

PRESENTATION FOR INTER-TRIBAL CONFERENCE  
NOVEMBER 17, 2009  
CIRCUS-CIRCUS, RENO, NV

Good Morning Everyone! My name is Sheryl Overstreet and I am the Court Improvement Program Coordinator for the Nevada Supreme Court. On behalf of Nevada Associate Supreme Court Justice Nancy Saitta, who is the Chair of the Court Improvement Select or advisory committee and the entire committee, I thank you very much for your invitation to speak this morning. I am truly honored to be here. Before I start, is Judge Teresa Sprouse in the room? Just so you know, Judge Sprouse from Duckwater Shoshone is a member of the CIP Select or "advisory" committee, which ensures that the Committee includes a strong and articulate voice on behalf of Nevada's Native American children and families.

Although "Court Improvement" sounds like we might be going out to the courts and repairing torn carpets and replacing old fixtures with new ones, it is something completely different and hugely more important to all of Nevada's children and families. I'll read you the **Court Improvement Program Mission, Purpose, and Goals Statement. It says:**

**The Court Improvement Program is a multidisciplinary project which seeks improvement of interrelated systems that serve children and families who enter the child welfare system. The program operates through team-oriented court and agency initiatives. The goal of the CIP is to make the systems more effective.**

The core elements of the Court Improvement Program and the priorities for our initiatives and projects which are funded through the Court Improvement Program stem from this mission statement.

The Program:

(1) "seeks improvement of interrelated systems that serve children and families who enter the child welfare system,"

(2) operates through "team-oriented court and agency initiatives," and

(3) with the goal to make the systems more effective."

In my capacity as Court Improvement Program Coordinator, I was invited to attend the Tribal Roundtables that took place earlier this year. The Roundtables gave me the opportunity to listen and learn about the needs, concerns, and resources of Native American communities in Nevada. This is particularly important for our Court Improvement Program which has sections of our strategic plans directly focusing on the child welfare of Native American children and strengthening families through improved advocacy for children and families in state courts, improved communication with tribal representatives and courts, joint training on legal protections for Native American children and families,

specifically the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), and culturally appropriate transition planning.

In the Basic plan itself on page 8, it says, "Meeting the needs of tribes and tribal children is also a priority." I will read directly from our plan. (read from and show the Strategic Plans folder). I brought with me a hard copy of our 3 Strategic Plans – Basic, or you might think of it as Administration and Planning, Training – or Education and Training, and Data, which you might think of as Data Collection, Analysis, and Sharing.

You may ask, what does that mean exactly? Well, CIP is funded by the federal Department of Health and Human Services - Administration on Children and Families.

We have a process for entities and individuals to request funding for specific "pilot" projects and/or training across the state. I say "pilot" because the idea is to fund thoughtfully put together projects from CIP funds being used as "seed money" and the funding doesn't continue forever. Each "proposal" must show how the project will sustain itself after CIP funding is no longer provided. Grant requests can be for 1 or 2 year projects. Once you have decided on a pilot project, whoever is designated as your "Project Manager" just needs to either go to the CIP webpage, at the Nevada Supreme Court's website, or you can email me directly and I will send you what we call an RFP packet or "Request for Proposal" packet for funding from the Basic, Training, or Data grants. Once the application is completed and sent to CIP, our Grant Award Subcommittee will review the proposal and submit their recommendation to the full CIP Committee. It generally takes 4 to 6 weeks to process a request and get a contract or "subgrant agreement" in place, but of course that can be impacted by many factors including the type of proposal, documentation and the availability of funds.

The CIP website has a list of the quarterly CIP Select Committee or "advisory" meetings, and they are open to the public. Meetings are held via videoconferencing or teleconferencing and you are welcome to attend. Also on the website are direct links to resources such as Nevada CASA Association, National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, National Center for State Courts, the Division of Child and Family Services, and the American Bar Association – Center on Children and the Law. There is also under documents and forms, a CIP Library List that contains publications on child abuse law and prevention, adoption regulations, legal representation manuals for attorneys and pro bono attorneys, the NRS432B Benchbook, resource guidelines and adoption guidelines, court performance measures, substance abuse, impacts of family violence, and a Native American resource directory for juvenile and family court judges.

