

**State Court Improvement Program 2017 Annual Self-Assessment Report**  
**Report ending 6/30/2017**

This self-assessment is intended as an opportunity for Court Improvement Programs (CIPs) to review progress on required CIP projects, joint program planning and improvement efforts with the child welfare agency, and ability to integrate CQI successfully into practice. Questions are designed to solicit candid responses that help CIPs apply CQI and identify support that may be helpful.

**I. CQI Analyses of Required CIP Projects** (Joint Project with Agency and Hearing Quality Project)

Joint Project with the Child Welfare Agency:

- **To increase the percentage of children achieving permanency within 12 months of entering foster care, measured by the CFSR (Joint Permanency Project).**

Identify the specific safety, permanency, or well-being outcome this project is intended to address.

- **Permanency.**

Approximate date that the project began:

- **Fall 2016.**

Which stage of the CQI process best describes the current status of project work?

- **Still selecting and refining solutions; some implementation.**

How was the need for this project identified?

- **It's been an ongoing problem in Texas, highlighted again by CFSR Round 3. Collaborators include judiciary and child welfare agency. The matter was specifically**

discussed at the CC annual judicial conference in November 2016 and at various other times throughout the year with the child welfare agency.

What is the theory of change for the project?

- **The original Theory of Change: The Children’s Commission (CC) and DFPS reviewed permanency data in preparation for and during the 2016 CIP annual meeting. The review revealed that a large percentage of children move through the Texas child welfare system to positive permanency (defined as children reunified, placed in permanent managing conservatorship or adopted) between 12 and 18 months after removal. Obviously, Texas, like all states, needs to exit children sooner – closer to 12 months or less. Thus, the CC and DFPS committed to, among other things, examine agency permanency data for FY 2015-2016 relating to children who achieved positive permanency) to: (i) identify each child’s placement pattern, noting the last placement before final outcome, and, (ii) determine whether the pattern is informative or relevant as to practices which encourage or inhibit permanency within 12 months or less. However, as of June 2017, the child welfare agency has not been able to produce this data (due to SACWIS upgrades and changes which have made data production difficult compounded by the demands of a legislative session). This strategy will likely change going into FY2018 to shift to using regularly published data that is now available on the agency’s public website. The new strategy will be included in the FY2018 CIP strategic plan.**

If you do not yet have a theory of change and/or would like assistance, please indicate such in the space below.

- **NA**

Have you identified a solution/intervention that you will implement? If yes, what is it?

- **Whatever results the data produce, the CC will develop through a collaborative process, assistance to local jurisdictions to develop interventions and best practices that encourage permanency within 12 months or less, with the specific goal of decreasing the percentage of children finding positive permanent placement in months 12-18 while increasing the percentage of children finding positive permanent placement in 12 months or less.**

What has been done to implement the project?

