustment in children and reduce re-litigation rates. Focus on the Children-Orlando is a unique eight-week (16-hour) program developed to educate parents about the damage of ongoing conflict, to educate and assist them in learning improved communication and conflict regulation. A four-week children's segment allows for children to share feelings and participate in activities related to divorce.

Evaluation:

Parents complete pre- and post-questionnaires for the eight-week program and complete a session satisfaction form weekly. Overall, findings are supportive of the claim that reported levels of conflict were lower and effectiveness of communication was higher subsequent to participation in the program.

Justification as Exemplary:

The CCCDF provides for mental health professionals to work closely with the judiciary to alleviate the fallout of high conflict divorce for parents and their children. Judges can make immediate referrals to the CCCDR and parties can be served and case managed following a one-hour targeted screening and intake assessment. The CCCDF's high conflict co-parenting services include Focus on the Children-Orlando and Parenting Coordination.

Sources of Funding:

Orlando County, Florida has provided funding for the CCCDF. The Parenting Coordination program received a grant from Florida's Alternative Dispute Resolution Innovation Program initiative and is now funded by Orange County.

Applications for Other Settings:

The primary key to success of programs of this nature is the support of the judiciary. Another key to success is obtaining funding, which is a major challenge, through grants or by combining grants, and support of the state or county governments.

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Court/Agency: Ninth Judicial Circuit Court of Florida

New Beginnings Program

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Standards / guidelines**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The New Beginnings Program (NBP) is an 11-session program to promote effective parenting following divorce. Research has found that high quality of parenting is one of the most reliable predictors of children's well being after divorce. The NBP was designed to teach and support two critical domains of positive parenting: the warmth of the parent-child relationship and the parents' use of effective discipline.

Evaluation:

The program has been evaluated in two rigorous randomized experimental trials. The results show that six years following participation, the program has multiple benefits for children, including reducing the likelihood of diagnosed mental disorder, reducing substance abuse, reducing the number of sexual partners and improving grade point average and self-esteem.

Justification as Exemplary:

The program is based on extensive research, which finds that quality of parenting following divorce is one of the best predictors of children's adjustment. It is described in a detailed manual, which enables group leaders to be trained to readily replicate the program in multiple sites.

Sources of Funding:

The development and evaluation of the New Beginnings Program was funded by grants from the National Institute of Mental health.

Applications for Other Settings:

- The program is applicable to other jurisdictions because it works to improve the quality of parenting, one of the most powerful factors that research has found to relate to children's post-divorce adjustment.
- One challenge is to recruit parents to the program. The program is 11 sessions long, which may discourage parents. We find that once parents begin the program, they continue for the whole program.
- Obtaining funding is also a challenge.

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Court/Agency: Arizona State University, Prevention Research Center

Oregon Family Institute: Parents Beyond Conflict

Program Category: Parenting Support

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

Parents locked in destructive patterns of conflict lose sight of their children's feelings and needs during and beyond separation and conflict. The children then suffer. With support and information, parents can reduce the negative impact of divorce on children and learn new strategies of dealing with some common post-divorce parenting challenges and keep more of the focus on the children. Over the course of six two-hour sessions, parents explore and discuss parental conflict, some of its causes, and strategies for reducing conflict.

Evaluation:

Parents complete an anonymous evaluation at the end of the class. Feedback has been positive, with parents reporting the class to be helpful. Long-term follow-up has not been conducted so far.

Justification as Exemplary:

The comprehensive nature of the program allows for innovative focus on communication and negotiation skill development and presents information on issues such as safety and protection of children. It also helps participants realize they are not alone and they can share support in a group setting.

Sources of Funding:

Currently, parents pay for this fee-for-service program. Jurisdictions could subsidize this for parents who need the class but can't afford to pay.

Applications for Other Settings:

Keys to success:

- Limit class sizes to 12-16 participants;
- Inject humor and use a variety of media, including videos, group and small class work;

- One challenge is to limit participants' attempts to dominate discussion with complaints against other parent.

