

TEAM SUMMARIES

Winnebago Tribe Team

Lead Judge and Team Coordinator: Judge Patrick Runge, patrickrunge@gmail.com

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ Establishing clear lines of communication between all agencies involved with child welfare
- ✓ Implementing procedures to ensure timely progression of cases to permanency

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ Implementing procedures at the start of cases to identify family members, prospective fathers, and other necessary parties
- ✓ Coordinating with service providers to front-load rehabilitative services

3. Barriers/Issues:

- ✓ Accessing adequate resources for out-of-home placements
- ✓ Lack of long-term and short-term mental health and psychiatric care for juveniles and families in need

1st District - Beatrice area

Lead Judge: Judge Curtis Maschman, curtis.maschman@nebraska.gov

Team Coordinator: Cheryl Johnson, cheryl.johnson@nebraska.gov

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ Consistent use of Pre-placement hearing conferences: PPHC are being used more consistently throughout the district. Our mediation center implemented a new format during the last quarter of 2011 in an effort to improve the effectiveness of the conferences. Facilitators are becoming more accustomed to the PPHC process and service options.

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ Emergency Placement Checklist for Law Enforcement: Due to the distance between many of our communities and the HHS intake workers homes, many times there is a significant delay from the time of the decision by law enforcement to make a home removal and the arrival of the intake worker. To expedite the process for all involved, our team is working to develop a checklist/tool for law enforcement to use to immediately start gathering information that the intake worker will need to assess placement and placement options. Some of this had been happening to varying degrees in the district, but this project seeks to enhance process and develop uniformity in its implementation.

3. Barriers/Issues:

- ✓ TRANSITIONS! KVC's transition into and out of the process has created difficulties. It also prevented many of the benefits typically achieved through continuity.
- ✓ We continue to struggle with delays in getting assessments and evaluations completed in a timely manner. There can be inordinate delays in getting voluntary services (counseling and treatment). Some of this is a function of lack of providers, but some is inefficiencies in the referral process.

2nd District - Sarpy County

Lead Judge: Judge Robert O'Neal, boneal@sarpy.com
Team Coordinator: Sandra Markley, smarkley@sarpy.com

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ Family Drug Treatment Court. Sarpy County started its first Family Drug Treatment Court in November of 2011
- ✓ Improvement of Service Delivery. Ongoing team discussions were held regarding issues related to the delivery of services and ways that services and service providers can improve.
- ✓ Statistical Reviews. Ongoing team discussion regarding statistics presented to us at the Regional Eyes Conference of case progression standards and ways to expedite adjudication.
- ✓ Permanency Planning Improvements. The team discussed permanency planning hearings and ways to make them more meaningful, and the implementation of voluntary Permanency Planning Counseling for parents.
- ✓ Dedicated Caseworkers. The Team discussed the need for, and HHS then responded with the implementation of a dedicated team for Sarpy County HHS initial investigations workers as a means to develop better working relationships between initial assessment workers, the schools, law enforcement, and professionals within the court system.
- ✓ Reunification Day. The Team decided not to hold a reunification day celebration, but did agree upon the future implementation of providing a gift certificate for a family photography session and picture to families whose case is closed with a successful reunification
- ✓ Met with the Chief Justice. On March 1, 2012, our team was honored to have Chief Justice Michael Heavican and Kelli Hauptman attend our Eyes meeting. We discussed case progression statistics and Action Plan Items that had been accomplished over the last year. Those action plan items included but are not limited to: 1) receiving a micro grant award to update the children=s space; 2) implementing Permanency Planning Counseling when deemed appropriate and agreed to by parents who are considering relinquishment; 3) Speeding up the process of Early Childhood referrals. The team also heard an update from Ann Ebsen regarding the Foster Youth Counsel, Branching Out, and Project Everlast opportunities for youth who are aging out of the system.

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ The Team is seeking to improve the Family Drug Treatment Court as an on-going activity. The group plans to participate in a Family Drug Treatment Court training at Mahoney State Park on June 25 and 26th. In addition, some members will attend a national Family Drug Treatment Court Symposium in Anaheim, California, in September of 2012.
- ✓ Over the past year, we have held meetings approximately every other month. Most meetings included a discussion of issues surrounding the Families Matter Initiative, as well as other items relevant to our local team.

