



**MAKING THE
COURT SYSTEM
WORK BETTER
FOR CHILDREN**

**25 Things Your
Court Can Do**



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OF THE **STATE BAR**
OF **CALIFORNIA**

INTRODUCTION

The Judicial Council's Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC) is pleased to publish *Making the Court System Work Better for Children: 25 Things Your Court Can Do*. Hundreds of thousands of children are affected annually by the California court system. Children encounter the system during dependency, dissolution, domestic violence, custody, and delinquency proceedings. This booklet highlights successful programs that actively improve children's experience in our court system and can be replicated throughout the state.

The programs described in this booklet are examples, and we recognize that there are many other programs that effectively serve the needs of children encountering California's courts. The programs that are included here range from providing teddy bears to children in court to establishing a juvenile drug court.

CFCC's goal for this booklet is that it be a useful tool and facilitate information sharing. CFCC hopes this booklet, which includes contact information, will help you to initiate and expand court programs involving children in your communities. The replication of these programs will positively affect the lives of countless children in the state.



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ADOPTION SATURDAY

The Adoption Saturday program, in which adoption completion hearings are held on selected Saturdays, began in Los Angeles in 1998 as a way to expedite adoption proceedings. Judges, attorneys, court personnel, and volunteers all work to ensure that the adopting families have the necessary paperwork completed prior to the Adoption Saturday in which they will participate. Because this adoption event is held on a Saturday, all essential court personnel and parties can be present.

IMPORTANCE

Adoption Saturdays reduce the waiting period for children and adoptive families and decrease the finalization time for adoptions. Also, permanent homes are established for children who may have been formerly abandoned or abused. The day is a celebration for many children and adoptive families. The Adoption Saturday program helps in the active management of caseloads and increases efficiency. It is also a collaborative community effort in which both public and private agencies work together to ensure the success of each Adoption Saturday.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Adoption Saturdays require cooperation from judges, court personnel, attorneys, and the local human services department. A specific day must be scheduled for each Adoption Saturday event so that all the necessary paperwork can be completed before the proceedings. Courts need the support of staff and the flexibility to pay overtime to certain court employees. However, because of the celebration of adoption that this program fosters, court and social service participants are usually eager to volunteer.



EASE OF REPLICATION

This program can be replicated in counties that have adoption case backlogs. Adoption Saturdays can be held even in counties without backlogs to highlight the importance of establishing permanent homes for children.

EXAMPLE

As an innovative solution to its backlog of adoption cases, in 1998 the Los Angeles County Edmund D. Edelman Children's Court opened its doors on three Saturdays to hold adoption completion hearings for children who had entered the child protection system as victims of abuse and neglect. Known as Sara Berman Adoption Saturday, the program has been a huge success in Los Angeles, where almost 50,000 children are under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court and a substantial number of them are awaiting adoption finalization. Because of the 1998 Adoption Saturdays, 780 children were adopted who had been in foster care. These adoption hearings are believed to be the most ever completed in three days in any state.

In 1999 the California Legislature pronounced November to be Court Adoption and Permanency Month, and another 809 children were adopted in Los Angeles on Saturdays. In the first 10 months of 2000, 822 children were adopted during Adoption Saturdays, with another 700 or more adoptions occurring in November 2000. In 1999 a total of 2,048 dependency adoptions were finalized, with a goal of 3,000 targeted for the end of 2000. Since its inception, the Adoption Saturday program has helped more than 2,460 children find permanent families.

In Los Angeles this program is a collaboration involving juvenile court officers from inside and outside the dependency court, the Department of Children and Family Services, court staff, the Alliance for Children's Rights, the Public Counsel Law Center, pro bono participants from the law firm of Gibson, Dunn and Crutcher, and many other volunteers. Adoption Saturdays have also been held in Sacramento, Tulare, and Fresno Counties.

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CHILDREN'S WAITING ROOMS

A children's waiting room is a separate room specifically dedicated to children in a courthouse. Established initially to provide a nonthreatening, protected environment to shelter child witnesses before they testified, children's waiting rooms have been required by the California Penal Code in all new or remodeled courthouses in California since 1986. They can, however, be developed in any courthouse. They now also serve children whose parents have to appear at hearings or take care of other court business.

IMPORTANCE

Before these waiting rooms were established, litigants and adult witnesses frequently brought children to court and left them unattended in the hallways while they attended their hearings. Because children should not be left unattended and their presence inside a courtroom can be disruptive, children's waiting rooms are necessary. The legal process can be made more efficient when young and potentially disruptive children are physically separated from the courtroom. The emotionally charged atmosphere of family court or other court proceedings, where children are not normally allowed, places additional stress on children already upset about their family situations. Children's waiting rooms can serve to entertain and enlighten children and can provide them with a friendly environment that is not foreign or threatening, as a courtroom may be. Also, the waiting room can offer a safe haven for a child who may need to return to the courthouse another time.



RESOURCES NEEDED

The most important resource is space. Adequate space must be provided to ensure that children can feel safe and happy. Almost any suitable room can be furnished with the toys, books, and child-sized furniture traditionally donated by interested community groups. Since these waiting rooms are not licensed child-care centers, it is vital that the program manager provide full guidelines for parents and adequate training for volunteers and staff. A competent and experienced staff and a network of helpful and experienced volunteers are needed to operate the waiting room. Other resources include security staff, administrative staff, and maybe the cooperation of local children's organizations.

EASE OF REPLICATION

The Legislature did not appropriate funds when it required children's waiting rooms in new or remodeled courthouses. Community support for children's waiting rooms is critical for success. This program may be difficult to replicate if funding or space is inadequate.

EXAMPLES

More than 70,000 children in San Diego County have used waiting rooms at seven different court sites, including juvenile and family courts, since the first room opened in 1986. A San Diego criminal case demonstrated the need for waiting rooms when a child witness found she was emotionally incapable of testifying in court after repeated exposure to the defendant, who waited outside in the same hallway. Community activism to prevent such emotional trauma to other children resulted in the first waiting rooms and the current Penal Code provision. The Superior Court of San Diego County was the first to offer multiple waiting rooms staffed solely by volunteers. Despite extensive recruiting, volunteers grew increasingly scarce, and by 1998 the rooms were open only partial days, so San Diego turned to student workers. The enactment of Assembly Bill 177 in 1999 allowed county boards of supervisors, after giving notice and conducting a public hearing, to impose civil filing fee surcharges (\$2 to \$5) to finance full-time paid staff for children's waiting rooms. Local community organizations contributed more than \$66,000 in funds and equipment to create stimulating, reassuring environments for the youngsters. High school art students painted murals on the walls. Public-spirited volunteers donated more than 58,000 hours to staff the rooms and still supplement paid staff.

The Superior Court of Butte County provides a child-friendly waiting room, although child supervision is not provided or staffed by the court. The Sierra Cascade Girl Scouts prepared the child witness waiting room by obtaining donations of paint, television, videos, toys, and games. The waiting room opened in October 1997. The room is painted light blue with clouds, has comfortable furniture, and has toys and games for the children who must wait for court business to finish.

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CHRIS ADAMS GIRLS' CENTER: CHILDREN CARING FOR ANIMALS

The Chris Adams Girls' Center is a county-operated, 20-bed residential treatment facility for adolescent girls with mental health issues who are on probation. The center has an on-grounds kennel that houses dogs and cats until they can be adopted. As part of their treatment, center residents care for these animals.

IMPORTANCE

Located in Contra Costa County, the Chris Adams Girls' Center is under the direction of the Health Services Department, Mental Health Division, in collaboration with the Probation Department, the County Office of Education, and the Animal Rescue Foundation (ARF). A mental health therapist with pet-assisted therapeutic experience has been hired, under ARF sponsorship, to help in the integration of this key treatment component.

There are many advantages to the combination of teenage girls and pets. Many animals at the kennel come from environments where they were unwanted or abused and may be in need of socialization and/or spaying or neutering before they can be adopted. The teens then have the opportunity to love and care for the animals, which helps the girls become nurturing while developing responsibility and trust. It is hoped that introducing animals into the teens' treatment program will also help these young women relax their defenses, allowing for more in-depth therapeutic work.



EASE OF REPLICATION

This program requires the interest, time, and energy of many collaborators, including the courts, probation, mental health, and ARF. Resources needed include space and funding to develop a kennel; provisions for ongoing animal care (housing, food, exercise, veterinary care, etc.); provisions for transitioning (animal adoption); a continuing supply of animals; and ongoing communication between program participants.

