

Fifth District's Children's Justice Initiative Team April 2009 Summit Report

The Fifth District's Children's Justice Initiative Team currently has twenty-six members from the 5A and 5B counties of the Fifth District. We have specifically chosen to continue having Polk County operate on a parallel track through the separate structure of the Model Court Team. The Model Court team process is well established and has functioned similarly to a Children's Justice Team since 2001. The Children's Justice Initiative allows the Fifth District to focus specifically on our more rural counties, acknowledging and addressing the fact that they have not received the attention or concerted collaboration for juvenile court that Polk County has.

In the last year the original team has added two more DHS SW Administrators, the regional supervisor and Assistant Director for CFI, a second GAL/parent attorney, a second County Attorney, a second Juvenile Court School Liaison Officer, changed our CASA representative (due to job changes), and added an AEA Associate Administrator representative. Attached to this report is a complete list of our current Team membership.

The team meets every other month, generally on the last Thursday of the month from 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. We consistently have 80 percent plus attendance from the team at each meeting. We rotate our meeting locations between Leon (Decatur County Courthouse) and Osceola (DHS Clarke County Office or the Clarke County Courthouse). We need a larger place to meet than is available in Osceola so we are exploring a room at the Southwest Community College for future meetings. Our meeting dates have been: 5/22/07; 7/26/07; 9/29/07; 11/29/07; 1/31/08; 3/27/08; 5/8/08; 7/31/08; 9/25/08; 12/4/08; and 1/29/09, with future meetings scheduled for 3/26/09 and 5/21/09. Note are prepared after each meeting and distributed to the Team members and the CJJ staff.

We have a number of work groups operating at this time including:

- Visitation Sub-Committee
- Youth Survey team
- April 9th Conference Follow-up Subcommittee

Some of Our Accomplishments over the past Two Years are as follows: These accomplishments have been targeted to assist our courts in meeting requirements of the Adoptions and Safe Families Act as well as Iowa Law on juvenile court proceedings. However, we do not have a specific process in place to determine specific measurable accomplishments.

1. Fall, 2007, foster children survey re effectiveness of DHS worker and guardian-ad-litem. In process of doing the survey again to measure changes. Information for sharing survey and process has been sent to Children's Justice Director.

2. Service Provider forum/seminar in Creston, April 2008. In the process of developing small group seminars based on evaluations of the 2008 seminar and changes in the child welfare area. Used Mini-grant funds to provide refreshments and meals for participants at the April event. Facility was free and no charges for any speakers.
3. Expanded membership on the committee to include AEA and local school districts, DECAT coordinator, domestic abuse service provider,
4. Modified and began distributing forms for children, teachers, foster parents and daycare providers to provide reports to the court for use in hearings. These reports are available for sharing with other districts. The original versions, which have been modified by our Team, originated out of the Polk County Model Court Team process.
5. Modified and implemented the use of standard guardian-ad-litem court reports to assist in monitoring guardian-ad-litem performance and to provide a check-list to the guardian-ad-litem to assist in their job performance. These reports are available for sharing with other districts. The original versions came out of the Polk County Model Court Team process.
6. Developed and implemented a recommended method of handling exhibits in juvenile cases, to provide direction to the clerks in handling exhibits, reduce the number of copies of various filings that appear in court files, and provide a clearer record for possible appeals. The protocol for this process is available for sharing with other districts.
7. Have continued to emphasize and encourage the use of the form orders developed by the Polk County Model Court project. These forms would be available for sharing with other districts, and have been shared in the past through Children's Justice staff.
8. Continuing to monitor and provide input on visitation issues for children in foster care
9. Obtaining and using a mini-grant to print and distribute Parent's Juvenile Court Handbook in both English and Spanish – handbooks are now in the hands of clerks and DHS workers in rural 5.
10. Continuing to monitor and support implementation of family team meetings in every juvenile case.
11. Reviewed and discussed the Children's Justice Initiative evaluations of Clarke and Dallas Counties, and met with all rural juvenile judges to discuss the results and ways to improve.