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Court/Agency: Oregon Family Institute

SPECIALTY COURTS

S.A.F.E. for Kids Program

Program Category: Specialty Courts

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Outreach to special populations**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description:

The S.A.F.E. for Kids program is designed to assist families with access to the non-custodial parent and to reduce parent alienation. Fee assistance is available for supervised visitation services. The courts use non-profit organizations in the community as sub-contractors to provide the services to the families. The goal of the program is child safety during supervised visits. The impact of the program has allowed low-income families access to their child(ren) in a safe environment.

Evaluation:

Per the program evaluation, more families than budgeted for have used the services through the collaboration with the community.

Justification as Exemplary:

Grant-funded program that trains sub-contractors, provides Web site access for services, innovative forms for client intake and is implementing a data collection system for client information.

Sources of Funding:

Access Grant, in-kind funds from sub-contractors.

Applications for Other Settings:

The success of this program is based upon the court's support and willingness to collaborate with the community to provide the services.

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Court/Agency: Los Angeles Superior Court

Compassion Power

Program Category: Specialty Courts

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
- * Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

Compassion Power is a psychoeducational program for court-ordered domestic violence and child abuse offenders. The goal is to eliminate recidivism of domestic violence and child abuse. A 28-hour, intensive educational and skill-based program teaches self-regulation and compassion for loved ones as an incompatible response to aggression. It includes dozens of homework assignments and skill practice sessions.

Evaluation:

Evaluation of Core Value (Compassion) Workshops for abusers: 285 court-ordered abusers have reached one-year follow-up eligibility (still living with or in continual contact with victim) in Prince George's County. Violence and verbal aggression statistics are from report of the victim. Violence is defined as a push, grab or shove as measured by the Conflict Tactics Scale. Of those ordered into the program, 68% complete. Group completers are:

- 86% violence-free (push, grab) after one year;
- 71% verbal aggression-free after one year;
- 92% free of serious violence (at least one instance of beating up, choking, or threatening with a weapon) after one year.

On average, each member of the group shows:

- 250% increase in strategies to resolve anger and violence situations;
- 36% increase in compassion;
- 49% reduction in anger-hostility;
- 33% clinical anxiety reduced to normal level;
- 28% improvement in well-being;
- 35% improvement in self-esteem.

Justification as Exemplary:

The program successfully engages abusers in the change process through the use of originally produced dramatic videos and audio tapes, trademarked emotional regulation techniques, original art work, and an original manual. It is one of the most successful programs of its kind. The program tracks clients and makes quarterly statistical reports to the courts.

Sources of Funding:

The program receives no public money and is entirely supported by fees from clients, although no one is turned away for lack of money.

Applications for Other Settings:

The key to success is regulating the personal feelings of staff and compassionately appealing to the deepest values of abusers. This is not easy to do because court-ordered clients are embittered about the criminal justice process. Ongoing evaluation and follow-ups with victims will reveal any improvements necessary. The emotional regulation focus of the intervention makes it cross-cultural. The manual is in eight different languages and in use all over the world.

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Court/Agency: Compassion Power

FIRST Program

Program Category: Specialty Courts

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals :

The FIRST Program (Families In Recovery to Stay Together) is a Drug Court Program with the goal of supporting parents in their endeavor to be successful in achieving recovery and reunification with children removed by the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services (DSS). The FIRST Program offers substance abuse counseling, parenting education sessions, recovery support programs, and alcohol and drug tests, with more intensive case management and residential treatment when needed.

Evaluation:

Program evaluation includes the collection of both outcome performance measures (screening and timely referral, reduction in substance abuse, progress in treatment interventions, and measures related to permanency planning) and outcome measures based on DSS data concerning the participants and their children.

Justification as Exemplary:

The FIRST Program is a collaborative effort of the court, Mecklenburg County DSS Youth and Family Services (YFS) and the Mecklenburg County Area Mental Health Authority (AMH) to support parents in achieving recovery and reunification. It offers parents different levels of participation and provides the court with more information about the parent's chance for recovery and reunification earlier in the dependency process.

Sources of Funding:

Fiscal Year Grant Funds awarded 2002-2004 \$658,708 (FDTC Expansion), 2002-2004 \$466,930.80 (Residential Services), a continuation grant from the Governor's Crime Commission to expand the FDTC Program.