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COMFORT FOR COURT KIDS®, INC.

Comfort for Court Kids®, Inc., is a publicly supported charity created for the specific mission of helping abused and neglected children cope with their experiences at dependency court. Each child who encounters this system is given a stuffed teddy bear.

IMPORTANCE

A courthouse can be a new and intimidating experience for children. In the dependency system, children may become confused about their families, their lives, and their identities. The teddy bear is a universal symbol of love and affection¹ and, as such, can assist children in coping with very real and difficult situations.

Terry Friedman, Presiding Judge of the Juvenile Division of the Superior Court of Los Angeles County, has declared: “The court has long encouraged Comfort for Court Kids® to distribute teddy bears to foster children and other children in our dependency system. Our support for use of teddy bears is founded upon our experience that they help children to better participate in court proceedings. Most children who appear in our court are frightened by their uncertain future as well as the formality of the court. Holding a teddy bear provides these children with a greater sense of security, enabling them to answer judges’ questions and speak openly to their attorney. For these reasons, the court considers providing teddy bears to dependent children to be a service, not a gift.”

¹The statement “The teddy bear is a universal symbol of love and affection” is a trademark of Comfort for Court Kids®, Inc.



RESOURCES NEEDED

In Los Angeles County, 3,192 bears are supplied every four weeks to 21 courtrooms, Court Appointed Special Advocates, and shelter care providers. San Bernardino and Riverside Counties have embraced the program, too. Court personnel from various jurisdictions inquire frequently about the program. For the past two years, Comfort for Court Kids® has provided teddy bears for all of the Adoption Saturdays that have taken place in Los Angeles County. Teddy bears were made available for all of the jurisdictions taking part in the first National Adoption Day on November 18, 2000. The bears cost between \$2.00 and \$2.75 each.

Teddy bear programs have been established at Orleans Parish Juvenile Court in Louisiana and at El Paso Juvenile Court in Texas.

EASE OF REPLICATION

L. Ernestine Fields is the founder and president of Comfort for Court Kids®. She is willing to assist any jurisdiction in establishing a similar program as long as there is a request from the presiding judge in the county. The program can be tailored to the individual county's needs. Ms. Fields will assist with fundraising and will contribute bears on a trial basis.

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COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATES

A Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program recruits, screens, selects, trains, supervises, and supports lay volunteers who assist and advocate for the best interest of children in juvenile court dependency and wardship proceedings. A CASA program is authorized by the presiding juvenile court judge. The juvenile court then appoints these volunteers as sworn officers of the court.

IMPORTANCE

A CASA volunteer becomes an integral part of a dependent child's life. He or she is the voice of the child in court and serves as an advocate for the child throughout the life of the case. Some of the responsibilities of a CASA volunteer include supporting the child throughout the court proceedings; explaining the court proceedings to the child; establishing a relationship with the child to better understand the child's needs and desires; reviewing all available documentation about family history, medical history, and school progress; communicating the child's needs to the court in written reports; ensuring that court-approved plans are being met; and coordinating efforts with the child's social worker, probation officer, and attorney.

CASA volunteers serve a very important function in the dependency system. Dependent children may have endured traumatic experiences. Thus, these children may need someone they can count on for emotional support and guidance. CASAs serve as an unbiased voice for the best interest of the child and spend the time and energy to learn and to understand the child's needs. Their recommendations are critical in assisting the court in making informed decisions about the child's life. Volunteers can change a child's life through their effective advocacy.



**A POWERFUL VOICE
IN A CHILD'S LIFE.™**

RESOURCES NEEDED

The Judicial Council of California offers grants to establish and maintain CASA programs. The grant funding is provided to encourage counties to establish or expand volunteer child advocate programs under legislated guidelines. The Judicial Council enters into agreements with county CASA programs only. Other agencies desiring to participate must do so as part of a county's CASA application.

A CASA program must adopt and adhere to a written plan, approved by the presiding juvenile court judge, for the oversight, support, and supervision of CASA volunteers in the performance of their duties. Other resources needed are space, administrative staff, and a volunteer base.

EASE OF REPLICATION

There are 35 CASA programs serving 37 counties in California. The Judicial Council's goal is to have CASA programs in all 58 counties by 2003. Rule 1424 of the California Rules of Court governs CASA programs and discusses the recruiting, selection, training, support, and supervision required of a CASA program.

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DAYCARE FACILITY

Daycare facilities located in or near the courthouse serve children whose parents or relatives must conduct court business.

IMPORTANCE

Child-care facilities provide a safe and warm environment for children who may feel threatened by the courthouse. Child-care workers provide supervision and age-appropriate activities for the children who encounter the court system. This service also allows the parent or relative to conduct legal business without a frustrated or bored child in tow. The child can be in a safe environment, and the legal process can proceed more peacefully. The child also feels less intimidated by a return to the courthouse if that is required.

RESOURCES NEEDED

The most important resources are space and staff. There must be adequate space and, if possible, adjacent restroom facilities to create a child-friendly environment. Also, the court must ensure that the child-care workers are qualified, dedicated individuals. Administrative personnel are required.

EASE OF REPLICATION

Given the appropriate space for the facility and the hiring of a qualified staff, this program is quite easy to replicate. The child-care facility may even be outsourced to other agencies to ensure a safe and happy environment for the children.



EXAMPLE

A daycare facility called the Children's Chambers is located in the Betty Lou Lamoreaux Juvenile Justice Center, which houses the juvenile court, family court, probate court, and mental health court in Orange County. There are two full-time staff who manage the daycare facility. A private, nonprofit agency is responsible for the staffing and management of the facility. Judicial officers and staff note that the services rendered are excellent.

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EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN

Classroom Tours, Job Shadowing, and Lunch With a Judge

Classroom Tours. In Fresno County, local schools and community groups can schedule tours at the courthouse as well as observe preliminary hearings, trials, and other court hearings. Older students may also tour the offices of the clerks for civil, family law, probate, and criminal matters, where the staff provides the students with a fact-filled orientation.

In courtrooms that are not in use, the Sheriff's Department exhibits some of the weapons that have been confiscated from the public when they enter the building through metal detectors. The deputies describe a normal day in jail for the inmates and demonstrate how prisoners are chained and shackled when they are brought to court.

Job Shadowing. In Fresno County, in a job shadowing program, high school students are assigned a judge or commissioner to "shadow" for a day to learn about his or her workday and to be exposed to the inner workings and decision-making process of our judicial system. In Ventura County, students have the opportunity to work with the judge in the courtroom and/or participate in chamber conferences for a three-hour session. Students must be carefully selected, since the judicial proceedings or chamber conferences in which they participate may be confidential. Students may also spend time in the court's exhibit unit to learn about the tracking and monitoring of evidence, participate in jury services and observe voir dire, or shadow courtroom clerks.



Lunch With a Judge. One component of Ventura County's Taking the Courthouse to the Schoolroom program is Lunch With a Judge. The activity is designed to address the special needs of certain youth who attend alternative schools. The project was initiated by the Rotary Club



of Thousand Oaks for an alternative school in their community. After several successful sessions, the superintendent of schools requested that the program be provided to schools throughout the county. The court, the Rotary Club, and the superintendent formed a partnership for the expansion.

The program is set up for small groups of four students to have direct and personal interaction with the judge. Students arrive at the courthouse at 11:30 a.m. to have lunch with the judge. The judge gives them a thorough tour of the courtroom and chambers, describing the various courtroom components and explaining the differences between chamber conferences and courtroom proceedings.

After lunch, one of the court's deputy executive officers gives the students a presentation on the management of the courthouse. The presentation includes descriptions of court operations such as records, criminal, civil, exhibits, courthouse security, and others. Exhibits are displayed that help the students comprehend the broad spectrum of types of cases the court manages. The varied occupations and vocational opportunities within the court are also discussed, with emphasis on the importance of education.

IMPORTANCE

Classroom Tours. Visiting the courtroom gives students and children a first-hand look at a variety of judicial proceedings. The demonstration by the Sheriff's Department has a strong antidrug message and gives the children a glimpse of what jail can be like if they disobey the law.

Job Shadowing. In the job shadowing program, the judge or commissioner is humanized when the students spend the day with him or her during the course of the workday. Students are provided with practical exposure to actual judicial proceedings. A student interested in pursuing a career in law may develop stronger motivation and greater understanding by observing the day-to-day functions of a judicial officer. The importance of education is stressed. The program may also encourage a student to stay in school and think about the possibility of attending college.