- In November 2016, the CC presented three related sessions at its annual Child Welfare Judicial Conference (CWJC) on permanency data, court barriers to permanency, and how to improve court practices to promote swift resolution of CPS cases so that courts are not a barrier to children exiting foster care within 12 months of entering care.
  1. Mr. Christopher Church presented national permanency data and compared it to Texas data, and explained how Texas data could be used to target improvements. The post-conference survey, answered by 38 judges, revealed that 83% found the presentation on improving permanency through data analysis very helpful.
  2. At the CWJC, judges met with their DFPS Regional Directors and Regional Systems Improvement staff to discuss regional permanency data to gain a better idea of the permanency outcomes in their locale and what they can do to help move the needle to improve the 12-month exit measure. Of the judges who responded to the post-conference survey, 77% thought this was very helpful and voted to meet with DFPS regional personnel at each annual conferencing going forward.
  3. Judge Michael Schneider of Harris County discussed inadvertent court practices that can prevent children from exiting foster care such as: (1) extending cases beyond the 12-month deadline without extraordinary circumstances; (2) using docketing practices that fail to consider the impact on participants; (3) failing to adequately and meaningfully engage youth, caregivers, and foster parents in the permanency planning and court process; and (4) granting continuances and delays in hearings and case progress. The majority (78%) of judges who responded to the post-event survey believe that docketing practices and extensions beyond the one-year statutory deadline are the most significant barriers to permanency.
- In response to the CWJC survey identifying docketing practices and extensions as the most significant barriers, the CC committed to working with the child welfare agency and judges to address these barriers.
- In February 2017, the CC met with child welfare agency to discuss the Joint Permanency Project in detail. Parties agreed to wait until the final CFSR report was issued to move forward.
- In March 2017, the CC met with the child welfare agency regarding the CFSR outcomes and provided extensive feedback on the proposed PIP.
- May 2017, the child welfare agency provided some data to assist with determining the best way and appropriate type of analysis regarding permanency outcomes to share with judicial stakeholders in preparation for the annual CIP meeting in Denver. Also in May, a team from the CIP met with staff from CBCC to review, refine, and plan parameters and deadlines for the joint project.
- Currently, the child welfare agency continues to use Regional Systems Improvement Specialists (RSIs) to work with each region on using data to focus on improving permanency outcomes for children. The RSIs have developed Annual Business Plans, which include goals related to permanency. These plans will be shared with judges in

November 2017 as part of the annual judicial conference program. The RSIs will prepare data in advance of the judicial summit, present the data, and meet with judicial stakeholders to discuss changes in practice to gain improvements.

What is being done or how do you intend to monitor the progress of the project?

- **The CC is working on accessing publicly available data from the child welfare agency, and working with the Capacity Building Center to understand it, and fashion reports, charts, etc., to share with judges in a simple and easy-to-understand manner. Also, for FY2018, the CC will include as part of its strategy related to this matter the establishment of a regular meeting schedule and workgroup to move the project forward.**

What assistance or support would be helpful from the CBCC or Children's Bureau to help move the project forward?

- **We are being assisted by Scott Trowbridge and Christopher Church.**

Hearing Quality Project:

Provide a concise description of the joint project selected in your jurisdiction.

- **The Texas Family Code requires that youth attend permanency review hearings, and places additional duties on attorneys ad litem, judges, and the child welfare agency to meet with children in advance of court hearings. Despite having statutes in place, the practice of involving youth in the court process continues to be a challenge, and meaningful participation by youth remains the exception and not the norm. This lack of involvement results in youth feeling disconnected from the process and judges not reaping the benefit of the input from youth. Although Texas has not yet studied whether the lack of youth participation in the court process directly correlates with delays in permanency, our hypothesis is that it does.**

Approximate date that the project began:

- **Fall 2016.**

Which stage of the CQI process best describes the current status of project work?

- **Selecting solutions; some implementation.**

How was the need for this project identified?

- **There have been many studies on this issue by the ABA, as well as CIPs around the country. There is consensus that foster youth repeatedly express the desire to be involved in decisions about their lives because it gives youth a sense of control, helps them understand the process, and promotes healing among the youth. Direct contact between the court and the youth also benefits judges. Simply put, youth involvement in court proceedings results in better quality hearings. We also know that youth engagement is beneficial because of a hearing observation project we undertook in FY2014. From our Hearing Quality Observation Project Report dated March 2014, when children were present, there was a significant increase in the number of quality indicators addressed in the hearings (Page 26).**

What is the theory of change for the project?

- **The CC has identified a need for increased youth participation, judicial engagement, and party support and participation in child welfare hearings. To make this happen, the CC will establish a youth workgroup in FY2018 to help ensure more meaningful youth input into policy, legislation and practice. We intend to keep providing training, attorney and judicial tools such as bench cards and communicate regarding statutory and practice changes so that youth will experience high quality hearings and court proceedings, and hopefully improved permanency outcomes, including exiting foster care sooner.**

If you do not yet have a theory of change and/or would like assistance, please indicate such in the space below.