Applications for Other Settings:

The FIRST Program can be very easily replicated in any jurisdiction or court that is willing to collaborate with agencies that normally operate in isolation from the court system

Program Contact Person Information:

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Court/Agency: 26th Judicial District, North Carolina

Domestic Violence Treatment Option Court

Program Category: Specialty Courts

Program Strengths:

-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Accessible to remote geographic regions**
- * Innovative / unique**

Program Description:

In this specialty court, specially assigned judiciary, crown and defense lawyers handle domestic violence cases. A treatment team, including probation officers, counselors from the Spousal Abuse Program and Victim Services, attend and provide assistance. Cases are fast-tracked and counselors provide monthly progress summaries to the court. Victims receive safety planning, referrals for counseling for themselves and their children, updates on the offender's progress and assistance in preparing for court and preparing a victim impact statement.

Prior to the implementation of the program, 75% of cases were not proceeding to trial. The program has shifted the focus from the victim and whether she can "make the case" to the abusive behavior of the offender and what he is prepared to do to alter that behavior and keep his family safe. Family violence issues are addressed from a holistic perspective.

Evaluation:

A long term evaluation is being conducted by the National Crime Prevention Centre (NCPC) and funded by the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family (CRILF). This study is scheduled to be concluded in March 2005. An interim report is available which focuses on the history and implementation of the DVTO and includes a preliminary analysis of the outcome data, including tracking and profiling. A multi-observation pre-test and post-test group design was used in the study.

Justification as Exemplary:

One of the first domestic violence courts in North America, it has been a model for others and participants have trained on the model in Alaska and across Canada. It has a significant impact in that 80-85% of cases involving allegations of domestic violence are handled through this specialty court. It focuses on offender treatment and responsibility.

Sources of Funding:

Funding sources include the federal government and the territorial government. Additional funding has been provided by the Federal Government of Canada for a part-time coordinator to complete the independent evaluation.

Applications for Other Settings:

Keys to Success:

- The program must be built on an effective treatment program respected by the domestic violence advocacy community.
- Key players including judges, crown and defense counsel, probation, agency partners and victim services must buy into the program.
- Attention should be paid to the needs of special needs clients (mental health problems, language and literacy limitations, substance abuse, etc.).
- It is also important to effectively address confidentiality concerns.

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Court/Agency: Yukon Territorial Court

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Lund and Strachan

Program Category: Information Technology

Program Strengths:

- 📍 Accessible to remote geographic regions**
- * Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

Staff of the firm of Lund and Strachan serve as custody evaluators, mediators, special masters, neutrals and child specialists in collaborative law cases. The Web site was established to solve the problem of potential claims of bias or prejudice resulting when one party to a dispute has direct communication with the firm regarding services. The Web site gives information about all services, including all forms, so that parties can download the information and see procedures without talking to any of the professionals. The site can be accessed at any time and is easy to navigate. All procedures are described in simple language. Both parties have access to exactly the same information. The program is self-funded.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Interactive Community Assistance Network (I-CAN!)

Program Category: Information Technology

Program Strengths:

- \$ Unique or detailed funding sources**
- 👤 Agency collaboration**
- 👥 Outreach to special populations**
- 🏠 Accessible to remote geographic regions**
- * Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The Interactive Community Assistance Network (I-CAN!) project is a network of Web-based legal services and interactive kiosks that provides self-represented litigants with easy access to forms and procedures. I-CAN!'s multilingual, interactive and tutorial modules enable self-represented litigants to create properly formatted pleadings and complete legal forms using a touch screen or Web interface.

How the Program Works:

Currently, 13 modules are available in English and Spanish, and five in Vietnamese, with forms and instructions for filing paternity cases, domestic violence restraining orders, small claims cases, fee waivers, license denial review, wage assignment review, documents for the opening of new cases with Orange County Department of Child Support Services, unlawful detainer, divorce, income and expense, and order to show cause matters. I-CAN! has a Web-based electronic filing component that allows Domestic Violence documents to be electronically filed with the court from remote sites such as domestic violence shelters.