Presentation for Inter-Tribal Conference  
November 17, 2009

CIP has funded numerous pilot projects across the state since its inception, and if you are interested and would like information on projects funded over the past year, I have brought about 65 copies of a document that briefly describes some of the projects. I also have business cards with the Supreme Court's web address and my email address for contact information. If you have questions of the CIP Select Committee, you can feel free to contact me directly, or my assistant Robbie Taft at [cip@nvcourts.nv.gov](mailto:cip@nvcourts.nv.gov).

In closing, thank you for inviting me to participate in this Conference on behalf of the Supreme Court's Court Improvement Program. I look forward to learning more about your cultures, ideas, and concerns **and** working with you and enriching our good relationship. I will be here for the Keynote Speaker, so if you have any questions, please introduce yourself or feel free to call or email me. Enjoy your conference!



## Nevada's Court Improvement Program (CIP) Pilot Projects 2009

### *CIP Mission, Purpose, and Goals Statement*

*"The Court Improvement Program is a multidisciplinary project which seeks improvement of interrelated systems that serve children and families who enter the child welfare system. The program operates through team-oriented court and agency initiatives. The goal of the CIP is to make the systems more effective."*

*Supreme Court of Nevada  
Administrative Office of the Courts*



## **Children's Attorney Project (CAP) Pro Bono Lawyer & Surrogate Education Advocacy**

Grantee is Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada

The purpose of this project is twofold: (1) to assist Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada (LACSN) in providing representation for abused and neglected children by enhancing recruitment and training for the volunteer lawyers; and, (2) to assist LACSN in providing educational surrogates, pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act (IDEA), by enhancing recruitment and training of volunteers.

- ❖ The LACSN [Pro Bono Project](#) recruits and trains private lawyers to represent child victims of abuse and neglect. Additionally, an LACSN CAP Staff Attorney is assigned as a mentor on each case.

The LACSN [Educational Surrogate Program](#) recruits and trains volunteers who act on behalf of the children living in group homes or institutional settings, advocating when necessary, with regard to special education services.

## **Children's Attorney Project (CAP) Adoption Subsidy**

Grantee is Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada

The purpose of this project was to help adoptive parents navigate the adoption subsidy process, potentially helping reduce the backlog of children in the foster care system awaiting adoption.

- ❖ LACSN has developed both written and web-based information to assist prospective adoptive parents in understanding adoption laws and regulations, the federal and state requirements for adoption subsidy, and their rights and responsibilities as prospective adoptive parents. An information brochure, *Navigating Nevada's Adoption Subsidy Program- A Guide for Clark County Families*, has been developed and is available at no cost for the public. This brochure is available on the LACSN website ([www.lacsn.org](http://www.lacsn.org)).

## **Early Representation Pilot Project**

Begun in February 2009, this pilot project follows best practice research regarding improving outcomes for children by reducing to a minimum the time a child spends in placement, and expediting comprehensive case planning while applying active efforts to reach an early resolution of plan and permanency. A core of the program is immediate appointment of counsel for children and parents, exchange of reports and necessary information, and a facilitated series of meetings with all counsel and stakeholders, within days of removal to identify and resolve conflicts and reach a collaborative solution. All cases were assigned to a single judicial officer and originate from a single geographic service area. Stakeholders include the Clark County Department of Family Services, the offices of the District Attorney juvenile division, Special Public Defender, conflict counsel, and the Children's Attorneys Project of Legal Aid Center of Southern Nevada.

Assigning attorneys to parents and children at the initial protective custody hearing has enhanced the court's ability to achieve better short term and long term outcomes for children by focusing on efforts to prevent removal through collaboration and team generated action plans. The project transforms the traditional conflict and litigation-based model of dealing with abused and neglected children into a more family-friendly model that encourages early parental cooperation, rapid engagement in services, and development of a circle of supportive relatives and friends.

## **Great Basin CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate)**

Grantee is Great Basin CASA

This CIP subgrant provided partial funding to cover the start-up of a new CASA program for the White Pine and Eureka Counties in the Seventh Judicial District. The first case appointed to Great Basin CASA was in August 2008 and since then CASA has advocated for 17 children. Great Basin CASA, which is based in White Pine County, was assigned its first two cases in Eureka County in late spring 2009.

## **Licensed Kinship Caregivers Project**

Grantee is Sierra Association of Foster Families (SAFF)

The use of relatives to provide foster care for children who are dependents of the court is an important resource not only for the stability they provide to children, but for their ability to reduce or ameliorate the impact of the removal of the children from their parent(s). The total number of Nevada children in foster care residing in the home of a licensed foster parent is estimated at 1,404. Recognizing the special challenges faced by caretakers, this project provided ongoing training on various requested topics. All training classes were provided to licensed kinship foster parents from Washoe County and rural communities, and the Dependency Court Proceedings and Grief and Loss classes were provided to licensed kinship foster parents from Clark County. Dr. Joseph Galata, Executive Director, is available to licensed kinship foster parents and as a special daily advocate for grandparents.

