

2019 Impact

Report



STATE OF
NEBRASKA
JUDICIAL BRANCH

Court Improvement
Project

NEBRASKA COURT IMPROVEMENT PROJECT
IMPACT REPORT | JANUARY-DECEMBER 2019

SMALL YET MIGHTY

While our staff number may be small, with your help our impact has been large. In the next few pages, you will read not only about what we do inside CIP to impact children and families, but also about the incredible work done by communities and agencies that have partnered with us. From our Through the Eyes of the Child teams, that impact families in every Nebraska County, to the Children's Summit that impacted the professionals who work tirelessly for, and with families, the CIP team invites you to celebrate the last year with us in this, our Impact Report.

Find the report online (PDF):

https://supremecourt.nebraska.gov/sites/default/files/u2921/2019CIPImpactReport_Final02.pdf

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Nebraska Court Improvement Project

OVERVIEW

In 1993, Congress created the State Court Improvement Program (CIP), which provided funds to the highest court in each state to conduct assessments of juvenile court processes. These assessments have been the cornerstone of CIP's work, focused on system improvement. The work of CIP initially focused solely on child welfare cases, but in 2012 expanded to include juvenile justice. CIP continues to provide high quality education of stakeholders, works as a change agent, and collaborates with federal, state, and local partners, to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.

A cornerstone of the Nebraska Court Improvement Project is the Through the Eyes of the Child Initiative (TEOC), multidisciplinary, judge-led jurisdictional teams, who identify local system issues. Focused on both child welfare and juvenile justice, over the years teams have addressed children's attendance at court hearings, availability of services, parenting time, and quality of court reports. Every year the TEOC teams review data to track case progression benchmarks and determine a focus for the upcoming year.

THROUGH THE EYES OF THE CHILD TEAMS:

Every year the Through the Eyes of the Child teams determine the focus of their efforts, below is a snapshot of team activities from 2019.

Team 1: Southeast Nebraska; **Increasing stakeholder education and supporting vulnerable families**

Team 3: Lincoln; **Assess mediation services, Child and Youth participation in court**

Team 4: Omaha; **Enhancing practice in Omaha, Training of attorneys, domestic violence training for court professionals**

Team 5.2: Columbus; **Education of Stakeholders**

Team 5.3: North Central; **Foster parent recruitment and expansion of services**

Team 6: Fremont; **Improve utilization of community resources in juvenile delinquency cases, Improve legal parties understanding of services and procedures, Determine best practice for prevention and non-court involved cases**

Team 7: Norfolk; **Focused on adolescent mental health, Developing protocols for emergency protective custody, safety planning to keep young people in the community**

Team 8.3: Broken Bow; **Expansion of services and support for vulnerable family's through community response**

Team 10.1: Hastings; **Family navigation to meet social and emotional needs of students age 12 and younger, through the Project AWARE grant**

Team 10.2: Holdrege; **Enhanced treatment services**

Team 11.3: McCook; **Come to the Table - a family engagement initiative, Suicide prevention, Learning from lived experience, Strong connections with schools**

Team 11.4: North Platte; **Connecting youth with organizations to enhance interest in sports, arts, etc.**





Children's Summit

Providing annual education to judges, attorneys, and other court system stakeholders is a critical role of the Court Improvement Project.

The 2019 Children's Summit was held September 11th and 12th in Kearney and was attended by more than 500 stakeholders from across the state. Keynote speakers included Jerry Milner, Associate Commissioner at the Children's Bureau and Acting Commissioner for the Administration on Children, Youth and Families; David Kelly, from the Children's Bureau; Tammi Fleming, Senior Associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation; and Judge Steven Teske, Chief Judge, Juvenile Court of Clayton County Georgia. **Approximately 5,250 hours of education were provided** in the 60 breakout

sessions covering a wide range of both juvenile justice and child welfare topics.

Awards were presented and included the following recipients:

Judge Michael Burns; recipient of the Michael Offner award for judicial leadership highlighting juvenile court leadership and presented in memory of the honorable Michael Offner, 10th judicial district judge from 2001-2014.

Through the Eyes of the Child Team 11.3 (McCook), received the Team Award for Excellence given to one Through the Eyes of the Child team based on outcomes and achievements since 2016.