Evaluation and Results:

Since May 2001, almost 22,000 pleadings have been filed with I-CAN!. A professional evaluation conducted by the University of California, Irvine noted that "users found I-CAN! very helpful." Judges made favorable comments about the system because pleadings were readable, users came to court better prepared with fewer questions, and information was correct and accurate. I-CAN! has significantly increased access to the court and reduced disparities of access to the legal system, and video conferencing capability enables users in remote or rural locations to gain access to individuals who can assist them with using I-CAN!.

Justification as Exemplary:

I-CAN! has already provided 22,000 self-represented litigants with enhanced access to the justice system information through common, well-understood technology from kiosks and PCs at remote locations. Modules are available in English, Spanish and Vietnamese. I-CAN! incorporates Web-based video technology in the form of a video guide that especially helps users with low literacy skills complete the I-CAN! forms. Judges hearing matters from I-CAN! users have indicated that they can help six I-CAN! users in the same amount of time as they would currently spend with one self-represented litigant.

Sources of Funding:

I-CAN! was implemented with funding from the statewide Commission on Access to Justice and a \$10 million Equal Access fund. There were many funding agencies, both law-connected and other community based organizations listed in the full nomination. Funding total was \$2,074,398.

Applications for Other Settings:

- I-CAN! is easy for other agencies to replicate because it uses standard technologies and is designed such that the modules that are court-specific are easily separable from those with general applicability.
- I-CAN! video segments are designed to facilitate the development of regionally-customized or court-specific content at a low cost.
- The Legal Aid Society of Orange County is available to assist other courts and legal service providers in the implementation of I-CAN!

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Court/Agency: Orange County Superior Court, California

OTHER PROGRAMS

Kids First Program for Women

Program Category: Other Programs

Program Strengths:

☛ Outreach to special populations

Program Description and Goals:

The goal of the program is to provide women with information regarding domestic violence and how they can keep themselves and their children safe. The program also provides information regarding children and the feelings that children experience because of domestic violence and divorce and separation. The women also receive information as to how they can help their children. The program validates women and their feelings.

Evaluation:

The women fill out an evaluation at the end of the program. The feedback has always been very positive. The women have told us that the information they receive is very valuable and helpful. The women have also felt more empowered to not only help themselves, but to help their children as well.

Justification as Exemplary:

We designed this program to respond to a need of women in domestic abuse situations. We redesigned our original curriculum to fit the needs of the women and wrote a new book for this program. Not only does this program deal with domestic violence, but it also focuses just as much on children and what they are experiencing. This is what makes the program innovative. From the evaluations, we have learned how effective the program is for the women who have attended. We continue to make changes to the program whenever necessary based on the feedback from the women. We felt that we needed to provide something more relevant to the women who have experienced domestic violence and wanted to be accountable to their special needs.

Sources of Funding:

Department of Health and Human Services, Target Department Stores, The Access and Visitation Grant Program, and private foundations.

Applications for Other Settings:

One of our keys to success is having program facilitators who are experts in the domestic violence field. Another success is the Kids First for Women booklet that the women receive. The fact that this program also stresses children and what they need is another reason why it is so successful. Our program also offers financial assistance. No one is

ever turned away if they are not able to pay. Our challenges have been to try to get other community agencies to refer women to our program. We need to continue to collaborate with other community resources so that they understand the program and its goals.

Program Contact Person Information:

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UMASS Family Court Clinic

Program Category: Other Programs

Program Strengths:

- 👉 Agency collaboration**
- 👥 Outreach to special populations**
- * Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

The UMASS (University of Massachusetts) Family Court Clinic provides brief, focused evaluations to families in crisis who present to Family Court. Our goal is better informed judicial decision making in family cases involving children. Judges formulate focused evaluation questions. The clinic is designed to do quick turn around evaluations, which respond to issues in court and parental concerns, especially about child safety. Written reports assist attorneys and judges in resolution of issues, with more information available at hearings than would otherwise be possible.