Lunch With a Judge. By participating in the Lunch With a Judge program, students are given the opportunity to interact informally with a judge in their

county. Students learn about the judge's responsibilities, court management, and the many career opportunities the court system provides.

RESOURCES NEEDED

These programs require the support of court staff, police staff, and the bench. It is necessary that the judicial officers schedule time for participation in these programs. There is no financial cost.

EASE OF REPLICATION

These programs are easy to replicate. Scheduling the students and classes is important for determining appropriate times for observations of courts and programming with the judicial officers.

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Day in Court (Mock Jury Selection)

The South Butte County Legal Secretaries Association holds an annual Day in Court for local high school students. The jury commissioner “summons” the students for duty. A judge presides over the jury selection, which is conducted by attorneys. The court staff is present, as well. This event was first held October 22, 1999, and was quite successful. Two courtrooms were filled to capacity with local high school students who were being selected for a mock criminal trial.

IMPORTANCE

The program helps to educate high school students about the justice system and their civic responsibilities. Many teenagers do not know about juror responsibilities, and this mock jury selection can instruct them about a juror’s role.

RESOURCES NEEDED

The resources needed include staff and court support and a time and place for the mock jury selection.

EASE OF REPLICATION

The program is easy to implement if it is supported by the jury commissioner and court personnel. Scheduling is important for courtroom space and courtroom personnel (including judges and volunteer lawyers).

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Field Study in Criminal Case Processing

The Field Study in Criminal Case Processing was designed to provide 11th- and 12th-grade students with a complete understanding of how a criminal case moves through the justice system. Over a two-month period, the students spend 28 hours outside the classroom learning how the criminal justice system works from the following professionals: police officers, detectives, district attorneys, public defenders, probation officers, judges, and court staff. Students are selected based on good citizenship and high academic performance. The teachers ensure that each student meets educational requirements such as a term paper at the end of the project. A graduation ceremony is held for those students who successfully complete the project. When the program was introduced in the spring of 1998, nine students from Camarillo High School and Oxnard High School successfully completed it. Due to its success, the program is now offered each semester, and other schools are interested in participating.

IMPORTANCE

The goal of the field study is to teach students the importance of each sector of criminal justice and why each is so important to the system as a whole. It includes content as well as activities that engage students in the learning process. The program improves community relations by building a partnership among the schools, the courts, and the criminal justice agencies. Justice agencies and the schools jointly establish and monitor the learning objectives for the participating students. The students learn by participation in the system.

RESOURCES NEEDED

A judge sponsors the project. The field study is directed by the court but is conducted in partnership with the Ventura County criminal justice agencies, high schools, and the police departments of the cities of Ventura and Oxnard. There are no direct costs; the program uses existing administrative staff. Duplication of program information and student materials is budgeted by the court.

EASE OF REPLICATION

The practical features and structure of the field study can be replicated at minimal expense. The judicial officers and criminal justice experts must extend themselves to create time for the study. There must be commitment from the schools, court staff, judges, and criminal justice agencies.

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First Impressions Program

The First Impressions Program began in 1996 in the Jordan-Locke Cluster, a group of 17 elementary schools in Southeast Los Angeles. This program educates students about the justice system. It is aimed at fourth- and fifth-grade children whose school curricula do not include civics instruction. Attorneys from the offices of the city attorney, the public defender, and the district attorney as well as private attorneys present information and an introduction to the courts. Some examples of the topics presented to the students include the difference between criminal and civil law, discussions about nonviolent dispute resolution, and the separation of powers. A mock trial is conducted after the presentations.

The students then have the opportunity to visit the courthouses and see the system at work. They are given tours by docents recruited from the Southeast Los Angeles community. The students observe court in session and meet courtroom staff and judges. At the conclusion of the tour and presentations, the students are asked to submit essays under the title “What I Learned About the Court System” to be entered in a contest. Special field trips are arranged for contest winners.

IMPORTANCE

The First Impressions Program enables children to observe and learn about the justice system. It is hoped that this will clarify any misconceptions they have about the courts. The students also learn what education and training are required to pursue careers in the justice system.

RESOURCES NEEDED

The biggest resource for this project is time. Volunteer time is requested from local attorneys in the community. Support from local agencies is necessary, as well. In Los Angeles, local bar association affiliates, the Constitutional Rights Foundation, and the Superior Court of Los Angeles County are supportive of the program.

The essay contest winners are given field trip tickets provided by Tickets for Kids and Universal Studios. Cash donations for purchasing prizes can be solicited from local organizations in the county.

EASE OF REPLICATION

This program is easily replicated and is relatively inexpensive. Students can be introduced to and instructed about the justice system in many different capacities using the First Impressions model. With the support of local legal agencies in the county, this program can be implemented rather quickly.

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Government in Action

The Superior Court of Riverside County, the Desert Bar Association, and the Desert Unified School District have implemented the community outreach program Government in Action for high school seniors enrolled in government classes. Presentations by guest lecturers such as Attorney General Bill Lockyer and former President Gerald Ford provide students with a better understanding of the three branches of government and how they interact. The sessions are in a question-and-answer format as opposed to traditional teaching methods (i.e., lectures and textbooks).

IMPORTANCE

The program exerts a positive and constructive influence on high school students by giving them an opportunity to understand the direct influence that government leaders have on their lives. Civics and government make up a critical area of study for high school students as they approach adulthood and the voting age. The program “makes government real,” according to one of the participating students. Government in Action assists the students in understanding the roles of government officials in an innovative way.

RESOURCES NEEDED AND EASE OF REPLICATION

Government in Action can be replicated anywhere. Task groups in the community can convene to determine the speaker curricula and the target audience. Using the contacts and the resources of the task group, guest speakers can be identified and scheduled. Speakers can also address younger students to emphasize basic concepts and the importance of government.

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EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS PROJECT AND PROJECT YEA

The Educational Rights Project is a collaboration in Santa Clara County between the Office of the County Counsel, Probation Department, and Department of Children's Services and such community agencies as Morrisey-Compton Education Center, the Legal Aid Society, and Parents Helping Parents. Its mission is to (1) train and assist social workers and probation officers to identify children in need of educational services; (2) ensure that children are assessed for disabilities and provided with appropriate services; (3) educate and inform parents and other caregivers of their right to request educational assessments for their children and how to obtain the appropriate services; and (4) assist parents by training community volunteers to advocate on their behalf.

The advocate component, Project YEA (Youth Educational Advocate), recruits and trains volunteers to advocate on behalf of parents to ensure that their children receive a free, appropriate public education. An advocate (1) reviews information on eligibility and assessment of special education services; (2) participates in consultations with the probation office or social worker, the youth, and (as appropriate) the parents; (3) meets with the child's teacher and observes the child in school; (4) participates in the child's individualized education program (IEP) meetings; (5) supports the child and the child's parents in formal conflict resolution efforts; and (6) monitors the child's educational plan and the delivery of special education services.



IMPORTANCE

In Santa Clara County, at least 500 (20 percent) of the approximately 2,500 children in the care of the Department of Family Children's Services have special education needs. Similarly, it was found that while 30 percent of the youths housed at the county's juvenile hall had been identified as requiring special education, only 10 percent had current IEPs as required by law. A majority of the children with unmet educational needs or unidentified learning disabilities were not succeeding at school and were usually behind in their coursework. Studies show that addressing the educational needs of children can be effective in preventing antisocial and criminal behaviors. Given the national statistics and the county's own data, the Educational Rights Project was created to ensure that the children of the court are provided with legally mandated educational services in an effort to prevent them from entering the criminal justice system.

RESOURCES NEEDED

The Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors initially funded Project YEA. Currently the project is financed through the Probation Department and Social Service Agency annual budgets.

EASE OF REPLICATION

It is critical that the court, local educational agencies, and involved outside agencies collaborate in a project of this type.

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EMPLOYING AT-RISK YOUTH/DEVELOPING INTERNSHIPS

At-risk youth are selected to work in entry-level positions or intern at the courthouse.

IMPORTANCE

Employing a teenager at the courthouse to perform entry-level work can change that young person's life. At-risk youth can truly benefit from working in the court system. There they have the opportunity to both mature as employees and develop a sense of civic duty. The responsibility given to these teens will ultimately raise their confidence and self-esteem. They will feel a stronger connection to the community and the legal system. The experience hopefully will give them the knowledge needed to stay out of trouble with the authorities. Each employee or intern will then be in a better position to be a role model for peers. This opportunity for teens to learn about responsibility and our legal system, contribute to the community, and succeed in work is invaluable.