- **NA**

Have you identified a solution/intervention that you will implement? If yes, what is it?

- **Our solution is to keep working on increasing awareness about the law, the importance of youth voice, reducing barriers to participation, and putting pressure on child welfare stakeholders to adopt and implement appropriate policy, legislative, and practice changes that ensure youth voice is present and considered.**

What has been done to implement the project?

- **The updated 2016 Bench Book now includes ABA Bench Cards on interviewing children.**

- In November 2016, the CC hosted a former foster youth at the annual Child Welfare Judicial Conference who spoke to judges about the importance of involving youth in the permanency planning and court proceedings. This closing session of the annual conference was the second highest-rated presentation of the conference. Judge Michael Schneider discussed inadvertent court barriers that can prevent children from exiting foster care such as: (1) extending cases beyond the 12-month deadline without extraordinary circumstances; (2) docketing practices that fail to consider needs of participants; and (3) failure to adequately and meaningfully engage youth, caregivers, and foster parents in the permanency planning and court process.
- In December 2016, the CC distributed a JIR and an Attorney Resource Letter on the importance of youth voice in court proceedings. To view this, link here: [The Importance of Youth Voice in Court Proceedings](#)
- In January 2017, the CC made a presentation to judges at the Family Justice Conference about the importance of involving youth in decisions impacting their lives.
- Throughout FY2016, the CC supported the video conferencing project, which enables children involved in child abuse and neglect cases to participate in permanency review hearings without being physically present in the courtroom. The Office of Court Administration (OCA) hosts and supports the hardware and software required to facilitate video conferencing between courts and residential placements. OCA maintains a list of courts, Residential Treatment Centers and local CASA offices with video conferencing capability. OCA maintains a log of all hearings conducted, including the date, time, participating court, type of hearing, participating placement, length of hearing, any problems with the transmission quality, or technical difficulties. In FY 2016, with CIP funds, OCA upgraded the video conferencing platform to enable conferencing capability from mobile devices, multi-party video conferencing, and email and calendar invitation capabilities.
- The CC produced CLE on “Effective Representation of Children and Aged Out Foster Youth: Beyond the Basics.” A total of 211 attorneys viewed the session.

What is being done or how do you intend to monitor the progress of the project?

- CC will utilize its new Foster Youth Workgroup to strategize about how to collect data relating to the presence (or lack of) in youth voice in court proceedings. We may use individual interview tools or surveys as well as agency and stakeholder interviews, focus groups or surveys. We will continue to monitor use of video conference hearings as one measure of youth involvement in court proceedings.

What assistance or support would be helpful from the CBCC or Children’s Bureau to help move the project forward?

- None at this time.

**II. Trainings, Projects, and Activities** For questions 1-9, provide a *concise* description of work completed or underway to date in FY 2017 (October 2016-June 2017) in the below topical subcategories.

For question 1, focus on significant training events or initiatives held or developed in FY 2017 and answer the corresponding questions.

**1. Trainings**

<i>Topical Area</i>	<i>Did you hold or develop a training on this topic?</i>	<i>Who was the target audience?</i>	<i>What were the intended training outcomes?</i>	<i>How did you evaluate this training?</i>
Data	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Judges	Increased awareness about data affecting their particular locale	Yes (see above for details re survey results)
Hearing quality	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Judges	Increased awareness about importance of youth voice in court proceedings	Yes
Improving timeliness/permanency	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Judges	Increased awareness about barriers to children and youth exiting foster care	Yes (see above for details re survey results)
Quality legal representation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Legal System Stakeholders	Awareness of changes in law and practice; availability of new tools and initiatives	Yes and No (Trial Skills Training evaluated extensively; online training evaluated only re # of attendees (211))
Engagement & participation of parties	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Judicial stakeholders	Awareness of tool, increase in use	Monitored increased in subscribers
Well-being	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Judges and Attorneys	Increased awareness about well-being issues affecting children in foster care	Yes (81% of judges surveyed have a good (60%) to moderate (20%) understanding of Trauma and effects on children in foster care)
ICWA	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Judges and Attorneys	Increased awareness about new ICWA Guidelines	Not Yet. (Communique sent to approx. 1k judges and 3k attorneys on March 31, 2017)

