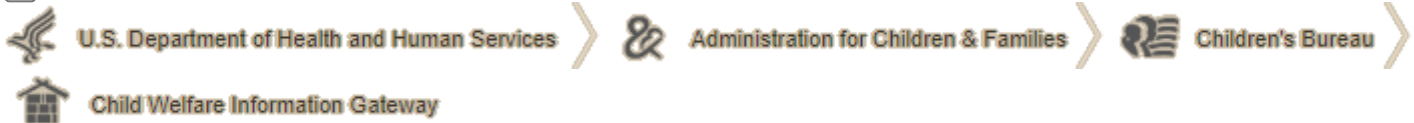


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Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES

Spotlight on Partnering to Develop Prevention-Oriented Court Systems

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Partnering to Develop Prevention-Oriented Court Systems

Courts and child welfare agencies regularly partner when children enter foster care or as part of in-home service plans, but prevention-focused opportunities for collaboration also exist. Some courts and agencies have long-standing prevention-focused collaborative projects. Others are taking advantage of options provided by the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA).

For example, agency inclusion of judges and attorneys in FFPSA prevention planning can prompt a renewed emphasis on prevention services – some of which may now be reimbursable through title IV-E under the FFPSA—as reasonable efforts to prevent a child's removal from their family.

While the court system's traditional role has been reactive, some agencies have worked with courts and legal representatives to implement more proactive approaches focused on strengthening families and preventing removal. Judges are in a unique leadership position, with the ability to convene partners, identify gaps in services and propose solutions, and consider effective approaches to family-centered court. Legal representation for parents and children, now reimbursable through title IV-E, can have a positive impact for families and can be strengthened when supplemented with support provided by social workers and parents or youth with lived expertise.

Examples from the Field

- As a result of family-centered court practices, New York’s Tompkins County Family Treatment Court program graduation rates doubled, relative custody tripled, and voluntary relinquishment of parental rights decreased by 64%.^[1]
- Since 2018, not a single child whose family received pre-petition representation and wraparound supports from Legal Services of New Jersey Model for Removal Prevention has been removed from their family.^[2]
- As part of a 2020 Iowa pilot project, seven judges were required to ask four specific questions before approving or denying a request for a removal order. Of the 83 removal requests, 44 were granted and over half of those removals resulted in kinship placements.^[3]

Resources

The Center helps jurisdictions build capacity to engage in cross-system collaboration with key stakeholders, such as courts. As child welfare agencies begin to make the shift to a more prevention-oriented system, they have the opportunity to partner with court systems and legal representatives in innovative ways to strengthen families and prevent removal.

The Center has several resources to help agencies implement collaborative strategies in partnership with courts.

Publications and Learning Experiences

- [Collaborating to Build Multidisciplinary, Family-Centered, Strengths-Based Courts](#) (Children’s Bureau Express article)
- [Becoming a Family-Focused System: How We Partner With the Community to Improve Service Options Podcast Series Episode 7: “Collaborating to Create Family-Focused Courts”](#) (podcast)
- [Becoming a Family-Focused System: One Agency’s Story Episode 4: “Partnering With the Courts”](#) (animated video)
- [Agencies & Courts: Putting Families Front and Center](#) (videos and discussion guide)

Related Resources

- [National Child Abuse Prevention Month 2021](#) (webpage and resources, including the [2021/2022 Prevention Resource Guide](#)) (Child Welfare Information Gateway)
- [Prevention as Our Common Goal: A Proposed Community Path to Success](#) (Children’s Bureau Express)
- [The Family First Prevention Services Act of 2018: A Guide for the Legal Community](#) (American Bar Association)
- [Reasonable Efforts as Prevention](#) (American Bar Association)
- [Using Legal Services to Keep Children in Families: The F.I.R.S.T. Clinic](#) (American Bar Association)

Related Organizations

- [Capacity Building Center for Courts](#) – The Center for Courts is part of the Children’s Bureau Child Welfare Capacity Building Collaborative and focuses on building the capacity of court improvement programs to improve child welfare practice in the courts and legal community.

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[1] Capacity Building Center for States. (2020). *Becoming a family-focused system: How we partner with the community to improve service options podcast series episode 7: Collaborating to create family-focused courts.* <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/foster-care-permanency/family-focused-system/podcast/episode-7/>

[2] Giordano, G. & Rajaraman, J. (2020). *Increasing pre-petition legal advocacy to keep families together.* American Bar Association. <https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/committees/childrens-rights/articles/2020/winter2021-increasing-pre-petition-legal-advocacy-to-keep-families-together/>

[3] Tabor, M. (2020). Transformation in child welfare. *The Iowa Lawyer*, 80(5), 10-12. Iowa State Bar Association.



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