Employment is only one option. There is also the option of obtaining youth intern experience at the court. An internship may give the youth a chance to explore career choices in the legal system. The keystone of this program is to introduce young adults to the legal system as a learning environment. Their experiences will stay with them as they consider the workforce and career goals.



RESOURCES NEEDED

This program may require a small stipend for the youth employee. If an internship is developed, the financial cost, if any, will be nominal. A program grant may have to be considered. Another necessary resource is time from the court staff, judges, and administration to oversee the employment or internship program.

EASE OF REPLICATION

This program is quite easily replicated. The court has to assess where its greatest need for entry-level work is. Program guidelines as well as an employment contract have to be devised to establish an internship or employment program.

EXAMPLES

In the city of Santa Ana, students from local high schools are made available to the court during summer months. The students are given entry-level work as well as special tasks. They receive a stipend for their work. They are supervised by court staff and evaluated. The selection process is based on economic considerations. A city coordinator meets with the youth during their employment to discuss their progress. The reaction from court personnel and the community is positive.

The Superior Court of Los Angeles County maintains a justice internship program during the fall and spring semesters. This program provides 10th-grade students in the law and government magnet school with an educational experience to enhance their understanding of the role of government and law offices in the life of the community. Court personnel developed the internship program with the Sheriff's Department and the city attorney's office. Students come to the courthouse twice a week for 10 weeks. They work in the clerk's office, observe the proceedings with the courtroom clerk and the bench officer, go on ride-alongs with sheriff's deputies, and work in the office of the city attorney.

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FAMILY CONFERENCE INSTITUTE

A family group conference is a strength-based, culturally responsive, family-centered decision-making process that focuses on care and protection. The conference is a voluntary gathering of family members, friends, community service providers, and others who care about what happens to a certain family. The participants develop a family-specific plan that reflects the family's strengths and issues or concerns. To initiate the process, family conference specialists, facilitators, and the referring professional (e.g., social worker, probation officer, or public health nurse) hold preconference meetings. Meetings with key family members occur as well. The preconference meetings seek to clarify whether the referral meets the agency criteria, to determine that the family and referring professional have reached an agreement about the purpose of the conference, to explain the conference process, and to identify the family's specific needs in regard to the conference.

The conference has three stages: (1) information gathering; (2) family "alone time" in which the family can discuss privately (or with a facilitator or someone else in the room) the concerns raised; and (3) the presentation of the family's plan, which the referring professional may accept or ask the family to strengthen to meet court/Department of Family and Children's Services parameters. At the end of the family conference, the family is offered a follow-up conference to discuss progress on the plan. The facilitators then complete a summary that is given to all participants. Both the family and the referring professional are responsible for monitoring the plan.



IMPORTANCE

The family conferencing process seeks to create a strong family bond and to provide a feasible plan for all participants for the future. Families and children can feel protected, supported, and empowered by the developed plan. Because the process is voluntary, participants can feel confident that their active role is an important contribution to the success of the plan.

There are many benefits to the referring professional. These include shared responsibility; less or no blame on the professional for the outcome; recognition of the family's strengths; improved relationships between the referring professional and the family, among family members, and between the professional and service providers; and time saved due to collaboration.

The Family Conference Institute (FCI) is a program of the Department of Family and Children's Services in Santa Clara County. It has facilitated more than 700 conferences since 1996. The family group conference model has been successful for these families. Over 160 people have been trained to facilitate conferences. The institute provides training for interested agencies.

RESOURCES NEEDED AND EASE OF REPLICATION

In 1999 Santa Clara County received a Challenge Award from the California State Association of Counties for its family conference model, as an innovative and creative program that works and can be duplicated by other counties. The development of a family group conferencing—also called family group decision making (FGDM)—program is multifaceted. The American Humane Association has identified 12 factors for communities to consider before implementing a program: (1) principles and values, (2) community profile, (3) collaboration, (4) funding, (5) legal, (6) political, (7) agency policies and guidelines, (8) logistics and administration, (9) staffing, (10) communications, (11) training and education, and (12) evaluation. (A. B. Ott, "Tools for Permanency Planning: Tool #2: Family Group Decision Making" [New York: National Resource Center for Permanency Planning, Hunter College School of Social Work, 1997].) Not all of these issues must be settled before a program starts, but at some point during the planning and implementation, each point should be carefully evaluated.

Community partnership is crucial to the success of the program. FCI works in collaboration with the Department of Family and Children's Services, Adult Protective Services, CalWORKS, the county probation department, the county mental health department, public health nurses, school districts, and community-based organizations.

EXAMPLE

Recently, a family conference was scheduled for a mother and her 16-year-old daughter. The child welfare case was closed, but the mother was receiving services from one of our family resource centers. The mother was desperate to find some way to improve her relationship with her daughter. The daughter refused to speak to or be in the same room with her mother. The daughter felt unwanted by her mother. The daughter was voluntarily placed at a local counseling center, which has a 30-day program to help families reunify. The worker at the resource center then referred the family to FCI.

The FCI facilitator and the family conference specialist met individually with the mother and daughter to explain the conference process and determine the family's needs in regard to the conference. Service providers were invited to the conference. The first conference was held, but the daughter had run away the night before, not wanting to participate. A second conference was scheduled and held at the 30-day program site. The mother and daughter both participated. They were able to listen carefully to one another and develop solutions. The plan was to have the daughter stay in the home of a friend (who will become her legal guardian) while the mother and daughter worked on establishing a positive relationship and reunifying. An important element of the plan was that the mother and daughter participate in family counseling together. The mother said she was a new driver, was fearful of driving on the freeway, and therefore would not be able to participate in family counseling. The daughter offered to take the bus to her mother's house and show her the way to the center on surface streets, avoiding the freeway. This shows how families are able to come up with creative solutions to their own issues. The conference ended on a positive note, with mother and daughter hugging each other and making a new agreement to re-establish their relationship.

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FAMILY COURT CHILDREN'S FUND

Attorneys are routinely appointed in cases of abuse and neglect, domestic violence, delinquency, dependency, high-conflict divorce, and guardianship. The Superior Court of Yolo County became aware of the problems faced on a daily basis by the children involved in these cases. There was no readily available fund that the attorneys could use to provide for the children's emergency needs.

In 1998 Superior Court of Yolo County Judge Donna M. Petre determined that the best use of a \$10,000 award that she had received from the National Foundation for the Improvement of Justice would be to establish a fund to provide children involved in court with such items as a bed, a toy, or fees to participate in extracurricular activities. Thus, she created the Family Court Children's Fund. A committee was formed to establish the form, procedures, and policies for the program.

IMPORTANCE

The Family Court Children's Fund regularly enhances children's quality of life or just brings children some unexpected happiness.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Once funding is available, a committee needs to be established to oversee the fund. In Yolo County, the county controller has volunteered to audit the funds as a private citizen. The board of supervisors agreed to maintain the fund and disperse the moneys without charge. Presiding Judge Thomas E. Warriner's son, who is a graphic artist in New York, designed the logo for the fund free of charge.



EASE OF REPLICATION

Given support and donations from the community, a court fund can easily be replicated.

EXAMPLE

Since the inception of the fund, the Yolo County CASA organization has donated a \$15,000 educational grant that it received from a local business. The Davis Police Department donated \$1,000. A local beauty shop provides free haircuts, and an art shop donated free summer art camps. The Justice Joggers raised money for the fund by joining a Human Race Walk.

The fund began dispersing moneys on June 1, 1999. One of the first requests was from a child who wanted a bike to join in neighborhood activities with friends. Both of his parents are on disability—his mother a victim of domestic violence and paraplegic as a result of jumping off a bridge in a suicide attempt.

Another child requested a bike after hers was stolen. She had been in and out of foster care after her mother died from complications of severe alcoholism; her father is in state prison serving a 15-to-25-year sentence. She has had to undergo several surgeries for a cleft palate and for tubes in her tear ducts and ears. Her 20-year-old sister, who was her newly appointed guardian, could not afford to buy her a new bike.

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FOSTER YOUTH SERVICES

Foster Youth Services (FYS) is a school-based intervention program that links school districts with child welfare and probation departments to meet the unique educational needs of foster children. Full programs are in place to serve foster children in six regions: Sacramento, Placer-Nevada, Elk Grove, Mount Diablo, San Juan, and Paramount. In 1999 the program was expanded statewide on a limited basis, for youth in group homes only. There are currently 38 county-wide FYS programs in California.