Evaluation:

Results indicate that in three-quarters of cases, clinicians do not recommend further assessment and recommendations are made toward the issues of concern identified by the court. Clinicians report that judges identify focused questions and that there are clear, short term issues in cases referred. Judicial ratings of the program are consistently favorable, with judges finding reports useful to their practice.

Justification as Exemplary:

The UMASS Court Clinic program evolved out of a need in the Family Court for reliable information in the early stages of a case when child safety is at issue. The brief evaluation model takes into account the limitations of the data and other ethical concerns. Written reports are used in order to promote clear and well thought out information, available for cross examination. Clinicians make clear to the court the limits of the data, what other assessment might be needed when the questions raised by a family situation require more in-depth evaluation, and how to make the family situation more safe and stable pending legal action. This is a cost effective program that promotes better informed judicial decision making and judicial efficiency. It also responds quickly to safety concerns expressed by parents, in order to engage their cooperation in court ordered access plans. This program is useful as a first response, or triage, in the family court.

Sources of Funding:

The program is state-funded through the annual state budget. In the past, there was foundation funding. There are also some assessments paid for by the clients themselves.

Applications for Other Settings:

- It is crucial to educate judges and attorneys about what appropriate referral questions are and about what kind of family situations lend themselves to a brief evaluation. Judges must understand the differences between brief, focused evaluations and comprehensive family evaluations and the limitations of brief evaluations.
- Clinicians must be experienced in family systems issues and in family law. They must be able to quickly gather relevant information and write clear and well organized reports to the questions at hand.
- There must be a good working relationship and good communication between the court staff and clinical staff.
- Finding funding and space for assessments is difficult. This is a high conflict caseload and clients tend to be litigious, resulting in complaints about services or clinicians. Appropriate space for family assessments, including separate waiting areas to keep parents with restraining orders separate, is expensive.
- Ongoing communication about programmatic concerns with judges, such as discussion of types of appropriate referrals would be useful, although both judges and clinicians often find it difficult to find the time to do this.

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Court/Agency: UMASS Medical School

Brief Consultation Service

Program Category: Other Programs

Program Strengths:

- ## Outreach to special populations
- * Innovative / unique

Program Description and Goals:

The service was designed to serve separating or divorcing parents with children between the ages 11 to 17 to provide the children's "voice to the court" in custody/access disputes. It was also developed to fill a gap in service created by the dissolution of *amicus curiae* service where lawyers were representing the "voice of the child" to the family court. The service was designed to work closely with the Case Conference Process in Case Management, Motions and Pre-trial conferences. A key benefit of this service is its ability to provide a timely focused assessment of specific access issues pertaining to children's wishes or concerns. This service was also developed in order to meet the differential needs of families accessing the Court and Family Conciliation for assessment services and to avoid the "one size fits all" approach to custody/access assessments.

Evaluation:

Preliminary results from the survey of parents reflect a roughly 55% satisfaction overall with the process and outcome of the intervention. Satisfaction with the process, however, is higher in some areas such as evaluators' knowledge, level of respect for the clients, responsiveness, and similar 'service' oriented activities. Anecdotal responses from the judiciary are that the service has been helpful to move cases forward in case conferences, have been useful in assessing the needs for more traditional assessments, and have been helpful overall to parents in making decisions about time-share arrangements post-separation.

Justification as Exemplary:

This service complements the case conference process and provides a timely service to the court and the parents involved in custody access disputes. The service attempts to meet the differential needs of litigating parents and avoids the "one size fits all" approach of traditional assessments that are time consuming and often not initiated quickly enough to deal with the issues at hand. The service is flexible and responsive and staff can respond to the court's needs for further input in a timely fashion.

Sources of Funding:

In addition to one existing staff of Family Conciliation which is funded through the Government of Manitoba, Department of Family Services, financial support has been provided by the Child-Centered Family Justice Fund of Justice Canada for two counselors and one support staff.

Applications for Other Settings:

The keys to success:

- Well trained and experienced staff who are able to play a consultation role with parents seeking assistance in their custody access dispute.
- A close working relationship with the judiciary and the ability to be flexible, responsive and consistent in approach.
- Short-term reports of the “voice of the child” have to be crafted carefully in order to be helpful to the children and the court.
- It is important that consultations not replace in-depth traditional assessments and in fact can be used to determine whether the more traditional and investigative type of assessment is required.