3. Barriers/Issues:

- ✓ Resource Issues: 1) obtaining timely and meaningful treatment services and evaluations; 2) not enough treatment services available locally; 3) lack of funding for treatment

Lead Judge: Judge Wadie Thomas, wadie.thomas@douglascounty-ne.gov

Team Coordinator: Cindy Tierney, ctierney@concord-center.com

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ Expansion of Family Drug Treatment Courts:
 - a. Serving a greater number of families;
 - b. Some parents and children residing together at Family Works while the parent undergoes residential treatment;
 - c. A therapeutic component added through Project Safe Start;
 - d. Quicker access to substance abuse evaluations
- ✓ Development of a Truancy Diversion Program:
 - a. Obtained a matching grant through Kiewit Foundation;
 - b. Over 100 youth served in 2011
- ✓ Development of Detention Alternatives through the JDAI Initiative with a specific focus on cross-over (youth with delinquency/status and Child Welfare cases pending)
- ✓ 1184 Teams have been expanded to include separate teams for Truancy, Delinquency/Status offenses, Missing Juveniles and "R" Safe Sexual Abuse cases.

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ Caseworker Training: Project Harmony, Health and Human Services, Nebraska Families Collaborative and CCFL have engaged in a collaborative effort geared towards training workers relative to legal issues, to include affidavit in writing, testifying in court, permanency planning and concurrent planning, which involves a series of on-going trainings.
- ✓ Project Harmony also conducts collaboration in Child Abuse/Neglect investigations for all case professionals and other community partners on an ongoing basis. The curriculum includes basic information about when and how to contact the County Attorney's Office in Child Abuse investigations, and specifically who should be contacted.
- ✓ 1184 Treatment Teams have continued to play a key role in the review of cases that are part of the Child Welfare System.
- ✓ Lutheran Family Services and Project Harmony have provided ongoing safety planning training in sexual abuse cases to all case professionals, including representatives from Health and Human Services and Nebraska Families Collaborative, with funding from an OJJDP RSAFE grant.

3. Barriers/Issues:

- ✓ Timeliness of service delivery to families
- ✓ Timeliness and quality of court hearings
- ✓ Consistency of expectations among courtrooms and attorneys
- ✓ Training of case management staff related to legal issues

5th District - Team 1 (Northern)

Lead Judge: Judge Patrick McDermott, patrick.mcdermott@nebraska.gov

Team Coordinator: Ellen Faltys, ellen.faltys@nebraska.gov

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ The Fifth District will no longer be divided into separate North and South Teams and have re-organized into one unified Team to include Colfax, Hamilton, Merrick, Nance, Boone, Platte, Polk, York, Butler,

Seward and Saunders counties. This was a recent development and members are looking forward to sharing ideas and goals in the upcoming year.

- ✓ The implementation of Pre-Hearing conferences in the District has been well received and has had a positive impact on the outcome of the children involved.

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ We are currently investigating the use of JABBER (Movi) to allow more timely hearings when Judge travel is an issue.
- ✓ The District is using prehearing conferences in all termination cases.
- ✓ Use of more direct family placements to avoid making children wards of the State and to measure outcomes in terms of total time to permanency.
- ✓ Attorneys that request bonding assessments are to inform the Court when the assessment is complete in order for a pre-hearing conference to be scheduled as quickly as possible.

3. Barriers/Issues:

- ✓ Large rural geographical areas continue to make widespread participation difficult.

5th District – Team 2 (York area)

Lead Judge: Judge Curtis Evans, curtis.evans@nebraska.gov

Team Coordinator: Gale Jungeman-Schulz, galejs@bvca.net

1. Accomplishments and 2. Current Activities:

- ✓ Pre-Hearing Conferences are being held at all first appearances to begin case planning. This enables interested parties to identify relatives and informal supports for possible placement and ongoing involvement. It also assists in arranging visitation and other services when requested. When the family is included in the decision-making, they feel they have a voice in the process. They have more of a 'buy-in' and cases move through the system more quickly. The barriers are the apprehension by parents' attorneys to have them reveal or admit areas needing improvement or what they review as incriminating information. Their concern is that it can be used against them if it goes to trial.
- ✓ Permanency Hearings are another area that Team 2 has focused on. What we have seen is that the facts of the case dictate when the Permanency Hearing should be held, not wait until the 12th month mark as required by statute. In the cases where Permanency Reviews are held early the case progresses faster because parents and all parties are aware of what is at stake, i.e., moving toward the concurrent plan if progress is not made. Another benefit of early Permanency Hearings is that children are moving to permanency quicker.