"The breakout sessions were outstanding. Best I've attended since the inception of Through the Eyes of the Child."

Lakeisha Phelps was awarded the Resilience Award, presented to a youth or family involved with either the child welfare and/or probation system who has shown resilience and determination in overcoming difficult obstacles.

Attendees of the conference wrote:

"Best Summit so far. Excellent information."

"The Summit breakout sessions offered a wide variety of topics – there was definitely something for everyone!"

"Keep up the good work. Summit was good!"

"Great youth summit. Thank you!!"

"Sessions did a nice job of highlighting the good work going on in Nebraska and was a nice mix of juvenile justice and child welfare."



Court Observation

"Prior to this project, I had the misconception that most judges were difficult to approach in court settings. However, most of the judges I have encountered display compassion and a willingness to help individuals in their courtrooms. It seems like the some of the judges develop a genuine connection with the families."

Jasmine Martinez, graduate student observer

COURT OBSERVATION

Hearing quality projects are a central component of the national Court Improvement Project. Hazel Delgado of Nebraska CIP leads the newest iteration of Nebraska CIP's court observation project. This project examines judicial engagement of parents and youth in court. To facilitate this project and observations across the state, a collaboration between CIP and Dr. Richard Wiener, Charles Bessey Professor of Psychology and Law at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, began in August, 2018.

Currently, there are eight trained observers which include graduate students from the University of Nebraska. All observers are attending court hearings and recording observations for both juvenile justice and child welfare cases.

This project is in its second year and will continue in its current form until July, 2020. The evaluation team will make preliminary results available at the Nebraska Supreme Court Commission for Children in the Courts in June, 2020.

Quote from Taylor Petty, graduate student observer:

"Most psychology and law students do not have the opportunity to witness the legal environment their research interests focus on. The ability to witness both juvenile justice and child welfare hearings gives me a greater insight into the nuances and complexities of this system."

Quote from Judge Worden about relationships in the courtroom:

"Genuine relationships are essential to the success of any undertaking. Nebraska Judges care about the families that come before us. It is important for us to help them to understand one of the goals of the juvenile court is to build a healthy family that will stand the difficult tests of our world. Judges are always hoping and working for a successful family outcome. When, as judges, we communicate that hope to the families we serve it can create genuine relationships that produce better results for children and their families."



Data

DATA DASHBOARD

The CIP Data Dashboard simplifies data driven work. The dashboard provides users with access to both child welfare and juvenile justice data. Both dashboards contain United States Census data as well as case progression measurement that corresponds with national best practice, Nebraska rule § 6-104, or Nebraska Case law.

We will continue to add data to both dashboards, including diversion and arrest data, and more robust child welfare data from the Department of Health and Human Services.

<https://supremecourt.nebraska.gov/programs-services/court-improvement-project/court-improvement-project-data-dashboard>