Barriers:

- Too many issues/needs to address, difficult to focus and prioritize. Need to better focus and steer our meeting time to accomplish goals and action, although time

spent these past two years has developed a group trust and commitment to the project which was probably phase one of a collaborative team's development process.

- Limited time and/or commitment to take time out of regular job duties to work on CJ Team activities. No dedicated staff support for initiative/Team.
- Lack of funding to support or pay for gaps in services or needs identified by the Team.

Review of Work Plan from 2007 Summit: The following is a re-print of our Summit plan in black font with the review and update comments in blue font.

Session 2 -3: The report format for this session did not work well for our group as the discussion unfolded, so presented here are some of the issues we wrestled with during this time.

1. In order to communicate and show the commitment to the rural needs of the Fifth District, we need to have our on-going team meetings in Leon, or Osceola (hold meetings in 5B counties). **Accomplished.**
2. We need to add local DHS workers, DECAT representative and local school officials to our team. **Accomplished.**
3. We need to not be dictated to from the State Team nor given specific requirements. The local team needs to direct itself on this initiative. **Current policy from CJI, SCA and Supreme Court Leadership.**
4. We feel sometimes like that overloaded donkey – needs to prioritize problems because there are many but give ourselves realistic timeframes and keep in mind the federal requirements/mandates. When we speak of problems we are talking about practices/behaviors that need to be addressed to get to best practice strategies. **This has become a stumbling block for us as predicted. The Team wants to fix “everything” sometimes. We need to consciously consider and address this issue as we move forward at the Summit and our next program year.**
5. We need a lot more information about financing and service related issues in our area. **Addressed for some areas/issues, but we continue to need to review areas in which additional information and understanding is needed as a Team.**
6. Need to work on our trust levels – honoring professional judgment and opinions of each other from each person's unique system and work product standpoint. **On target, on schedule, need to continue to collaborate and work together as a team of professionals. We have had some tense moments at meetings and need to continue to consciously step back to avoid interjecting personal issues or feelings.**
7. Increase our lines of communication: Currently there is no feedback or discussion among players outside the formal court process. People wonder are they being listened to, is my perspective valid in the eyes of others, do others care about my role, do others understand my role? We feel like there are many

communication silos in our system versus ways to work together to design solutions, such as “what fits for this case?” How can we change this? We need more teamwork, collaboration, talking to each other. A regular professional team meeting might be a possible solution. **In progress. Need to consider more closely and actively as we have discussed the professional team concepts several times but have not taken affirmative action nor ruled out the concept.**

8. Educate and Inform Ourselves: We need to educate ourselves more: what services are available in the area, how do they work, how can they be funded for children and families, what is the best use of resources, what requirements does DHS face, what requirements to the courts have to meet, etc. **In progress. We need to continue to learn, educate and inform ourselves as a group to enhance the overall team’s knowledge and ability to then network with that knowledge base.**
9. Concerns about capacity in the system – we still don’t have enough service providers (or attorneys or foster parents) in the area to meet the needs of the kids and families, nor to do system-wide practices like family team meetings. **Continues to be an issue and we often discuss it. We need to continue to work through these issues, discuss them and then take action if possible.**

Team organization: We as a team committed to attending and actively participating in future meetings of the Fifth Judicial District’s Children’s Justice Initiative Team. **Done.** Meetings will be called by the Chief Judge through the District Court Administrator. **Done.** Meeting locations will rotate among various sites in the 5B area of our district. **Done – we could consider other locations within the area as feasible.** We prefer to meet around a large table to enhance the ability to work together and discuss matters arm in arm (versus sitting in rows in a courtroom public gallery or jury box). **Need to continue to work on this as our group has outgrown the jury room in Decatur County and the DHS conference room in Clarke County. We are moving our 5/21/09 to SWCC (Southwest Community College) in Creston for this purpose.** The Chief Judge will chair the meetings and the DCA will act as facilitator. **The Chief Judge has delegated chairing the meetings to District Court Judge John Lloyd. The DCA continues to act as a facilitator and prepares and circulates notes from each meeting.**

Communication and Information Sharing: Communication will generally occur by E-mail, with hard copy mailing or telephone calls as needed/appropriate. We will also meet regularly to communicate with each other as a group in person. **Operational.**

Decision Making: Decision making will be by group consensus. Everyone shall have an equal voice and vote in the process. In close call situations we may need to go with a majority vote thought specifically being sensitive to the minority’s point of view/concerns. **Operational.**

District Team Action Plan – April to October 2007 – First Draft: We intend to refine and augment this action plan as our work progresses through this first seven month period.