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Court/Agency: Family Conciliation

Georgia Fatherhood Services Network

Program Category: Other Programs

Program Strengths:

-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Agency collaboration**
-  **Accessible to remote geographic regions**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description:

The Georgia Fatherhood Services Network is a statewide program implemented in 1998 that offers free technical training at any technical college in the state, job search assistance, career counseling and life skills workshop for low-income non-custodial parents with child support cases. Since the program's inception, 13,000 non-custodial parents have received services with over 3,000 currently active participants. Fatherhood program coordinators are available at each technical college and a community resource specialist from the child support enforcement office is assigned to each school. Participants must work at least 20 hours per week and pay child support while in the program. Upon completion, participants should be employed full-time at a wage that permits them to support themselves and their children.

Evaluation:

Regularly evaluated by outside consultants. From the evaluation of 2002 data, upon entry:

- 63% of participants were unemployed;
- 25% had less than a high school diploma;
- 57% lacked access to reliable transportation;
- Of those employed, the average hourly wage was \$5.97, only \$0.82 above the state minimum wage.

The program has resulted in a 16% increase in the percentage of those employed, and an increase in average hourly wages of \$2.32.

Justification as Exemplary:

The program is based on good agency cooperation and data tracing to coordinate between employment counselors, the program coordinator and child support enforcement officers. The program has overcome significant barriers to increase employment for low income payors, many of whom have low education, criminal records, lack of transportation and no driver's license.

Funding:

Total funding for the program is \$5,757,575. This is provided for through a 34% in-kind match from the Georgia Department of Adult and Technical Education and 66% from Title IV-D funds.

Application for Other Settings:

Keys to Success:

- The program represents a creative alternative to incarceration for parents unable to pay child support.
- Because the barriers for these individuals are so great, and the need for employment is urgent, it has been easy to identify and work with agency partners.

Challenges:

- The target population has many barriers to success, such as low education, criminal background, lack of access to transportation, etc.
- Many live in rural areas where there is little employment.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Court/Agency: State Office of Child Support Enforcement, Georgia

Working for Kids

Program Category: Other Programs

Program Strengths:

-  **Evidence-based**
-  **Strong evaluation component**
-  **Standards / guidelines**
-  **Unique or detailed funding sources**
-  **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

Working for Kids (WFK) was created to assist non-custodial parents who were under an active child support order and having difficulty meeting those obligations. WFK utilizes a unique type of intensive case management approach to service delivery that focuses on leading these individuals toward greater self-sufficiency through employment and, through parenting skills, counseling and support group sessions, helping them to become more active, positive role models for their non-custodial children. Upon enrollment, participants are offered a variety of comprehensive case management services including:

- Individualized job development;
- Pre-employment/job skills training;
- Placement and follow-up services;
- Advocacy in court and with child support staff
- Housing, training and transportation assistance;
- General counseling, as well as information and referral services for a variety of issues (substance abuse/mental health/health, legal/custody/mediation, etc.).

Evaluation:

The typical WFK participant enters the program having paid little or no child support for several months or years. Eighty percent are ex-offenders, many are dealing with substance abuse and/or mental health issues and most have poor work histories. Below are some outcome measures for Fiscal Year 03-04:

- 75% of closed cases maintained employment for a minimum of 13 weeks;
- Average length of employment for those cases was more than six months at closure (29 weeks);
- Average client hourly wage was \$8.29;
- Over 2,000 hours of parenthood training were provided;
- 93% of clients increased or initiated child support payments while working with the program;

- More than \$86,000 in new child support payments were generated (an increase of more than \$10,000 over last year);
- Customer satisfaction ratings of 4.7 on a 5 point scale (where 3 = “good” and 5 = “excellent”).

Justification as Exemplary:

In addition to working directly with clients on employment and training, legal and other issues, WFK works with clients to help them see their non-custodial children as a piece of their lives – not just a piece of their paychecks. Much of this work occurs during weekly parenting skills/support group meetings. WFK’s many community partners bring health, legal and financial information to participants during groups, and Child Support staff hold quarterly informational forums on-site. Although other service providers may work with similar populations, none can match WFK in the variety and intensity of services offered.

