

The NC Children's Justice 3-Year Study evaluates how child abuse and neglect cases are handled as they move through the system. As a result of the evaluation, the Children's Justice Task Force must make recommendations to improve handling and assess the progress of those recommendations every three years. The Children's Justice Task Force plans to reevaluate, but not necessarily complete, the following recommendations in the next three years.

CHILDREN'S JUSTICE TASK FORCE – North Carolina 3 Year Study – FY 2003

Introduction

The Children's Justice Act (CJA), section 107 of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), authorizes eligible states to fund programs to improve the handling of child abuse and neglect cases. Eligibility is contingent upon satisfying five criterion: 1) Compliance with the CAPTA Basic State Grant to improve Child Protective Services system; 2) Establishment and maintenance of a multi-disciplinary advisory Task Force; 3) Comprehensive review of the system handling of child abuse and neglect every three years; 4) State adoption of Task Force recommendations stemming from the three-year review; and 5) Submission of an application annually. In North Carolina, the Basic State Grant is administered by the Division of Social Services, while the Task Force, study and application are assigned to the Juvenile Justice Planning Committee of the Governor's Crime Commission in the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety. North Carolina is required to include the three-year study in the FY 2003 application.

Method of Study

The NC Children's Justice Task Force comprehensively reviewed and evaluated investigative, administrative and judicial handling of child abuse and neglect cases. This evaluation was accomplished by reviewing studies of other collaborative groups and child abuse data from governmental agencies. Additionally, the Children's Justice Task Force convened a one-day workshop of over 40 professionals from various disciplines across the state to discuss the gaps in services and make policy recommendations to improve the system handling of child abuse and neglect cases.

Recommendations

In general, study participants indicated the greatest needs for improved coordination and training. Individual findings of the review and recommendations are grouped by Coordination, Training, Judicial Handling, Investigative Handling, Administrative Handling, Legislative, and Services. The Children's Justice Act (CJA) assigns recommendations to three categories—(a) investigative, administrative and judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect and cases involving a potential combination of jurisdictions in a manner that reduces trauma to victim/family and ensures fairness to accused, (b) experimental, model and demonstration programs for improving handling or enhance effectiveness of child abuse and neglect cases, (c) reform of state laws, ordinances, regulations, protocols and procedures to provide protection for child from abuse; and progress on fulfilling recommendations. These categories are indicated as (a), (b), and (c).

Coordination

Improve Coordination of Stakeholders Involved in Child Abuse and Neglect

Findings

Task Force members and workshop participants consistently reported limited coordination of key government agencies, advocacy groups, and victims and their families involved in child abuse and neglect cases. No single body coordinates statewide efforts across all systems, which leads to inconsistent service delivery. In

particular, there is limited coordination involving juvenile delinquency cases and Division of Social Services cases, police investigations and prosecution. Limited communication between the Division of Social Services and courts contributes to inadequate follow-up and service provision to families after diversion. In some cases, the court is unaware if a Division of Social Services report has been filed.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- Develop and integrate a child abuse/child protection statewide quality improvement program, designed to map resources and gaps annually, define variations in systems practices, and work to strengthen cross-agency and legislative collaboration. Create a subcommittee of the Juvenile Justice Planning Committee to facilitate coordination of the individual efforts of government agencies and advocacy groups in the prevention, intervention, treatment and system handling of child abuse and neglect cases. (a, b, c)
- Enhance funding and collaboration between the courts (AOC), Adult Corrections (DOC), State (SBI) and local law enforcement, juvenile justice (DJJDP), social services (DSS), Mental Health, Governor's Crime Commission (GCC), and others as needed to more effectively collect, warehouse, and utilize legal, investigative, treatment, and offender supervision data across the state. (a)