IMPORTANCE

FYS provides many important services for foster children. These involve coordination among the school district, child welfare department, probation department, foster parents, and group homes to provide tutoring, advocacy concerning educational assessments and individualized education programs (IEPs), assistance with records and school placement, and linkage with independent living skills programs. In 1999 FYS served approximately 11,680 foster youth statewide.

FYS's biennial reports to the state Legislature show that FYS programs have improved academic achievement and reduced truancy and expulsion rates among foster children.



RESOURCES NEEDED AND EASE OF REPLICATION

FYS is funded through the California Department of Education. For fiscal year 1999–2000, the state allocated \$6 million to support existing FYS programs and to expand FYS statewide. While the expansion funding was limited to children in group homes, there have been legislative efforts to expand the program statewide for all foster children. Funding is currently distributed to county offices of education and to school districts on a per-capita basis (i.e., the number of children residing in group homes under the county's jurisdiction). Some FYS programs have supplemented their funding through Title 1 neglected and delinquent youth program services, Healthy Start, and foundations. The goal is to expand the network of projects to all 58 counties.

EXAMPLE

In 1997 the San Francisco Juvenile Court initiated a collaboration among itself, the San Francisco Unified School District, the Department of Human Services, and the San Francisco City Attorney's Office to improve educational services for foster children. The collaboration was later expanded to include input from the Juvenile Probation Department, Foster Care Mental Health, the University of California at Berkeley School of Social Welfare, Court Appointed Special Advocates, group home providers, and juvenile court panel attorneys with expertise in special education.

The committee sought to address the fact that significant numbers of foster children had failing grades, had dropped out of school, and had difficulties obtaining IEPs and other special education services. The committee researched the matter and concluded that FYS provided the best model for rectifying these problems.

In 1999 the San Francisco Unified School District, together with the juvenile court and the Department of Human Services, submitted an application for funding to the California Department of Education to establish a San Francisco FYS program. San Francisco was awarded funding in the summer of 1999, and an FYS coordinator was hired shortly thereafter. The steering committee consists of juvenile court commissioners; senior administrators in the school district, Child Welfare Department, and Juvenile Probation Department; and a former foster youth. It continues to meet monthly to assist in the development of this program.

The involvement and leadership of the juvenile court have been important to the development of this program, especially as the program addresses issues such as confidentiality, surrogate parents, and enforcement of special education laws for foster children.

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FREE ARTS FOR ABUSED CHILDREN



Free Arts for Abused Children (“Free Arts”) is a California nonprofit corporation. It integrates the healing and therapeutic power of the arts into the lives of children and youth who have been abused or neglected and families who are designated as being at risk. Free Arts recruits, trains, and places caring adult volunteers to work hands on with victims of abuse, encouraging them to use creative arts to express negative feelings. Child victims of abuse may not be able to verbalize their feelings but may be able to express their feelings through creative activities.

In Free Arts’ Children’s Courthouse program, children and family members awaiting hearings at the children’s court become involved in creative art projects that alleviate the stress of the environment and teach them new ways to



express themselves. Each participant in Free Arts' weekly volunteer program commits to a 20-week placement with a group of 6 to 10 children in a residential care facility, offering the children opportunities to develop healthy relationships with adults and to increase their self-worth through participation in the arts. Free Arts' special events programs include Free Arts Days in which children do age-appropriate art projects and learn to work through obstacles to discover their abilities and talents. Free Arts' Parents and Children Together With Art (PACT) programs take place at domestic violence shelters, family resource centers, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation facilities; they are designed to be interactive and to encourage positive forms of communication between family members.

IMPORTANCE

Dance, drama, writing, music, painting, and other avenues of creativity encourage abused children to channel emotions, release anger, and develop positive methods of communication. Artistic expression builds confidence and self-esteem. The philosophy behind all Free Arts programs is simply that *art heals*.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Cooperation and encouragement are needed from professionals in child protective services and from the legal, education, and art communities. Intergenerational, multicultural community support should be sought to develop a roster of volunteers. Experienced staff are necessary to recruit the volunteers, to provide training in creative arts activities and population-specific sensitivity, and to provide ongoing support following placement. Finally, the encouragement, cooperation, and commitment of the judiciary and court administration are essential in a program of this type.

EASE OF REPLICATION

Free Arts can be replicated in other California counties. When Free Arts in Los Angeles was organized in 1977, it served children in a few facilities. With the four basic programs just described, it now serves 41,000 children in 90 facilities annually, using more than 1,000 active volunteers. In 1999 a branch office was opened in Orange County, administered by the Los Angeles board of directors with a director and two program staff. The Orange County Free Arts programs are similar to the Los Angeles County programs but are modified and amplified because of Orange County's particular needs, and include a Free Arts courthouse program integrated with an existing court-operated child-care center.

Free Arts has also expanded to other states by licensing its trademark and providing ongoing support and encouragement to affiliates who have established separate nonprofit corporations.

EXAMPLE

The Free Arts Children's Courthouse program started in 1993 and has grown to serve approximately 200 children and family members daily. Volunteers are recruited; many of them are students who receive field service credit from their universities to work with the children and family members in the Children's Courthouse. The creative arts activities are provided in the waiting areas



on three floors of the Edelman Children's Court from 10 a.m. to 12 noon and 1 to 3 p.m. Monday through Thursday and on Friday mornings. Free Arts was asked to provide this program in furtherance of the court's goal to provide a child-friendly environment. The program not only meets the goal but has a positive impact on

the lawyers and judges. They are reminded of the child's point of view when a victim child enters the courtroom wearing his or her work of art, such as a paper crown.

This program is fully supported by the court's judges and administration. Free Arts receives substantial funding from the court's Parking Lot Trust Fund as well as courthouse office space for Free Arts staff to administer the program.

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GUARDIANSHIP PROJECTS

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Many California children are cared for by nonparent relatives. Any person raising a child should be knowledgeable about the child's rights and entitlements. A child who is living in a new environment may need particular kinds of attention. Specific educational, medical, and legal needs must be acknowledged and met by the nonparent relative. Programs, clinics, support groups, and hotlines have been developed for relative caregivers.

IMPORTANCE

Raising children is a difficult and sometimes tiring task. The opportunity for grandparents or nonparent relatives to learn about their role as guardians is crucial. Clinics and hotlines staffed by volunteer attorneys do important work by assisting caregivers with their paperwork and with understanding their legal rights. Such support helps grandparents and nonparent guardians become more active in the community and the guardianship system.

RESOURCES NEEDED

A court replicating this program would not expend many resources. It could provide an information network to assist grandparent and nonparent guardians, in which case the only resource would be staff time to refer clients to established community organizations and hotlines. In the alternative, the court could establish support groups and resource links for guardians. This would require dedicated and qualified staff.



EASE OF REPLICATION

It is relatively easy to establish a network or information base for grandparents and other nonparent caregivers. Production of an informational flyer listing the legal hotlines, support groups, and clinics is also easy. Developing and staffing a support group is an option that requires a greater commitment.

EXAMPLE

In Sacramento County, the staff attorneys and volunteers of the Senior Legal Hotline prepare guardianship petitions and related paperwork for pro per grandparents as needed. In addition, the staff attorneys assist grandparents several times a month at the self-help center in the Sacramento County family court facility. The Senior Legal Hotline has a toll-free number offering access to advice about custody, guardianship, juvenile dependency, and visitation for grandparents throughout northern California. The hotline staff is willing to assist agencies in northern California to set up clinics on guardianship proper for grandparents and can provide ongoing initial screening of clients and continuing backup support.

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Guardianship Pro Per Clinic

Some guardians cannot afford attorneys or legal counseling. Clinics can be held in which volunteer attorneys assist pro per guardians with their procedural problems and forms or paperwork. The clinics can also make referrals for those guardians who need individualized legal assistance.

IMPORTANCE

Volunteer attorneys assist pro per guardians with their paperwork and procedural difficulties. The service helps guardians provide good representation for the children in their care. Guardians can meet their responsibilities and fulfill their guardianship role more effectively if they are well informed and assisted by an attorney. This program empowers low-income guardians with the knowledge and resources they need to be helpful and nurturing to the child.

RESOURCES NEEDED

A guardianship clinic requires the time and dedication of volunteer attorneys. Space is also a valuable resource for scheduling a large clinic for the community.

EASE OF REPLICATION

A pro per clinic for guardians is easy to develop. Volunteer attorneys would need to be enlisted, and a location for the clinic established. The cost is quite low for a critical informational session.