7th District – Norfolk area

Lead Judge: Judge Ross Stoffer, ross.stoffer@nebraska.gov

Team Coordinator: John Ullrich, john.ullrich@nebraska.gov

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ Consistent monthly meetings with strong stakeholder involvement, including judges, county attorneys, GALs, parents' attorneys, CASA, HHS, schools and agency supported foster care members

- ✓ Continued use of Pre-Hearing Conferences and expansion to Permanency Pre-Hearing Conferences prior to review hearings. Each and every effort put forth in these conferences is all in the best interest of the child.
- ✓ Sponsored training with Frank Grijalva from the Midwest Trauma Services Network conduct training on trauma and behaviors. The team took away from this an understanding that it is possible to create an environment that allows children to trust what we teach. That, children can become invested in learning and can alter their view of society and of themselves to be able to participate as a law abiding citizen and begin to turn away from the need to affiliate themselves with antisocial groups.

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ The team also used its influence to bring about discussion of the possibilities of using an "apartment model" for substance abuse treatment in our area. The team pulled together a group of community members and arranged a meeting to consult with Pamela Baston on how this projected could work and benefit our area. Once these people were brought together by our team and a dialogue started they were then encouraged to continue with follow up and planning strategies to determine the feasibility of this project in our local area. It is a work in progress!
- ✓ Overall the last several months have been interesting and educational. The team has focused conversation and actions on the on the existing priorities and looks forward to the upcoming months and new priorities to focus on.

8th District - Team 1 (Valentine area)

Lead Judge: Judge James Orr, james.orr@nebraska.gov

Team Coordinator: Suzy Beel, suznbeel@yahoo.com

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ Family Preservation/Decreasing time to Permanency- We have had many cases close out recently and several more to close out by accomplishing the goal of family preservation, guardianship and/or adoption. We are having better, quicker results due to the use of pre-hearing conferences and team meetings. We have very few contested adjudications.
- ✓ Parenting time is occurring as recommended by the Supreme Court guidelines.

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ We have been talking about getting a meeting set up with the providers in this area and the attorneys who are active in the Juvenile court area so that the attorneys can become more informed about services they provide and how they can assist the children and the court process.
- ✓ We would like to promote the education of District Court Judges on the procedures available for a Juvenile Court to modify their divorce/paternity decrees.
- ✓ We have discussed the possibility of the team trying to assist with efforts to recruit service providers and/or foster care parents to our area.

3. Barriers/Issues:

- ✓ Lack of service providers in our district as well as a lack of local foster care parents. This causes our families to spend lots of time on the road traveling to visits, going to appointments etc and missing work.
- ✓ We have experienced difficulty with 2 District Court Judges in our District regarding the filing of the juvenile court paperwork modifying their divorce decrees. The Judges have been unwilling to accept the modification paperwork and we have had to draw the paperwork up again and re-file in District Court.

8th District - Team 2 (Boyd/Holt Counties Area)

Lead Judge: Judge Alan Brodbeck, alan.brodbeck@nebraska.gov

Team Coordinator: Rodney Smith, rwsmithlaw@gmail.com

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ We have refined and expanded the areas of inquiry in the pre-hearing conference process.
- ✓ We have established guidelines and procedures for a pre-hearing process for permanency hearings.
- ✓ We have restructured the composition of the “team” to establish a “core team”. The Core Team is comprised of 10 individuals who each have an area of specialization. The Core Team is scheduled to meet monthly. The full Team, which presently has approximately 25 members meets quarterly. Each Core Team member is responsible for keeping others in their area of specialization informed about day-to-day issues and activities of the Core Team.
- ✓ Expanded and diversified the membership of the “team” to include Clergy, Educators, Law Enforcement, mental health providers, medical providers, other organizations involved with juveniles and business leaders.

