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Administrative Office of the Courts

William C. Vickrey
Administrative Director

Michael Bergeisen
General Counsel

Diane Nunn
CFCC Division Director

Production of this sheet

Michelle Gordon
Staff Analyst
Author

Charlene Depner, Ph.D.
CFCC Division Manager

Don Will
Supervising Research Analyst

Amy Nunez
Supervising Research Analyst

For more information on this study please contact us at

455 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, CA 95814
(415) 865-7739
Email: CFCC@jud.ca.gov

Full report is available on the Center for Families, Children & the Courts website at

www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/resources/publications/articles.

STAT SHEET

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Court-Based Juvenile Dependency Mediation in California

Study Overview

A recent report from the California Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), "Court-Based Juvenile Dependency Mediation in California", provides the history and description of the juvenile dependency mediation (JDM) programs in California. Juvenile dependency cases, which involve allegations of child abuse and/or neglect, are frequently complex because they encompass various issues, multiple parties, and numerous hearings. JDM is used to help settle a wide range of issues and disputes that occur in these cases. JDM programs have designed and implemented different and effective mediation models in order to address the needs of the court and parties in specific jurisdictions. The report highlights some of the differences and similarities among the programs.

The information about the programs comes from a survey that was administered by the AOC to the directors and coordinators of the JDM programs that were operating as of January 1, 2002. There are 19 programs for which data are presented. This stat sheet presents some of the key findings from the report.

Key Findings

- More than half (11 programs) the JDM programs surveyed were less than five years old.
- The number of children served by a JDM program is not necessarily related to the population size of the county or the number of children who are dependents of the court. The number of children served varies due to factors such as the level of court funding, varying service models, and the support of judicial officers. In a usual month, ten programs conducted fewer than 10 mediation sessions while six programs conducted between 10 and 30 sessions and three programs conducted more than 40 sessions. The largest program conducted approximately 220 mediation sessions.
- The court can order cases to mediation at or between any of the hearings or proceedings throughout the life of a dependency case. However, not all courts refer cases at all procedural stages. All jurisdictions do refer cases at the 6-month and 12-month review hearings. Eighteen of the 19 programs mediate cases at jurisdiction, disposition, the 18-month review hearing, and the point of dismissal/exit orders.
- There are various people who participate in JDM sessions including but not limited to, parents, social worker, attorneys, CASAs, caregivers, and children. Most programs allow anyone related to the case to participate in the mediation session. All programs allow the parents and social workers to participate, and in 15 counties they are required to participate.
- JDM programs use different effective session formats. Six programs use a co-mediator model (in which mediators work in pairs) and 11 programs have one mediator per case. Two programs indicated that they do both, depending on the number of participants/issues.
- 13 programs reported program challenges. Respondents emphasized lack of funding as a major challenge, including the need for more mediators, additional training and education for staff, improved facilities, competitive salaries for qualified job candidates, and fear of potential budget cuts. Additionally, four of the 13 programs reported under-use of the mediation service (lack of referrals) as a challenge. Therefore, the support of key players (judicial officers, attorneys, Child Protective Services, etc.) is critical to the growth and success of these programs.

Methodology

Data presented in this report come from the 2002 Juvenile Dependency Mediation (JDM) Survey. The California Administrative Office of the Courts, Center for Families, Children & the Courts administered this survey to the directors and coordinators of the 21 JDM programs that were operating in California as of January 1, 2002. Although all 21 of the program directors or coordinators completed surveys, one program (Lassen) was excluded from the analysis because it had been in existence for less than one year. An additional program (Tulare) was dropped because it was in the process of redesign and was not mediating dependency cases at the time of the survey. Accordingly, there are 19 programs for which data are presented. Respondents were asked to base their answers to questions about mediation practices on their program's usual practice within the 6 months immediately preceding the survey (between July 2001 and December 2001). "Usual" was defined for respondents in the survey as occurring more than 75 percent of the time.

Characteristics Measured

The 2002 JDM survey measured the following characteristics:

- Program Age
- Program Size
- How cases are referred to mediation
- When in the dependency process cases come to mediation
- Who participates in the mediation session
- Mediator tasks
- Format of the mediation session
- Program effectiveness and future challenges

California JDM Programs in Operation as of January 2002

<u>County</u>	<u>Year Program Began</u>
Los Angeles	1983
Orange	1987
Nevada	1992
Santa Clara	1993
Tulare	1994
Contra Costa	1995
Sacramento	1995
San Francisco	1995
Sonoma	1995
Riverside	1997
Alameda	1998
Fresno	1998
Humboldt	1998
San Mateo	1998
Ventura	1998
Siskiyou	1999
Napa	1999
San Bernardino	1999
Marin	2000
Lassen	2001
Yolo	2001

A more extensive report is available that describes a full analysis of the 2002 JDM Survey. This report "Research Update: Court-Based Juvenile Dependency Mediation in California" is available on the CFCC website.

www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/cfcc/

This publication was prepared by Michelle Gordon, Staff Analyst at the AOC, Center for Families, Children & the Courts. The views expressed in this document are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the Judicial Council of California