EXAMPLES

The Superior Court of Alameda County, in collaboration with the Alameda County Bar Association/Voluntary Legal Service Corporation, provides guardianship pro per clinics every third Thursday of the month in Oakland and every fourth Friday of the month in Hayward. Clients must meet financial criteria. There is a referral system for guardians who need direct representation. Volunteer attorneys assist the guardians with their legal questions and needs.

The Sacramento County Guardianship Pro Per Clinic is run jointly by the Voluntary Legal Services Program and the superior court. The clinic, held at the William R. Ridgeway Family Relations Court Self-Help Center every Wednesday and Thursday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., has served 800 to 1,000 clients so far. It is staffed by two part-time attorneys and numerous volunteer attorneys, all supplied by the Voluntary Legal Services Program. The program also provides student interns and work-study students to help with client intake.

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H.O.P.E. COURT

The H.O.P.E. (Helping Organize Parents Effectively) Court was designed to help families with multiple cases successfully navigate the judicial system. The first H.O.P.E. calendar was called in June 1998. A multidisciplinary H.O.P.E. team nominates a family. One person from the nominating team acts as the lead worker for the family. Once the family is accepted into the program, all of its cases are grouped together and a family plan is developed. One judge hears all the family's matters. The lead worker is responsible for contacting agencies about the family's court service plan. The judge instructs team members to make comments to and ask questions of the family. Before each court appearance, the team meets to discuss the family's progress in meeting the service plan goals and makes recommendations for modifications to the plan. A family remains in the H.O.P.E. Court unless (1) one or more of the parents have not participated in good faith or (2) the family has achieved its collective goals and reporting to the court serves no further purpose.

IMPORTANCE

The one-judge/one-family system helps eliminate duplicative and conflicting orders and enables the court to maximize its use of available services. The dialogue between team members and the family builds alliances and gives the family a sense that there are caring service providers in the community. For each individual in a family being considered for the H.O.P.E. Court, certain general items should be assessed: alcohol use, drug use, parenting skills, employment, school attendance, legal entanglements, mental health, and behavioral and medical issues.



Left to right: Alma Jacobsen, Butte County Children's Services; Lee Wood, Butte County Office of Education; Judge Steven J. Howell; Jean Wilcox, Butte County Behavioral Health; and Cindy Quintana, Butte County Probation Department.

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JUVENILE DEPENDENCY COURT MEDIATION

Dependency mediation is a confidential process in which a specially trained, neutral mediator helps the family, social worker, attorneys, and others involved in a case discuss and resolve the disputes sent to mediation. The mediator does not make recommendations to the court. The goal is to have the participants define a plan that everyone agrees is safe and best for the children and safe for the involved adults. The plan is then subject to the court's review for approval or disapproval.

IMPORTANCE

Research has demonstrated that mediation (1) is effective in resolving disputes involving all types of maltreatment, at all stages in case processing; (2) significantly reduces the number of contested hearings; (3) often results in better compliance by parents; and (4) is preferred by parents and most professional participants as a method of resolving disputes that would otherwise often result in adversarial hearings, with their attendant negative side effects. Mediation provides an opportunity and adequate time for the family and all other case participants to exchange the most current and accurate case information in a full, open, and frank discussion. Participants are given the chance to ask questions, focus on the children's needs and safety issues in the family, and solve problems in a confidential and informal setting with the assistance of specially trained mediators who understand the dynamics of child maltreatment and family violence.



RESOURCES NEEDED

The minimum resources required to initiate a dependency mediation program include (1) the leadership and support of the dependency court judicial officers; (2) at least one contract or salaried position for a trained mediator with some dependency or family court experience; (3) funding for advanced training (i.e., travel to existing programs for observation and training); and (4) a facility or room that will accommodate multiparty mediation, which can range from groups of six or eight people to groups twice that large.

EASE OF REPLICATION

Dependency mediation programs have been replicated and implemented across California and in selected locations in most states. The key elements of successful implementation are (1) judicial leadership, support, and utilization; (2) adequate time for preparation and the involvement of all stakeholders in the development and implementation of the program; (3) the availability and selection of high-quality mediators who are adequately trained; and (4) ongoing judicial support, utilization, and monitoring of the program.

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Parents Beyond Conflict Workshop

Parents Beyond Conflict is sponsored by Los Angeles County Juvenile Dependency Court Mediation Services. It is an educational intervention developed by Los Angeles County as a response to the needs of high-conflict families fighting over the custody of their children. The program addresses serious interpersonal and communication conflicts between parents and/or caregivers, which are harmful to the emotional and psychological well-being of their children.

The workshop is offered free for parents and caregivers identified and referred by the court. Each workshop consists of five two-hour sessions, held monthly. With the help of handouts, lectures, small-group discussions, homework, videos, and role plays, parents and caregivers practice the concepts taught.

IMPORTANCE

The goal of the workshop is to assist parents and caregivers involved in custody conflicts to become aware of how their conflicts negatively affect their children and to teach them how to move beyond conflict to work positively with one another for the sake of the children. Participants learn techniques to improve their communication and solve problems in order to ensure that the child's needs are identified and met. The workshop provides information concerning parental conflict, the developmental needs of children, and the effects of domestic violence, and increases the participants' knowledge of dependency mediation.

Judicial officers and attorneys have observed immediate changes in the participants' behavior toward one another. The workshop increases the participants' knowledge of dependency mediation and provides them with a better understanding of what they need to do to ensure that their children's needs are met. The program protects children by empowering parents and caregivers to act positively for their children's benefit and best interest.

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JUVENILE DRUG COURT

Juvenile drug courts are a nontraditional approach to young offenders who are addicted to alcohol or drugs. They provide an alternative to current juvenile justice proceedings. The goal is to reduce both the substance abuse and the criminal behavior of juvenile offenders. The results of treatment are taken seriously, and the judge may order changes in the treatment plan.

IMPORTANCE

Recovery from a drug or alcohol addiction can assist children in becoming productive members of the community. Drug courts aim to assist children in remaining sober, prevent criminal activity, and promote school attendance and educational goals. A treatment plan is developed to address each child's needs.

EASE OF REPLICATION

The program requires dedication and collaborative effort on the part of the agencies involved in the juvenile justice system, treatment providers, the local community, and the juvenile court.





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EXAMPLES

The Stanislaus County Juvenile Drug Court is a voluntary comprehensive treatment program for children who have alcohol and drug problems. To be eligible for the program, the child must be a ward of the court, have an admitted or verified history of drug or alcohol use, and be of a sufficient age and maturity level to understand and complete the program requirements. The court must accept the participant into the program, which lasts one year. A juvenile drug court team, which consists of a probation officer, a substance abuse counselor, and a case manager, monitors the child. The child's probation officer gives the judge progress reports regarding drug test results, school attendance, and attendance at and participation in the alcohol and drug treatment program. The program is divided into four phases that together include (in decreasing frequency) (1) court appearances; (2) meetings with the child's probation officer; (3) attending school; (4) employment and vocational training; (5) 12-step alcohol and drug treatment (Narcotics/Alcoholics Anonymous) and family treatment; (6) drug testing; and (7) electronic monitoring, day commitment, juvenile hall work program, and community service orders. The treatment plan is a guide for the course of treatment and can be modified upon the signatures of the child, the probation officer, the substance abuse counselor, and the juvenile drug court judge.

Los Angeles County presently has two juvenile drug court programs at the Sylmar and Eastlake Juvenile Courts. Both programs target nonviolent male and female juvenile offenders with substance abuse problems. The Sylmar program provides services primarily to youth charged with simple possession or being under the influence of an illegal substance. The Eastlake program is designed for high-risk probationers; these are youths who are already on probation with a drug testing order and have either failed to appear for testing or have tested positively for use on at least two occasions. The mission of the programs is to provide an integrated and comprehensive system of treatment for high-risk youth and their parents within the highly structured drug court setting.

The Los Angeles County Juvenile Drug Courts include regular court appearances before a designated drug court judicial officer, intensive supervision by the probation department, frequent drug testing, and a comprehensive program of treatment services provided by a community-based agency. Individual, group, and family counseling sessions are all provided by the treatment agency. Regular attendance at 12-step meetings (Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous) is required, as is regular and verified school attendance. The involvement of a child's parents and family members is strongly encouraged, and referrals for ancillary services, such as vocational training, job placement services, and remedial education, are also made appropriate. Participants must spend a minimum of 12 months in the program, comply with all the program requirements, and be drug-free to be considered for graduation from drug court.