Sources of Funding:

Working for Kids consists of three Senior Case Managers, one half of one Team Leader and one half of one Information and Referral Specialist. (These positions are shared with another, co-located Vocational Services program.) WFK is currently budgeted at \$265,610 for fiscal year 2004-05. These funds are provided to Wake County Human Services via federal TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) dollars (\$265,610) and through a State Child Support Access and Visitation grant (\$40,000) that is used strictly for client support items.

Applications for Other Settings:

- Replication efforts should start with a staff that is experienced in intensive case management, group facilitation and familiar with local resources.
- Child support and court personnel must be involved in any replication efforts, since their support will be necessary for program success and growth.
- Programs using WFK as a model will need to overcome some of the same public and institutional prejudices to help clients succeed (WFK clients were—and sometimes still are—called “Deadbeat Dads”).
- Replication efforts would benefit from a more flexible funding source (i.e., participants must meet restrictive TANF eligibility rules to receive assistance).

Program Contact Person Information:

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Court/Agency: Department of Health and Human Services, North Carolina

247th STAR Family Intervention Court

Program Category: Other Programs

Program Strengths:

- ☒ **Strong evaluation component**
- 👤 **Agency collaboration**
- 👥 **Outreach to special populations**
- * **Innovative / unique**

Program Description and Goals:

In child dependency cases, the safety and welfare of children with substance abusing parents is provided through early intervention, education, and treatment, utilizing comprehensive, judicially supervised, case management with a collaborative, multi-disciplinary approach to the entire family. Participants must be voluntary, have a diagnosable substance abuse problem, and be non-violent offenders. The treatment services include: detoxification, residential treatment, outpatient treatment, and aftercare. Ancillary services include: employment training/counseling, physical health services, mental health services, parenting skills enhancement, social/life skills training, and literacy training.

Evaluation:

An independent evaluator has been a part of the FIC team since inception, and measures the key program assessment and service variables and results in terms of support paid.

Justification as Exemplary:

Through the leadership of the Honorable Bonnie Crane-Hellums and the Honorable Leta Parks, a real solution is now available, without a governmental mandate or much-needed funding.

Sources of Funding :

Existing funds pay for staff and services.

Applications for Other Settings:

- Agency and community stakeholders meet regularly to provide guidance and direction to the drug court program.
- Partnerships between drug courts and community programs build effective links between the court and chemically ill persons in the community.

Program Contact Person Information:

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Court/Agency: Court Related Services, 247th District Court, Texas

DuPage County Family Center

Program Category: Other Programs

Program Strengths:

\$ Unique or detailed funding sources

🤝 Agency collaboration

👥 Outreach to special populations

Program Description:

The DuPage County Family Center provides a continuum of services including parent education, neutral exchange, mediation and supervised visitation, to help establish, maintain and enhance family relationships. It is professionally staffed and housed in a stand-alone facility, with separate entrances to permit the physical separation of parents when necessary. The Center works collaboratively with the court system and the family violence community.

Evaluation:

Anecdotal and statistical data is available although the program has not gone through a thorough statistical evaluation. Agreements have been reached in over 70% of cases mediated. Participant evaluations of other services have been positive. Focus groups were conducted with non-custodial and custodial parents to obtain constructive feedback regarding the physical structure of the building.

Justification as Exemplary:

The program offers a continuum of services for families who are in crisis due to divorce or separation. Its “on the spot” mediation provided in the courtroom is unique. Services are also designed for never-married parents.

Sources of Funding:

Funding is provided through a federal Access and Visitation Grant administered by the Illinois Department of Public Aid and from local court filing fees (a neutral site custody exchange fund).

Applications for Other Settings:

Keys to Success:

- Collaboration with the judicial system has been key to the center’s success.
- Information on forms, literature and procedures is available upon request for those looking to replicate the center’s success.

Challenges:

- Financial constraints, the volatility of the population and reluctance of the local bar association can be obstacles.

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Court/Agency: DuPage County Family Center