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ Establishment of a “speakers bureau” comprised of Core Team members who will, working with the foster home providers, speak to community organizations, business organizations and churches to assist in the recruitment of new foster homes.
- ✓ Present a “meet and greet” day to familiarize the juvenile court bar and judiciary with the organizations and entities involved in judicial cases. Additionally, it will present an opportunity to acquaint the Central area staff and providers with the persons now involved in the transition from the North Area to the Central Area. This event is planned for mid-October, 2012

3. Barriers/Issues:

- ✓ Given our small rural population members of the Team are called on to also dedicate time to other community projects and professional endeavors.
- ✓ Given our small rural population it is difficult to recruit foster homes in or near each community in order to comply with guidelines for parenting time, decrease the costs of and the time expended by parents, foster parents and providers in exercising parenting time.
- ✓ Competing with urban and higher population density areas for available resources

8th District - Team 3 (Broken Bow area)

Lead Judge: Judge Gary Washburn (retired in May 2012)

Team Coordinator: Tami Schendt, custeratty@yahoo.com

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ We now have Pre-Hearing Conferences before every first appearance hearing which is led by a facilitator from Central Mediation. Allowed us to move cases through the system faster and gain information quicker.
- ✓ We've conducted a training on Effective Team Meetings as our group had identified that the team meetings that were being held for cases where not being very effective or helpful, ran too long, and overall the feeling was that not much was being accomplished.
- ✓ We've utilized Pre-permanency Hearings more which allows the case to move toward permanency much faster that they had in the past.

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ We would like to explore the use of Skype or other video-conferencing to see if we can hold hearings in a more timely fashion

3. Barriers/Issues:

- ✓ Lack of resources being available or nearby. Travel distance to resources. Families have limited income or access to reliable transportation.
- ✓ Availability of hearing dates due to the distance and number of counties judge and attorneys have to travel to. We have to balance calendars for several counties.

9th District - Hall County (Grand Island)

Lead Judge: Judge Philip Martin, philipm@hallcountyne.gov

Team Coordinator: Barb Ernst, barb.ernst@nebraska.gov

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ **Pre-Adjudication conferences** (2007) Adjudications were not happening in a timely manner. Pre-Adjudication conferences were put in place to meet this need.
 - The **Through the Eyes Team** developed a process that would require Pre-adjudication conferences to be held within 30 days from the removal date. DHHS will schedule the meeting and invite all parties including the County Attorney. The focus of this meeting will be to discuss the allegations and develop a basic plan of action for the family to begin the process of completing goals and outcomes to successfully achieve reunification.
- ✓ **Initial Parental Notification** (2011) Parental notification was not happening in a timely manner. Parents were unsure as to the date and time of initial court hearing.
 - The Through the Eyes Team developed the process for notification to be made within 48 hours of the filing of the petition to the parents from which the children were removed of the pending initial hearing from County Attorney or DHHS.

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ The **Through the Eyes Team** District 9 had a planning meeting on March 29th. The Team identified the following:
 - Concurrent planning
 - ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act) Training requested by the Team
 - GAL (Guardian ad litem) reports to be revamped
 - Identify resources for foster parents within communities
- ✓ **Core Team** was developed and will meet one week prior to the Quarterly meeting to discuss agenda items and present issues at hand.
- ✓ The Team made the decision to meet quarterly with the following meetings being set: June 21, Sept 20, Dec 20, 2012. All meetings will take place in Judge Martins courtroom from 12-1.

3. Barriers/Issues:

- ✓ Barriers identified where excessive caseload sizes (Addressed in LB 961)
- ✓ Lack of community resource information (to be a topic for Current activities)

9th District - Buffalo County (Kearney)

Lead Judge: Judge Gerald Jorgensen, gerald.jorgensen@nebraska.gov

Team Coordinator: Jaylynn Graham, jsgraham@familyadvocacynetwork.org

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ Our team has been more active in meeting this year. Our team has worked hard at communicating times and availability of team members so that meetings in this area can be effective and active. With this being said our accomplishment will be that we will hold all meetings required for the year. Our team attendance with this accomplishment has also improved. We have more members involved in our team.

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ Permanency being established more effectively and rapidly in Buffalo County. There has been more termination of parental rights being filed to allow a more rapid response of permanency for those youth. With either parental relinquishments being taken or rights are terminated on.
- ✓ The team is working on a way to effectively incorporate pre permanency hearings and utilizing this service more often.

3. Barriers/Issues:

- ✓ The past previous year there was a lack of meetings due to the availability of team members. Holding a meeting is hard to schedule when there are many schedules and members that need to be involved.
- ✓ A barrier to reunification at times and working with families is being a rural community/area. The more rural the area the harder it is to find services to work with the family around their safety and needs. There are many barriers for a rural area that play into not having services, lack of transportation, lack of service providers, lack of placement providers.
- ✓ Placement providers: At times there is a barrier with the amount of providers in the area, not having placements for youth in the community or area that the child(ren) come from making it hard to keep them involved in all things that they used to. The further the children are away the harder it is for more regular visitation etc.