PERMANENCY IN 12

Joint Project

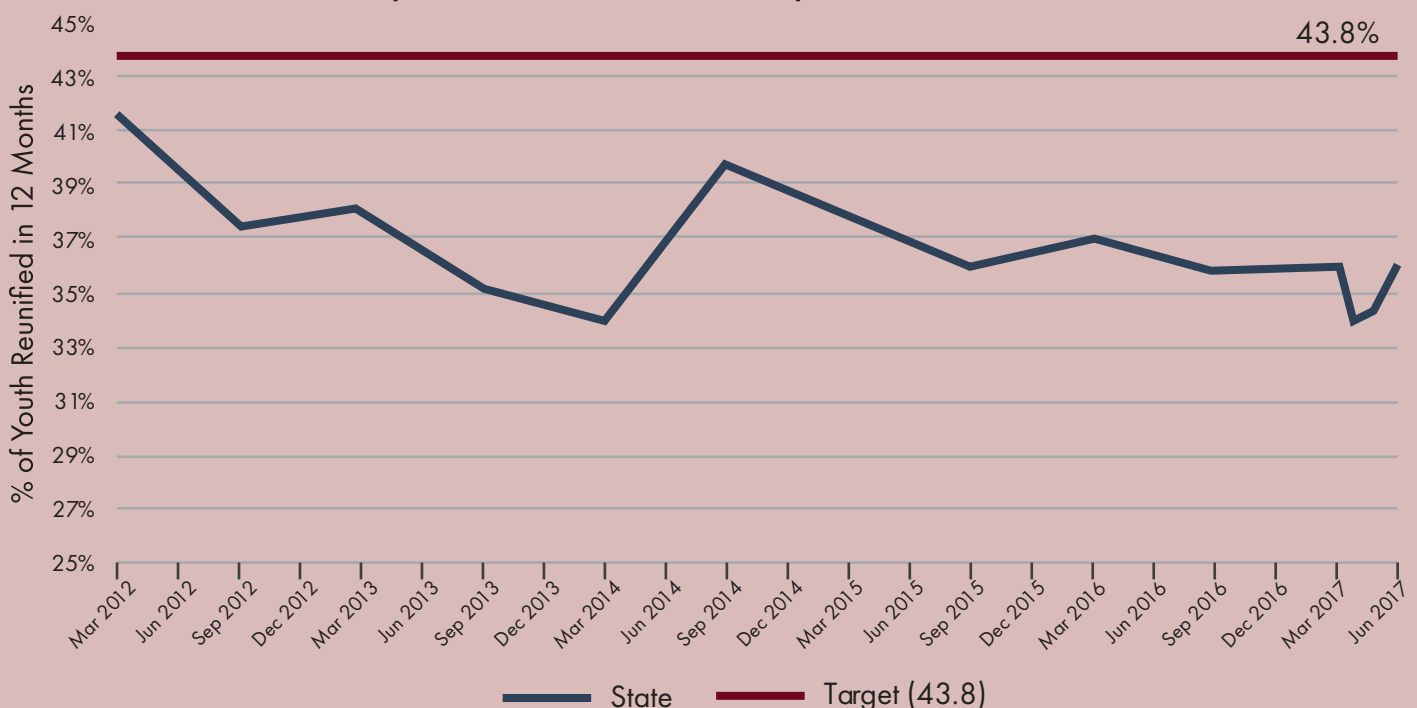
Beginning in June 2017, The Nebraska Court Improvement Project (CIP) and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) partnered on a joint project to increase our performance and the rate at which youth are reunified with a parent, or returned home on a trial-home-visit within 12 months. Current and historical data illustrate Nebraska continually fails to reunify youth within 12 months at a rate that achieves the Federal CFSR guidelines.

Focus groups were conducted in 3 pilot locations – Lincoln, Lexington, and Norfolk in November 2017. Data gathered from the focus groups helped to pinpoint an intervention for the joint project.

Pre-hearing permanency conferences, an intervention provided in partnership with the Office of Dispute Resolution and the Mediation Centers began in the pilot locations in January 2019. CIP and DHHS will monitor outcomes of children and youth to determine if facilitated meetings increase collaboration and conversation resulting in increased reunification.

CIP will continue to work with each of the pilot locations throughout the duration of the project. Cases will be accepted into the pilot through June 2020, with the project expected to be completed June 2021.

Entry Cohort Permanency in 12 Months



Nebraska Supreme Court Commission on Children in the Courts



The Nebraska Supreme Court Commission on Children in the Courts, created in 2005, consists of judges, lawyers, representatives of the legislative and executive branches, and children's advocates. Its charge is to study systemic issues and make recommendations to the Supreme Court to ensure that the court system is as responsive as possible for children who interact

with, or are directly affected by, the courts. It is co-chaired by Judge Francie Riedmann, Nebraska Court of Appeals, and Lancaster County Separate Juvenile Court Judge Roger Heideman. The main work of the Commission is done in subcommittees. The Access to Services and the Unified Family Court (UFC) are examples of two of the subcommittees.



ACCESS TO SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE

The Access to Justice Subcommittee arose from the lack of services in the rural areas of the state. This subcommittee is focused on foster parent recruitment, in-home services, detention and detention alternatives, timely access to therapy and evaluations, services for tribal wards, and the needs in specific judicial districts.

UNIFIED FAMILY COURT SUBCOMMITTEE

The Unified Family Court project will improve the lives of children and families by streamlining court procedures to address all of a family's legal needs in one unified case. The group has received the final report and recommendations from the University of Baltimore. A working group has been established to identify barriers and the processes needed for implementation.



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