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KIDS' TURN

Kids' Turn is an educational program for Bay Area families who are undergoing or have undergone separation or divorce. It is one of the first programs designed as an educational forum for both children and parents. The program began in San Francisco in 1988 and now serves many counties in the Bay Area. It is also being presented in Sonoma, Shasta, San Diego, Napa, and Yolo Counties as well as in two out-of-state counties. In 1999–2000, 652 children and 723 parents attended Kids' Turn workshops. Separate programs serve Spanish-speaking families and parents of children ages 0 to 3.

IMPORTANCE

What is unique about Kids' Turn is that it intervenes with parents and children simultaneously, teaching them the skills that can improve their communication. Children learn coping skills to help deal with separation or divorce and their family's reorganization. They learn to identify and communicate their feelings about separation and divorce; talk about changes in their family; understand the basic concepts of the legal process of separation, divorce, and custody decision making; and learn how to deal with common situations they may encounter after their parents' divorce or separation.

The program assists parents in understanding their children's experience during and after divorce. They also learn the steps they can take to develop skills for effective parenting following a separation or divorce, how to communicate better with the children's other parent, and how other parents are reorganizing their families.



EXAMPLE

The Bay Area program is designed for children ages 4 to 14 and their parents. The children are grouped according to age, and at least one parent must attend, although both are encouraged to participate. A parent may be placed in a separate group from his or her former spouse. The workshops are 90 minutes long and are held weekly for six weeks at a convenient location such as a school or community center. Qualified professionals with backgrounds in mental health and education lead both the parents' and children's workshops.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Kids' Turn is a nonprofit agency funded by grants and private donations. Events raise almost 20 percent of the funds for the program. Tuition from the parents accounts for 15 percent of the budget. The parents are charged according to a sliding scale, and children participate for free.

EASE OF REPLICATION

The curriculum for the workshops is available to other organizations and interested individuals.

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MOCK TRIALS

The mock trial program enables students to experience the justice process. The students prepare for and take on the roles of key players in a hypothetical case and conduct a trial.

IMPORTANCE

The mock trial program is both educational and fun and serves many purposes. Students learn the key figures in a trial and learn about the agencies involved in the justice system. By taking on roles within a trial, they actively participate in the system rather than just observing. They are required to prepare and role-play to the best of their abilities. This requires organization, discipline, and self-confidence. Through role playing, they develop legal strategies or responses, select a strategy, and utilize it.

Students learn the importance of logical and analytical thinking. They use and develop their ability to formulate ideas and their public speaking skills. The feedback they receive is helpful for future presentations and similar activities.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Court staff in your county can organize mock trials. The only true resource is time. Time needs to be dedicated to explain the process and assist the students throughout it. Lawyers and judges can be asked to participate as co-counsel or judges during the final mock trial presentation. Another consideration is determining the time and venue of the mock trial.



EASE OF REPLICATION

This program is quite easy to initiate and implement and—with the support of local court personnel, lawyers, and the community—is not costly. The program requires coordination of volunteer time and the development of an instructive yet intriguing case model.

EXAMPLES

The Superior Court of Los Angeles County conducts the mock trial program with students from the Aviva Center, a residential placement facility for adolescent girls. Two to three times per year, 10 students are selected to participate in a seven-week program. One or two bench officers work with the students throughout the process. The cases utilized range from misdemeanor shoplifting to landlord/tenant cases. Four to six practicing lawyers are invited to assist the students with their roles and explain their own role in the legal process. The final trial is videotaped for educational and debriefing purposes. The students develop a rapport with legal officers in the community and observe how the legal system works. The mock trial process enhances their self-confidence and develops their critical thinking skills.

The Constitutional Rights Foundation of Orange County is a collaboration of youth, judges, attorneys, educators, and community members that conducts a mock trial program. Each year, more than 45 high schools sponsor teams of 15 to 40 students to participate in the program. After months of preparation, the teams enact every part of the court trial for an eight-round competition. The mock trial process helps the competitors improve their reading, speaking, reasoning, critical thinking, and cooperative learning skills. According to a recent survey, 92 percent of the student participants found that the program had increased their knowledge of the judicial system, and 86 percent demonstrated improvement in reading, writing, and oration skills.

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PEER COURTS

Peer court is an alternative sentencing program for juveniles who commit lesser offenses. Following arrest procedures, a juvenile offender appears before a jury of his or her peers. The “judge” and “jurors” are permitted to inquire about the incident and circumstances to determine the appropriate sanctions. Postcourt supervision and monitoring take place to ensure compliance.

IMPORTANCE

This program offers a responsible alternative to the formal juvenile justice system. Peer court holds youthful offenders accountable for their actions and teaches responsible decision making. The judicial process is expedited because of the efforts of volunteers during peer court sessions. Peer court serves as an educational experience for juvenile offenders, their families, other participants, and observers. Offenders have the opportunity to learn from their peers. Offenders may behave more cautiously in the future if it is their peers who denounce their improper conduct. They may also be more receptive to a sentence devised by jurors of a similar age. Peer court is a program that can positively affect a child’s life and behavior. It introduces high school students to the justice system and may stimulate them to pursue careers in the legal field.

RESOURCES NEEDED

This program is administered with the help of volunteers. There must also be collaboration between the juvenile court system and the county probation department to establish procedures, guidelines, and the monitoring process and to address other concerns. Another consideration is space. The peer court proceedings can be held at the courthouse or at local high schools.



EASE OF REPLICATION

With the assistance of community agencies, this program is fairly easy to replicate if an alternative sentencing program is desired.

EXAMPLE

The peer court program administered by the Superior Court of Orange County Juvenile Court operates under the authority of the juvenile court and the Orange County Probation Department. Volunteer judges, attorneys, and probation officers staff the court sessions. High school students take on the roles of jurors and bailiffs. Peer court is held during the school week on local high school campuses. Fifteen high schools host court sessions.

The probation department selects juveniles to attend peer court following their arrests. To participate in peer court, a juvenile must not be considered a threat to public safety. He or she must admit guilt and waive privacy rights and the right to an attorney. The jurors listen to both the charges and the juvenile offender's response. After deliberating, the jury presents sentencing recommendations to the judge, and the judge then has the opportunity to modify the jury's recommendations. The judge makes an order accordingly. Examples of informal probation that can be ordered by the judge include counseling, community service, participation in peer court, interviewing a victim and writing an essay, and paying restitution. The probation department and volunteer officers monitor compliance with court orders.

Each year, more than 300 juvenile offenders in Orange County who have already admitted guilt appear with their parent(s) at peer court. Twenty-five judges preside over peer court, and 150 volunteer attorneys dedicate their time to high school jurors. The program involves 15 Orange County high school hosts and appears to be very successful. Eighty-one percent of the students who responded to an Orange County survey felt that they were more informed about the consequences of breaking the law after attending a peer court session. According to probation department records from October 1998 through March 1999, 89 percent of the juvenile offenders in the program successfully completed their assigned peer court sanctions, and of these juveniles, 96 percent did not commit a subsequent offense in a year and a half of being tracked. These statistics are encouraging and indicate the importance and success of peer court for juvenile offenders.

CONTACT

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S.T.O.P.

S.T.O.P. (Specialized Treatment Offender Program) is a juvenile substance treatment program offered as an alternative disposition. A substance abuse specialist and the deputy probation officer closely supervise and monitor the progress of each participant. This substance abuse treatment program becomes a condition of probation. A 45- to 60-day juvenile hall term is imposed by the court and ordered stayed.

In order for a child to be eligible for the program, he or she must (1) have a history of drug or alcohol abuse; (2) have committed an offense pursuant to Welfare and Institutions Code section 602; (3) have not committed any sex offenses; (4) have no prior or pending sales convictions; (5) have no prior or pending felony convictions; and (6) be between the ages of 14 years and 16 years 11 months. Program participants are required to attend weekly counseling sessions, submit to drug tests, follow probation conditions, work closely with the probation officer and the substance abuse specialists, attend school, make weekly court appearances, and attend a weekly support group. Successful participants are given a graduation certificate and placed in aftercare support status. After 90 days and while in aftercare, the child appears before a juvenile court referee.

IMPORTANCE

The primary goal of S.T.O.P. is to ensure that the child successfully completes the treatment program and follows all court orders. It is a seven- to nine-month process aimed at intervening in drug use and criminal behavior through intensive supervision and participation in recovery services.



RESOURCES NEEDED

Funding for juvenile substance abuse treatment programs and juvenile drug courts differs among counties. The Kern County program began as a pilot program and then needed to apply for more grant funding.

