

## **SIXTH DISTRICT REPORT**

**April 2009**

Our Sixth District Summit Team began monthly meetings within a short time of our initial Summit. These were most often conducted by conference call with the largest group being at the Linn County Courthouse juvenile court area with others participating in their home counties. We initially expanded our membership to include participation by the Juvenile Court Office, more members from DHS, an additional county attorney practicing in juvenile court and ELEVATE. At the current time the district team is operating as a committee of the whole.

The most pressing issue in the fall of 2007 was the initiation of the DHS re-design and the impact it was having on the court's ability to deliver services to its families. Thus, we had a number of presentations from supervisory staff at DHS explaining the new assessment standards and availability of services. This helped enhance communication between a number of groups.

Consistent with our District Plan, we also attempted to do outreach to, especially, our rural counties by trying to piggyback Summit presentations with Law Day events. These were only successful in Johnson and Benton Counties where attendance was good. Assistant Johnson County Attorney Kristin Parks was the Summit Team representative at the Benton County event where she held an impromptu round table with lawyers practicing in juvenile court. Kristin also initiated lunch meetings in Johnson County which included presentations by Summit Team member Teresa Mahoney and others on ICWA issues and a DHS presentation on transition services available to teens aging out of the system.

Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) became a major focus of our Summit Team discussions. This was inspired by the success our Juvenile Court Offices in Johnson and Linn Counties in initiating programs to involve minority community members as facilitators at the intake stage of the delinquency process. This has resulted in fewer court referrals of minority youth. DHS in Linn County is now using community mentors, in association with the Partnership for Safe Families and family team meetings, to lessen the need for out of home placement of minority children. The Team was also able to partner with the University of Iowa to bring in a day-long speaker to address issues and solutions regarding DMC

issues. This was attended by about two dozen, including judges, JCO, DHS and prosecutors. Because the University provided funding, we did not need to access our mini-grant.

The flood of 2008 forced many Summit Team activities to the back burner as almost every facet of the juvenile court/child welfare service sectors in Linn County was displaced. The flood also impacted families and services in Benton and Johnson County. Flood recovery, along with the normal demands made on Summit Team members' time, has made continuity difficult.

Our Summit Team has addressed some of the Supreme Court's goals. Members have been involved in producing educational activities, as set out above, and including bi-monthly training for attorneys practicing in juvenile court. Our district has established one judge – one family case assignment in every county. The Summit Team process has enhanced communication but we still need to attempt to engage the schools more fully. Hopefully, bringing a school board member with attorney experience in juvenile court into the process will assist this. We need also to continue to explore the DMC issue more fully so we have a better understanding of why minorities are so disproportionately represented in the juvenile system and what we can do to effectively address the problem on a systematic basis. Finally, we continue to face the challenge of making our Summit Team process relevant to our rural counties while still engaging the large pool of service providers in Linn and Johnson counties.

## **Sixth District Team Members**

Hon. Patrick Grady, District Court Judge, Linn County

Hon. Stephen Gerard, District Associate Judge, Johnson County

Michael Larimer, foster parent

John Burke, DHS

Elizabeth Homrighausen, DHS

Gloria Johnson, Partnership for Safe Families,

Jay Stein, Attorney, Iowa City

Tamara Beall-Thomas, Meskwaki Family Services

Rebecca Belcher, Assistant Linn County Attorney

Dawn Turner, DHS

Lu Barron, Linn County Supervisor