Below is a list of the classes:

- ❖ Lifebooks, Dependency Court Proceedings, Six Heart Emotions/Grief, Fostering Medically Fragile Children, Kinship Care, Preventing Academic Disruption, Positive Discipline, Trust, Foster Parents and Biological Parents Working Together, Emotional Intelligence, Tapping to Relieve Stress, and Grief and Loss

## **Nevada CASA Association, Inc.**

Grantee is Nevada CASA Association, Inc. (NCA)

CIP has provided second year funding for the Nevada CASA Association, Inc. The purpose of the Nevada CASA Association is to support existing local CASA programs with volunteer recruitment, training, and support as needed; expand the program to one additional court per year, to reach the goal of providing a CASA volunteer for every abused and neglected child; and to promote the CASA mission throughout Nevada. With more CASA programs and more volunteers, more abused and neglected children have advocates working toward the ultimate goal of permanency. CASA local programs are now serving abused and neglected children in eight counties. NCA has published its first brochure, which is used for publicizing the CASA mission and recruiting activities throughout Nevada. NCA has formed an advisory committee comprised of CASA volunteers to (1) promote awareness of the CASA mission in Nevada; (2) seek grant opportunities for NCA; and (3) help solicit donations for NCA.

## Northeastern Nevada CASA

Grantee is Northeastern Nevada CASA

A new CASA program was established in October 2006, again addressing the improvement of representation in child welfare cases. The program is sustained in the Elko area through a combination of two CIP subgrants and funds raised from the private sector through local fundraising. The NE Nevada CASA program has a Board of Directors and two ¾-time staff who provide ongoing training and support for volunteers to ensure that they are properly performing their duties and have the necessary resources. Sixty-four (64) children have been assigned CASA volunteers through this program. A total of 16 new, active volunteers have been trained and are ready for appointment. The CASA program is proud of the fact that every child that has come into the system under Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) 432B has been appointed a CASA volunteer since January 2008.

## Parent to Parent Mentoring

Grantee is Sierra Association of Foster Families

When a child is placed in a foster home, social service notifies the Sierra Association of Foster Families. As soon as possible, they match the newly licensed foster parents with a volunteer foster parent mentor who is trained prior to their assignment in a wide range of topics including community resources, interpersonal relations, and the social services and legal system. The Association provides mentoring and training for mentors throughout all of Northern Nevada and Pahrump (in southern Nevada). Over the past 12 months, SAFF exceeded its goals and timeframes with 200 foster parents having been provided mentoring from SAFF, and 99% of the mentors have retained their licenses and are continuing to mentor.

A component of the mentoring program was offering in-home/after school academic tutoring to foster youth ages 5-18 to increase academic stability, improve academic grades and testing scores, prevent academic disruptions, increase high school graduation rates, and decrease early school terminations. For the past year, SAFF has provided 10 academic tutors for 102 youth in foster care. The total number of youth in foster care being held back a year and not progressing to an advanced grade level, who dropped out of school, or were forcibly removed from school is ZERO. At the beginning of the Mentoring Program, SAFF had about 5 community partners; at the conclusion of the program they have 80 community partners.

## Washoe Legal Services

Grantee is Washoe Legal Services

Washoe Legal Services (WLS) has been providing representation for children since 2002. This subgrant expands the capacity of WLS to meet the growing demand for representation by funding the representation of 15 more children that would otherwise go unrepresented during the 12-month term of the subgrant. The outcomes will be measured according to the best practices identified in the West Palm Beach study by Chapin Hall in 2008, linking strong advocacy on behalf of children with improved outcomes such as reduced time in placement, reduced time to permanency, and more family engagement. The progress on each of the cases of children appointed counsel through this program are specifically monitored through monthly summaries, and summaries submitted quarterly to CIP.

### For More Information Contact

Sheryl Overstreet, CIP Coordinator  
Phone: 775-687-9809  
Email: [soverstreet@nvcourts.nv.gov](mailto:soverstreet@nvcourts.nv.gov)  
[www.nevadajudiciary.us](http://www.nevadajudiciary.us)