EASE OF REPLICATION

For a similar program to be initiated, collaboration is necessary among the court, mental health agencies, the probation department, and treatment providers. Also, staffing must be adequate to accommodate the caseload. A program would have to be tailored to an individual county's needs. Observers are welcome to learn more about the Kern County program.

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TAKING COURT TO SCHOOL

Actual court trials are conducted at local high schools throughout a given day. The purpose of conducting court proceedings at local high schools is to give students a chance to observe and learn the inner workings of the justice system.

IMPORTANCE

Designed to broaden students' knowledge of how the judicial system operates, this program also enlightens them about conflict resolution skills and teaches them how disputes are resolved in a court setting. Although the setting is not a courthouse, teens get to observe actual court proceedings, and many of their misconceptions about the process are eliminated. This observation period may be the only time a student has contact with the justice system. It provides youth with personal experience that enhances their civics course work.

RESOURCES NEEDED

Court communication with local high schools is critical. Necessary accommodations can be made through discussions with school personnel. The main resource needed is an appropriate venue in the school for conducting court business. Other resources include court staff involvement and transportation to the school locale. No employment time is lost since the proceedings are conducted during the standard workday.



EASE OF REPLICATION

This program is quite easy to replicate once court personnel have contacted a local high school and scheduled proceedings there. (A local ordinance had to be passed to designate local high schools as court sites.) Because students are not transported to the court, any responsibility to transport and to insure the “field trip” is minimized. It is also logistically easier for the judge, clerk, litigants, and other staff to convene at a school than for the students to visit the courthouse.

EXAMPLE

The Superior Court of Butte County conducts small claims court proceedings at local high schools. The judge, clerk, bailiff, and litigants follow courtroom procedures in a new setting. The multipurpose room at the school is converted to a courtroom. Classes of students rotate throughout the day to observe cases already in progress. This program has been extremely successful.

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VICTIM OFFENDER RECONCILIATION PROGRAMS

In a victim offender reconciliation program (VORP), victims and juvenile offenders are brought together by trained volunteer mediators to discuss what happened during a law violation and what it takes to “make things right.” Participation in this process is voluntary. The product of the process is the mediation outcome.

IMPORTANCE

A VORP allows a victim to meet face to face with a juvenile offender and convey how the violation has affected him or her and the community. VORPs both provide an alternative to and augment traditional juvenile justice processing. The philosophy of the program is that a crime is a violation against the person and the community as well as the state. If both the victim and the offender actively participate in the process, justice is truly achieved. The parties can make informed decisions, resolve issues, and reach agreement with the help of the trained mediator. The mediator facilitates communication, accountability, restitution, reconciliation, and clarification of the future relationship. Through this process, the parties can be heard, describe what they want, and explore their options. The goal of the process is to develop a plan that is accepted by both parties, in which justice can be achieved.

RESOURCES NEEDED

The funding for a VORP varies. Some programs depend on a narrow source of funds, and others have a broader financial base. Dispute Program Resolution Act (DPRA) funds, California’s Office of Criminal Justice Planning funds, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families funds have been critical in financing VORPs.



EASE OF REPLICATION

Funding must be actively sought. With trained and dedicated staff, resources, and space, this successful program can be initiated in any county.

EXAMPLES

In Mendocino County, the VORP began as an informal effort championed by one volunteer, Ed Dick. He dedicated his time, absorbed program expenses, and contributed software and a computer. A local church donated space. He attended mediation training provided by the Orange County VORP, the Center for Peacemaking and Conflict Studies of Fresno Pacific University, and the Institution for Peacebuilding of Eastern Mennonite University, among other training sessions. He receives assistance from other VORPs in the state, which meet semiannually to share information. In addition to victim-offender conferencing, the Mendocino County VORP now offers parent-teen mediation and mutual assault mediation.

In Orange County, St. Vincent de Paul staff chaplains initiated the program in 1987. In 1989 the county community service agency issued a request for proposals to establish an alternative dispute resolution program using DPRA funds. Program Director Scott Mather and two other individuals submitted an application that was successful. The DPRA funding was extended, and over the years Orange County's VORP has expanded to include a mediation/conciliation program for juvenile truants (Keeping Kids in School).

These examples show the importance of having dedicated individuals initiate a VORP.

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VOLUNTEER AUXILIARY OF THE YOUTH GUIDANCE CENTER

The Youth Guidance Center (YGC) Auxiliary in San Francisco, the first such auxiliary in the history of the juvenile courts, is a private nonprofit organization that was established 50 years ago to serve the children in the San Francisco juvenile court system. It is located at the Youth Guidance Center and is governed by an 18-member board of directors.

IMPORTANCE

With its many different enrichment services and scholarships, the YGC Auxiliary enhances the lives of delinquent and dependent children. Last year alone, the auxiliary funded direct services and scholarships for more than 600 children and purchased holiday gifts for approximately 2,000 youth.

RESOURCES NEEDED AND EASE OF REPLICATION

The YGC Auxiliary is a private nonprofit organization that works closely with the juvenile court. The Juvenile Probation Department, the Department of Human Services, the county's Court Appointed Special Advocates organization, and the child's counsel also make referrals on behalf of children supervised by the juvenile court. The auxiliary receives funding from individuals, corporations, and foundations. The 18-member board meets monthly and donates many hours of volunteer work to sustain the organization's programs.



EXAMPLE

Because of its commitment to literacy, the YGC Auxiliary led the effort to open and staff a library for the youth detained in San Francisco's juvenile hall and assisted in the development of the library at Log Cabin Ranch. In the auxiliary's mentorship program, youth receive stipends upon successful completion of work monitored by juvenile probation officers or social workers. There is also a fund for enrichment and educational services such as dance, music, and athletic classes and summer camp. Scholarship funds are available to assist with college tours, incidental college expenses, and graduation costs. The auxiliary has helped fund programs sponsored by the San Francisco Juvenile Drug Court ("YTEC"). This year, the YGC Auxiliary launched its Project Keep (*kids' emergency essentials pack*), designed to provide comfort to children removed from their parents or caregivers due to abuse or neglect. Every child taken into an emergency shelter in San Francisco now receives a backpack full of items such as toiletries, pencils and paper, a new GAP T-shirt, and a colorful teddy bear.



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WATSONVILLE JUVENILE COMMUNITY COURT

The Watsonville Juvenile Community Court is a pilot program that began in June 1998. The program team accepts a child into the program only after he or she is declared a ward of the court and evaluated by a case manager. A young person chooses to participate in order to receive intensive services. The court uses a team approach to work closely with the child and the child's family to monitor their progress. The one-year program involves intense supervision; individual, group, and family counseling; 12-step support; mentoring; and tutoring. Each child is tracked for one year after the program.

A participant of the program must (1) be between the ages of 13 and 16; (2) not have any Welfare and Institutions Code section 707(b) offenses or violent offenses; (3) be motivated to participate, along with his or her parents; (4) have no prior drug sale charges; and (5) be willing to admit to the charges in the petition. At each court appearance, the child is given a list of tasks to accomplish by the next review, such as attendance at school or counseling. If the child fails to complete his or her tasks, punishment includes a strict curfew or confinement in the detention facility. If the child succeeds in completing the tasks, he or she may receive any reward from applause to a field trip. Each week, the child's progress is reviewed by the district attorney, the judge, and the child's attorney, probation officer, case manager, counselor, school representative, family, and mentors, as well as community volunteers. The reviews are then held less frequently if the child does well. The team approach is very successful. A graduation may be held for the child, which may encourage termination of the wardship or dismissal of the petition.



IMPORTANCE

Through community collaboration, this program aims to improve access and increase services to citizens of the southern end of Santa Cruz County. The entire team is focused on the adolescent instead of on traditional courtroom rules. Supervision of children in the program is more intensive than supervision of other children in the system. The program seeks to improve the attitude of the child as well as work with the child's family. Parents and children in the program have access to such services as counseling, parenting education, anger management training, drug and alcohol treatment, life skills training, sessions with youth development specialists, positive reinforcement activities, 12-step support, and tutoring. Children in the community court program learn to be accountable for their actions, increase their self-esteem, and improve their chances for success.

RESOURCES NEEDED

The branch court redirected its existing funding. The program uses existing programs and services.

EASE OF REPLICATION

The court, the district attorney's office, the public defender's office, and the probation department collaborate on this program. The judge and court personnel were willing to take on the program and the increased caseload because of the belief that improving access and providing services to children and their families would be very valuable.

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