

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
- 2004 -

2004 Court Improvement Program: Achieving Permanency for Children

Strengthening the Judiciary:

Served the best interests of 4,056 children who on any given day in 2004 were in the Louisiana foster care system by educating all Louisiana judges on the successful implementation of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 and the concomitant Louisiana law. Three judicial education programs conducted across the state focused judicial and court staff attention on

- Protecting rights of the parties, while determining the best interests of the child
- Avoiding unnecessary separation of children and their families
- Reasonable efforts to enable a child's return to the family, if removed
- When reunification is not possible, then availability of alternative permanent homes for children
- Timely decision-making at court hearings
- Providing safety and permanence in the life of a child
- Acceptance of the judge's leadership role

Permanency for Children Through Mediation:

Served 23 children in Orleans Parish Juvenile Court and Jefferson Parish Juvenile Court by providing an alternative to litigation in 19 cases. Twenty-six mediation sessions were held, all of which resulted in mediated agreements. Nationwide research and data from established mediation programs indicate that mediated cases

- Shorten and abused or neglected child's average length of stay in the foster care system
- Result in greater compliance with case plans by enhancing parents' sense of involvement in decision-making
- Extended family members are more likely to participate in a case
- Are more likely to result in a permanent plan for the child that will avoid the child's return to the foster care system
- Result in cost savings to the entire child welfare system

"Together We Can" Conference – October 2004:

Served all Louisiana children affected by the judicial system by con-sponsoring a multi-disciplinary conference on issues affecting children and families in the child welfare arena. Primary emphasis was placed on state court compliance with the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, the upcoming Child and Family Services Review, cross-cultural sensitivity, domestic and child abuse, professionalism and ethics. Conference attendance was the highest in the history of the Court's sponsorship

- Judges/Court Staff/FINS
- Independent Attorneys
- OCS Staff
- OCS Attorneys
- Child welfare agency representatives (CASA, Foster Parents, etc.)
- Others

2004 CASA Assistance Program

Approximately 3,109 children in need of care were served by 13 CASA programs statewide; 1,002 children were placed in permanent family homes. The programs assisted 30 judicial districts across the state. CASA Services:

- Are court-based and initiated by judicial appointment of advocates to abused and neglected children in the foster care system
- Provide independent investigation and reporting to the courts
- Provide individualized advocacy to abused and neglected children in the foster care system
- Increase timely placement of children in permanent, safe and stable homes and decrease the time children spend in foster care
- Enhance family stability by facilitating linkages between the child and his family and community resources and systems through trained, qualified and supervised advocates
- Are required to conform to national CASA standards for program development, administration and performance

2004 FINS Assistance Program

FINS served over 14,000 families in cases accepted for informal FINS intervention by the 53 FINS offices in 40 judicial districts across the state and the Orleans Parish Juvenile Court. The FINS Assistance Program administers appropriate funds to assist courts in:

- Identifying families in need of services through a complaint based on grounds of truancy, violation of school rules, ungovernable behavior, runaway and other status offenses
- Assessing the needs of families referred to the court
- Connecting families with needed services through a voluntary family services plan agreement
- Monitoring the agreement for compliance by the family and the service provider
- Intervening in a pre-judicial, informal and voluntary process designed to prevent formal court intervention as a FINS, delinquency or CINC cases

TRUANCY ASSESSMENT AND SERVICE CENTERS (TASC)

TASC programs in 17 Judicial Districts served over 6,000 truant children and their families. The purpose of TASC is to provide for early identification and assessment of truant children and the prompt delivery of coordinated interventions to prevent continued unauthorized school absences. Research confirms a strong correlation between early truancy, continued academic and behavioral problems in school, eventual school dropout and delinquent behavior development. Teen pregnancy and adolescent substance abuse are also more likely to occur when children are unsuccessful in school.

TASC is a tool that can be utilized to interrupt this cycle and reduce the negative effects of the truant behavior pattern. Several important characteristics are associated with effective truancy intervention including:

- Early identification of truant children and appropriate assessment
- Rapid, coordinated, targeted service response to identified needs
- Consistent, timely monitoring and revising of service plans
- Attention to family environmental factors affecting the child
- Appropriate use of the Family in Need of Services (FINS) process including sanctions to ensure parental cooperation and behavioral change.

The TASC programs are intended to identify, assess and intervene with children in grades K-5. Many school settings encompass grades K-6, and where this is the case, 6th grade students are included in the local target population, because including them in such cases is more natural than excluding them from the referral population.

According to KidsCount2000, Louisiana's composite rank is 50th in the nation. The TASC program's long-term outcomes could reduce many of the risk factors for children living in Louisiana and thereby improve Louisiana's overall ranking throughout the country.

<http://www.socialwork.lsu.edu/OSSRD/taschome.htm>

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