Activity	Completion Date	Person Responsible	Notes	REVIEW
Hold first Team meeting in early May in Leon	May 15, 2007	Chief Judge and DCA	Notice of meeting sent out by 4/19 07	Completed.
Hold on-going meetings thereafter at least bi-monthly	July and September 2007	Chief Judge and DCA	Schedule next two meeting dates at 5/15/07 meeting.	Completed.
Add members to team – school officials, DECAT representative, and local DHS workers	May 30, 2007	Team to determine and invite – DCA will ensure completed.	Local invites with DCA follow-up	Completed.
Consider development of Professionals Discussion Group concept	Initial determination of direction at May 15 th meeting	Team – need to appoint leads at first meeting if proceed with concept	Team to discuss at first meeting feasibility, structure, etc.	Need to address further for action, have discussed at several meetings.
Consider forum to educate selves (others?) on funding/financing options and available services for children and families in need	Initial determination of direction at May 15 th meeting	Team- need to appoint leads at first meeting if proceed with concept	May be a mini-conference or training? Should this be periodic?	First forum held on 4/9/08. Have also discussed several components during Team meetings. Need to review for any gaps not yet covered.

Activity	Completion Date	Person Responsible	Notes	REVIEW
Consider how we educate ourselves on the roles and responsibilities of different system actors	Initial determination of direction at May 15 th meeting	Team- need to appoint leads at first meeting if proceed with concept	Maybe we have each present at our 2 nd meeting – specific bullet points for each to discuss?	Need to address specifically if Team wants to carry out activity regarding all Team member roles.
Consider use of/expansion of Family Team Meetings in 5A and 5B	Initial determination of direction at May 15 th meeting	Team- needs to appoint leads at first meeting if proceed with concept. Would need co-lead to be DHS representative	Funding/ resources questions, may want to consider phase in, pilot process over time.	In process for completion by end of FY09 per DHS Team members – funding issues.
Consider convening groups of stakeholders at county level for overall improvement of court process for children and juveniles	Initial determination of direction at May 15 th meeting	Team – would need lead in each county where process to occur.	Need to consider structure, purpose and make up of county level teams, how relate to district level team, etc.	Need to address specifically, Team has discussed but not taken implementation action.
Educate next tier of constituency groups on issues and possible solutions for improving juvenile court child welfare outcomes (best practices rural Iowa style)	If proceed with this, July to October 2007 timeframe	Team - need to appoint leads at first meeting if proceed with concept	Might include all 5A and 5B judges and applicable court staff, other attorneys including County Attorneys, all DHS staff involved, other School Liaisons, parent representatives, service providers, others?	April 9 th Conference was first event; need to now consider future possible second event and beyond.

Addressing Supreme Court Goals for the Iowa Children's Justice Initiative:

The Fifth Judicial District has adopted the one-family/one-judge concept and implemented it in December, 2006. The policy remains in effect for all juvenile courtrooms in the Fifth District.

During the last round of assessments (2008), staff from the Children's Justice Initiative assessed Clarke, Dallas and Polk Counties. The assessment reports have been provided to the respective judges and their local teams including the Polk County Model Court Team members, and the 5th District's Children's Justice Team members. In Polk County, two leadership team meetings were spent reviewing and discussing the assessment report. Two follow-up activities have been initiated to address issues raised. For the 5th District's CJI Team, Kathy Thompson presented the Statewide Assessment Report to the Team on 12/4/08. All 5A and 5B Juvenile Judges were invited to the presentation at which discussion and judicial sharing of ideas occurred. Further review of the assessment results is anticipated at the Summit in April 2009. Union, Warren and Polk County have been identified for the next round of assessments through the Children's Justice process.

Respectfully submitted by Judge John Lloyd and DCA Beth Baldwin for the Fifth Judicial Children's Justice Initiative Team.