10th District - Team 1 (Nuckolls/Webster County)

Lead Judge: Judge Michael Offner, michael.offner@nebraska.gov

Team Coordinator: Jolene Duffy, jolene.duffy@nebraska.gov

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ Adoption of Action Plans for 1) Court Operations, Calendaring and Case Flow Management; 2) Front Loading System; 3) Emergency Procedures and Orders; 4) Adjudication Hearings; 5) Preliminary Protective Hearings; 6) Disposition Hearings; and 7) Review Hearings and consistently following same to have a more efficient and responsible Juvenile Court system
- ✓ Regular and well attended Juvenile Team meetings. Good communication with team members regarding upcoming juvenile training opportunities.

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ Magistrates use a "Master Progression Schedule" in front of each Juvenile case's exhibit folder to aid in keeping case within best practice case progression guidelines.

- ✓ Magistrate's use of Magistrate's Ex parte Temporary Custody Order Protocol; Pre-Hearing Conference Protocol; Pre-Hearing Conference Checklist; and Pre-Hearing Conference Sign-In Sheet for all ex parte juvenile removals and pre-hearing conferences.

3. Barriers/Issues:

- ✓ Ability for Guardians ad Litem to be able to adequately visit the Juveniles due to the distance almost all Juveniles are placed from Webster and Nuckolls Counties. The lack of foster homes in those counties and the fact that group homes and other placement facilities are a great distance from Webster and Nuckolls Counties are obstacles for adequate Guardian ad Litem one on one visits.

10th District – Adams County (Hastings)

Lead Judge: Judge Michael Burns, michael.burns@nebraska.gov

Team Coordinator: RuAnn Root, rucasa@windstream.net

1. Accomplishments and 2. Current Projects

- ✓ Judge Jack Ott retired January 2011. Michael Burns was sworn in June 2011 as our new county court judge for the 10th Judicial District. Since his appointment our team has been meeting quarterly. There are two projects we are working on:
- ✓ **The Living Center (TLC):**
 - Mission: To provide a place for foster children who have aged out of the Nebraska social services system and homeless youth ages 18-24 to live and be a part of a program that will help provide support as they become a contributing member of society.
 - Where? Former Maryland Building at Seventh Street and Lincoln Avenue which historically and presently houses nursing students for the Creighton Nursing Program.
 - We have secured a \$937,000 grant (to help with the renovation costs of the building) and a capital campaign committee is currently working on a goal of \$350,000 to help secured the rest of the renovation expenses as well as the first year's operational costs. We anticipate the building to be completed by July 2013, with youth moving in the apartments in September.
 - Who Qualifies for the Program? There will be a screening process to ensure that all youth who enter into the program and living center do not abuse illegal substances and will not be a threat to the community or other youth participating in the program. Youth will demonstrate that they have no permanent address and are in need of housing as well as the opportunity to find work or go back to school.
 - What wrap around services will be provided to help youth achieve independent living skills?
 - money management/consumer awareness
 - food management
 - personal appearance
 - health
 - housekeeping
 - housing
 - transportation
 - education planning
 - job-seeking
 - job maintenance
 - emergency and safety skills
 - knowledge of community resources
 - interpersonal skills
 - religion (optional)
 - leisure activities

- How Many Youth Will Participate? There will be 12 apartments in the new living center. We anticipate that 11 will house youth involved in the program and one will be reserved for a residential manager.