<i>Topical Area</i>	<i>Did you hold or develop a training on this topic?</i>	<i>Who was the target audience?</i>	<i>What were the intended training outcomes?</i>	<i>How did you evaluate this training?</i>
Sex Trafficking	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	We did not offer training, but the CC staff attended training	Increase the CC awareness and CST	Attendee evaluated training for how the CC could use up-to-date information to inform our training and outreach efforts.
Other: Unconscious Bias; Trial Skills Training	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Multidisciplinary (Judiciary, Legislative, Executive Branch as well as community, local government, and service providers) Attorneys (up to 42 attorneys per year)	Raise awareness and level of education about unconscious bias For attendees to leave with a commitment to change within their own discipline and locale. Provide hands on trial skills training for attorneys	Surveys

On average, with ordinary funding levels, how many training events do you hold per year?

- **Between 3 – 5 events, but CIP also regularly produces online training and publishes communiques, educational materials, resource guides and bench books to large distribution lists of judges and attorneys throughout the year.**

What is your best prediction for the number of attorneys and judges that attend a training annually?

- **Around 100 judges and between 100-150 attorneys are trained at live events, but approximately 1000 judges and over 3000 attorneys receive regular educational communiques. There are also several hundred attorneys who access online training materials each fiscal year through the State Bar of Texas CPS library, which is mostly populated through the CC training events and efforts.**

- Data Projects.** Data projects include any work with administrative data sets (e.g, AFCARS, SACWIS), data dashboards, data reports, fostering court improvement data, case management systems, and data sharing efforts.

Do you have a data project/activity?  Yes  No (skip to #3)

<b>Project Description</b>	<b>How would you categorize this project?</b>	<b>Work Stage (if applicable)</b>
<i>(add narrative here)</i>	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
Texas Blueprint Data Workgroup	Education and Health Data Sharing	Implementation
Permanency (CFSR Round 3)	Agency Data Sharing Efforts	Selecting Solution

(a) Do you have data reports that you consistently view?  Yes  No

(b) How are these reports used to support your work?

➤ **The reports help identify training needs, where we need to share information about certain trends, whether law or practice should be amended.**

**3. Hearing Quality.** Hearing quality projects include any efforts you have made to improve the quality of dependency hearings, including court observation/assessment projects, process improvements, specialty/pilot court projects, projects related to court orders or title IV-E determinations, mediation, or appeals.

Do you have a hearing quality project/activity?  Yes  No (skip to #4)

<b>Project Description</b>	<b>How would you categorize this project?</b>	<b>Work Stage (if applicable)</b>
See Above (second CQI project on Youth Engagement)	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
	Choose an item.	Choose an item.

**4. Improving Timeliness of Hearings or Permanency Outcomes.** Timeliness and permanency projects include any activities or projects meant to improve the timeliness of case processing or achievement of timely permanency. This could include general timeliness, focus on continuances or appeals, working on permanency goals other than APPLA, or focus on APPLA and older youth.

Do you have a Timeliness or permanency project/activity?  Yes  No (skip to #5)

<b>Project Description</b>	<b>How would you categorize this project?</b>	<b>Work Stage (if applicable)</b>
See Above (first CQI project on improving timeliness to permanency)	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
	Choose an item.	Choose an item.

- 5. Quality of Legal Representation.** Quality of legal representation projects may include any activities/efforts related to improvement of representation for parents, youth, or the agency. This might include assessments or analyzing current practice, implementing new practice models, working with law school clinics, or other activities in this area.