✓ **Project Permanency Quest:**

- Our team is a pilot project for implementing the 3-5-7 model for youth in the foster care system. The goal of the program is to help in preparation of children for permanency. It is based on three components: (1) the completion of three tasks—clarification of life events, integration of all family memberships and actualization in belonging to a new family; (2) the answering of five conceptual questions relevant to each child living in placement, Who am I? What happened to me? Where am I going? How will I get there?, and When will I know I belong?; and (3) the use of critical skill elements in the preparation work: engaging the child, listening to the child's words, speaking the truth, validating the child's life story, creating a safe space, going back in time, and recognizing pain as part of the process. By incorporating this model, workers and families conducting the preparation work, assist the child in grieving losses, formulating self-identity, establishing trust and security through attachments, and building relationships and openness to join families on a permanent basis.
- The 3-5-7 Model is a newly developed method that provides a specific approach for those who work and live with children in temporary care, remain in care and are making the transition to permanency through reunification, kinship care, adoption, or permanent legal custodianship. Much of the work done with children is predicated on the assumption that children in care have many unresolved losses. Therefore, the model incorporates activities involving the reconciliation of these losses, which can be accomplished through the exploration of three tasks, the answering of five conceptual questions, and the incorporation of seven critical skill elements.
- The activities our team has been working on include:
 - 2 day training with Darla Henry teaching the 3-5-7 concepts
 - We have picked out 20 youth, ages 5-16, to begin with.
 - All youth will be given a trauma assessment which will be incorporated into case plan
 - Youth will meet every other month with GAL, GAL reports 10 days ahead of court date
 - Foster families, bio-parents and youth will have support groups supporting the 3-5-7 approach
 - Monthly team meetings facilitated by the Central Mediation Center, specific items of discussion on permanency, goals of case plan, barriers, and (if over the age of 15) independent living plan.
 - Each youth to work on a life book, which includes a family life line
 - 3 hour educational meeting to foster and bio parents
 - Triage team to respond to placement disruptions

10th District – West End (Holdrege area)

Lead Judge: Judge Robert Ide, robert.ide@nebraska.gov

Team Coordinator: Darrie Streeter, darrie.streeter@nebraska.gov

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ Prehearing Conferences are held prior to the first appearance, which are held within 96 hours at the latest, usually within 48 hours.
- ✓ Mediation conducts Prehearing Conferences and the Pre-permanency Conferences. All parties feel that this has been very beneficial.
- ✓ CASA, Parent's Attorney and GAL always appointed at removal.
- ✓ Moving cases toward permanency quicker. Pre-permanency hearing moved to 6-9 months into the case to stress the expectations, with deadlines, for the parents to meet the goals set out by the Department.
- ✓ Developed a Community Resource Handbook that was distributed to the Community and out of which grew the Community Collaboration Team which looks for services and creates new services that are needed in our community. The Handbook is in hard copy and can be found at various web locations (i.e.

City of Holdrege website, Phelps County website, PMHC website, etc.) Certain members of the Team were designated to be able to make changes so the websites will always be current.

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ Sponsoring a Bridges out of Poverty workshop in July. Worked with the Schools, Hospital, Foundation to bring this workshop to our community
- ✓ Continuous update of the Resource Handbook that we developed
- ✓ Community Collaboration Committee meeting monthly (the Court is still a part of the group but plan on making it self-sustaining in the future.)
- ✓ Working on improving the Family Drug Court and getting all stakeholders involved

3. Barriers/Issues:

- ✓ Shortage of caseworkers
- ✓ Finding services available for our families and children without asking them to travel a distance

11th District – Team 1 (Dawson County)

Lead Judge: Judge Carlton Clark, carlton.clark@nebraska.gov

Team Coordinator: Judith Geiger, spudhse@msn.com

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ Ice Breaker Meeting – We facilitate a meeting within three days of removal between the foster parent and the biological parents to discuss the needs of the child such as what foods to serve, toys, clothing, medicine and to make sure all parties understand we all want what is in the best interest of the child.
- ✓ Pre-hearing conferences – Held not less than 10 days after child is removed from the home. Meetings held between all parties to get address and contact information; find if the child has medical issues that need to be addressed; deal with paternity, transportation, visitation or issues involving the Indian Child Welfare Act.
- ✓ Court Appointed Attorney – Attorney is appointed for parents and Guardian ad Litem for child at the same time as the custody order is signed.
- ✓ Court Appearance – Children must appear in court at every hearing unless specifically excused by the Judge – We want to know why we're in court and we want the children to know what is going on.
- ✓ CASA Appointments – CASAs are appointed at the time a custody order is signed.
- ✓ Regular Team meetings – Once established our team has maintained regular team meetings and are consistent in requiring Pre-hearing conferences for ALL juvenile 3A cases filed.
- ✓ Permanency Pre-hearing Conferences – Required 30 days prior to Permanency hearing.

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ CASA has received the children's reading books so one may be given to each child to encourage parent and child to read together and bond with each other. Books are available in both Spanish and English.
- ✓ CASA is also responsible for giving each child a coloring book or comic book about the court. This helps the child to understand what is happening when the child comes to court.
- ✓ We try to bring in educational information into our team meetings. As an example, at our last meeting, we had a child relinquishment counselor and the relinquishment/adoption specialist from DHHS give presentations on the relinquishment procedures and process.