Do you have a quality legal representation project/activity?  Yes  No (skip to #6)

<b>Project Description</b>	<b>How would you categorize this project?</b>	<b>Work Stage (if applicable)</b>
Legal Representation Committee	New Practice Models	Develop Theory of Change
Texas Board of Legal Specialization	Other	Implementation
	Choose an item.	Choose an item.

- 6. Engagement & Participation of Parties.** Engagement and participation of parties includes any efforts centered around youth, parent, foster family, or caregiver engagement, as well as projects related to notice to relatives, limited English proficiency, or other efforts to increase presence and engagement at the hearing.

Do you have an engagement or participation of parties project/activity?  Yes  No

<b>Project Description</b>	<b>How would you categorize this project?</b>	<b>Work Stage (if applicable)</b>
Notice and Engagement Alert	Other	Implementation
Video Conference Hearings	Youth Engagement	Implementation
Family Helpline	Caregiver Engagement	Implementation

- 7. Well-Being.** Well-being projects include any efforts related to improving the well-being of youth. Projects could focus on education, early childhood development, psychotropic

medication, LGBTQ youth, trauma, racial disproportionality/disparity, immigration, or other well-being related topics.

Do you have any projects/activities focused on well-being?  Yes  No (skip to #8)

<b>Project Description</b>	<b>How would you categorize this project?</b>	<b>Work Stage (if applicable)</b>
Statewide Collaborative on Trauma Informed Care	Trauma	Selecting Solution
Judicial Workgroup Addressing Dispro	Racial Disproportionality	Implementation
Foster Youth Education Outcomes	Education	Implementation

**8. ICWA.** ICWA projects could include any efforts to enhance state and tribal collaboration, state and tribal court agreements, data collection and analysis of ICWA compliance, or ICWA notice projects.

Do you have any projects/activities focused on ICWA?  Yes  No (skip to #9)

<b>Project Description</b>	<b>How would you categorize this project?</b>	<b>Work Stage (if applicable)</b>
Monthly Tribal Calls with Tribal Representatives and Child Welfare Agency	Tribal Collaboration	Implementation
Published JIR/ARL letter on new ICWA Guidelines, including resources and tools provided by Tribal Member who serves on Children’s Commission	ICWA Notice	Implementation
	Choose an item.	Choose an item.

**9. Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act (PSTFSA).** PSTFSA projects could include any work around domestic child sex trafficking, the reasonable and prudent parent standard, a focus on runaway youth, focus on normalcy, collaboration with other agencies around this topic, data collection and analysis, data sharing, or other efforts to fully implement the act into practice.

Do you have any projects/activities focused on PSTSFA?  Yes  No

<b>Project Description</b>	<b>How would you categorize this project?</b>	<b>Work Stage (if applicable)</b>
Participation on Statewide Task Force	Collaboration with other agencies	Selecting Solution
Participation in Office of Governor Efforts	Sex Trafficking	Selecting Solution
NCJFCJ Domestic Child Sex Trafficking Institute	Sex Trafficking	Identifying/Assessing Needs

**III. CIP Collaboration in Child Welfare Program Planning and Improvement Efforts**

Please describe how the CIP has been involved with the state’s CFSP due June 30, 2017.

- **The CC provided information related to Notice and Engagement and Video Conferencing in April 2017.**

Please describe how the CIP was or will be involved in the most recent/upcoming title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Review in your state.

- **Not sure yet. The CC normally attends the kick-off and exit conference of the IV-E Review to hear about judicial and court order concerns, but The CC is otherwise not very involved.**

Please describe how the CIP is or was involved in preparing and completing round 3 of the CFSR and PIP, if required, in your state.

- **The CC helped conduct stakeholder meetings preliminary to the actual review and provided feedback to the child welfare agency in March and to ACF and the agency again in May 2017.**

Are there any strategies or processes in place in your state that you feel are particularly effective in supporting joint child welfare program planning and improvement?