3. Barriers/Issues:

- ✓ High worker turnover at the Department of Health and Human Services

- ✓ DHHS caseload size
- ✓ Resource issues – Services available for low income families

11th District – Team 3 (McCook area)

Lead Judge: Judge Anne Paine, anne.paine@nebraska.gov

Team Coordinator: Linda Smith, linda.k.smith@nebraska.gov

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ Our team has 23 active team members
- ✓ Front loading continues to be an essential part of this team's success. It is all based on what is in the best interest of the juvenile(s) and how they can be reunified with their family.
- ✓ During the past year, our team has worked hard to educate team members on the programs available to assist children and their families. We meet quarterly over the lunch hour to encourage attendance. Shari Marchman-Day from Voices 4 Families spoke to our team in February regarding what her organization does; Dennis & Deb Hazen, who are local foster parents, spoke to the team in May about what they do and what the Team can do to help foster parents; Rochelle Dotson, HHS, spoke to the team regarding foster care recruitment in August; and Pam Allen provided information to our team in November regarding the Ice Breakers Program.
- ✓ Our team is fairly unique in that our CASA leader, Cathy McDowell, is also a trained mediator. She facilitates our pre-planning meetings, which is cost effective to all of our counties. If she is not available, the guardian ad litem in the case is the facilitator. The meetings have run very smoothly and often calms all involved prior to the hearing. There is typically a plan in place by the time they come in to the courtroom for the first appearance.
- ✓ This team held a Helping Babies from the Bench Series in McCook, Nebraska, on May 6, 2011. As a result of the action plan from that workshop, this team has made sure there is adequate training for family support workers who are integral in helping families reunite.
- ✓ Case Plans/Court Reports are due within 30 days and this has helped with the time to reunification. Judge Paine has also asked for the goals in these plans to be more specific. It is only fair to the parent(s) and the juvenile(s) to know exactly what is expected of them for the juvenile(s) to be returned home.

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ The juveniles in this district are expected to appear at hearings unless the guardian ad litem does not feel it would be beneficial to the juvenile. Furnas County is in the planning stages to prepare a room where the younger children can stay if their presence in the courtroom is not beneficial.
- ✓ The team is currently working on an education piece for the prevention of teen/young mothers. We are working hand in hand with the McCook Junior High School to incorporate that education.

3. Barriers/Issues:

- ✓ Getting the Youth Court Questionnaire out to juveniles. At our last meeting, this was remedied when Health & Human Services offered to provide the form to the juvenile when they go over the Case Plan/Court Report. The team looks forward to increased information from juveniles as a result of this.
- ✓ Availability of services in rural areas.
- ✓ Placement of juveniles great distances from their parents due to lack of foster parents, placements and facilities, which makes reunification in a timely manner particularly arduous.

11th District - Team 4 (North Platte area)

Lead Judge: Judge Kent Turnbull, kent.turnbull@nebraska.gov

Team Coordinator: Amanda Speichert, aspeichert@flatrocklaw.com

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ Being a pilot project in OJS/probation
- ✓ Changes in court scheduling
- ✓ Filing more TPRs and are adding people to do the TPRs
- ✓ Starting the CASA program in our area

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ Mediation for permanency, pre-adjudication
- ✓ Ensuring that permanency hearings are being had and scheduled in a timely and efficient manner
- ✓ Working with CASA as we are in the start up stages
- ✓ Working on frontloading and making sure we are identifying non custodial parents as placement possibilities

3. Barriers/Issues:

- ✓ Placement instability
- ✓ Lack of resources
- ✓ High attrition in HHS

12th District - Scottsbluff

Lead Judge: Judge James Worden, jworden@scottsbluffcounty.org

Team Coordinator: Katherine Batt, katherine.batt@nebraska.gov

1. Accomplishments:

- ✓ Permanency hearings- addressing permanency as early as possible
- ✓ Filing Aggravated Circumstance TPR at the beginning of cases, when needed
- ✓ Adoption Day celebration 3 years

2. Current Activities:

- ✓ Pre-Hearing Conferences- to talk about services, visitation, ICWA, placement, etc.
- ✓ Child support- Parents rarely are ordered to pay child support for children that are wards of the state

3. Barriers/Issues:

- ✓ Services- rural area, lack of providers, lack of in-home services
- ✓ Timely evaluations of the parents so that services can be put in place