- **Regular (bi-monthly) contact with the agency as well as involvement by agency staff on most every project and/or workgroup staffed and supported by the CC.**

Does the state child welfare agency currently offer professional partner training to judges, attorneys, and court personnel as part of its title IV-E Training Plan?

- **Not to the CC's knowledge.**

If yes, please provide a brief description of what is provided and how.

If no, have you met with child welfare agency leadership to discuss and explore utilizing professional partner training for judges, attorneys and court personnel?

- **No, but will plan to do so in FY2018.**

Which category or categories of activity best describe current CIP data efforts with the child welfare agency?

- Contributing data       Receiving data       Jointly using data
- Collaborative meetings       Collaborative systems change project(s)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### **IV. CQI Current Capacity Assessment**

1. Has your ability to integrate CQI into practice changed this year? If yes, what do you attribute the increase in ability to?

- **Yes. Learning about it over the past several years has improved our CQI abilities incrementally.**

2. Which of the following CBCC Events/Services have you/your staff engaged in in the 2017 Fiscal Year?
  - Annual CIP Meeting       CQI Consult (*Topic: \_\_joint project\_\_\_\_\_*)
  - Constituency Group – ICWA       Constituency Group – Anti-Trafficking
  - Constituency Group – New Directors       Constituency Group – APPLA/Older Youth
  - CIP All Call — *What % of All Calls does your CIP participate in? 90%*

3. Do you have any of the following resources to help you integrate CQI into practice?
  - CIP staff with CQI (e.g., data, evaluation) expertise       Consultants with CQI expertise
  - a University partnership       Contracts with external agencies to assist with CQI efforts
  - Other resources: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Describe the largest challenges your CIP faces with implementing CQI into your work.

- **We probably need to dedicate funding to hire a data evaluation expert, but have not done that yet due to uncertainty with CIP and other employer considerations beyond the CC control.**
  
- 4. Is there a topic or practice area that you would find useful from the Capacity Building Center for Courts? Be as specific as possible (e.g., data analysis, how to evaluate trainings, more information on research about quality legal representation, how to facilitate group meetings, etc.)
  
- **Not at this time.**

## APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS

### Definitions of Evidence

**Evidence-based practice** – evidence-based practices are practice that have been empirically tested in a rigorous way (involving random assignment to groups), have demonstrated effectiveness related to specific outcomes, have been replicated in practice at least one, and have findings published in peer reviewed journal articles.

**Empirically-supported-** less rigorous than evidence-based practices are empirically-supported practices. To be empirically supported, a program must have been evaluated in some way and have demonstrated some relationship to a positive outcome. This may not meet the rigor of evidence-base, but still has some support for effectiveness.

**Best-practices** – best practices are often those widely accepted in the field as good practice. They may or may not have empirical support as to effectiveness, but are often derived from teams of experts in the field.

### Definitions for Work Stages

**Identifying and Assessing Needs** – This phase is the earliest phase in the process, where you are identifying a need to be addressed. The assessing needs phase includes identifying the need, determining if there is available data demonstrating that this a problem, forming teams to address the issue.

**Develop theory of change**—This phase focuses on the theorizing the causes of a problem. In this phase you would identify what you think might be causing the problem and develop a “theory of change”. The theory of change is essentially how you think your activities (or intervention) will improve outcomes.

**Develop/select solution**—This phase includes developing or selecting a solution. In this phase, you might be exploring potential best-practices or evidence-based practices that you may want to implement as a solution to the identified need. You might also be developing a specific training, program, or practice that you want to implement.

**Implementation** – the implementation phase of work is when an intervention is being piloted or tested. This includes adapting programs or practices to meet your needs, and developing implementation supports.

**Evaluation/assessment** – the evaluation and assessment phase includes any efforts to collect data about the fidelity (process measures: was it implemented as planned?) or effectiveness (outcome measures: is the intervention making a difference?) of the project. The evaluation assessment phase also includes post-evaluation efforts to apply findings, such as making changes to the program/practice and using the data to inform next steps.