Progress

- The Juvenile Justice Planning Committee organized a workgroup in January 2003 of child abuse and neglect professionals across the state to discuss the gaps in services and make policy recommendations. Participants from this workgroup will be included in further collaborative efforts.
- Early in 2002, Governor Easley appointed the Child Well-Being and Domestic Violence Task Force, co-chaired by the state Chief Justice and Secretary of NC Department of Health & Human Services, to implement a plan to better serve families facing the issues of domestic violence and child maltreatment. The final report of that task force was released in February 2003. Several recommendations addressing child maltreatment are reflected in this plan.
- Following a series of reports in the Raleigh, NC, newspaper, *News and Observer*, on child abuse and neglect in childcare facilities, several pieces of legislation have been introduced in the General Assembly requiring better cooperation between law enforcement and NC DSS when investigating maltreatment in childcare settings.
- The North Carolina General Assembly, in Regular Session 2002, passed a bill to establish criteria to trigger an "Amber Alert", to coordinate the public and private sectors, and to provide for the use of Department of Transportation changeable message signs to display information regarding missing children.
- Children's Justice Task Force will continue to examine other issues and will consider funding relevant projects through CJA grants.

Improve Collection and Management of Child Abuse Cases Involving Suspected Perpetrators Who are not "Caretakers" (Cases Not Referred to Social Services)

Findings

NC Division of Social Services (NC DSS) investigates cases of suspected maltreatment perpetrated by a "caretaker". There is no central database for information on child maltreatment cases not investigated by NC Division of Social Services. The scope of the children being harmed by relatives, strangers, siblings, and acquaintances has not been measured. Child to child sexual abuse may be four times as likely as caretaker abuse. There is no clear guidance on the agency responsible for investigating and treating victims and offenders of sibling on sibling abuse.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- Identify if and where non-caretaker data are being collected. (a)

- Enhance the data collection of non-caretaker abuse to examine case handling and limit trauma to child victims. (a)
- Coordinate efforts of key agencies in non-caretaker cases. (a)
- Study the effects of changing reporting requirement for non-caregivers. (c)

Progress

- The Children's Justice Task Force will consider using CJA funds to implement additional recommendations as more data become available.

Training ***Enhance Medical Expertise***

Findings

There is insufficient medical expertise in the area of child abuse and neglect, particularly in rural areas where there is little or no access to physicians trained in medical evaluations of victims of child/adolescent sexual abuse, due, in part, to the lack of incentives, training, and personnel. The University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill administers a model networking and training program (Child Medical Evaluation Program, CMEP) on child abuse and neglect assessments, but receives funding only for cases initiated by North Carolina Division of Social Services (NC DSS). Practitioners outside of the CMEP network report limited or no compensation for evaluations. Universal CME training of pediatricians may not be as effective as targeting resources for the development of regional and state training centers, in collaboration with the medical schools, Area Health Education Centers (AHEC), and hospitals. General practitioners, pediatricians, and emergency room staff may lack a general awareness of child abuse and neglect issues, identification, and resources. Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners (SANE) nurses are trained in the physical collection of evidence, most often for adults, and may lack the full spectrum of training and experiences to work with the psychological/emotional support of young children while conducting physical exams and collecting physical evidence.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- Increase federal and state funding allocated to N.C. medical training centers specifically devoted to enhancing the competencies of pediatricians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, etc. (all who do physical examinations and potential evidence collection) in areas of child sexual abuse investigations (including forensic training). (a)
- Increase funds allocated to the development of Multidisciplinary Teams (MDT) in rural and urban centers around the state, and cultivate "lead agency" capacity for under-served areas where Child Advocacy Centers (CAC) or other medical centers are not available. (b)
- Increase training and supporting funds for SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners) nurses toward competencies in the psychosocial, emotional, and family support interviewing areas to supplement their medical training. (a)
- Increase incentives for practitioners to conduct Child Medical Exams (CME) to include payments for travel, court time, court preparation, etc. where feasible. (a, b)
- Increase state and regional training capacity to include new/best practices in child sexual and physical abuse examinations, and related competencies for effective case resolution. Training should include awareness, developing core and expanded protocols for physical/collateral examinations, how to interface and support multidisciplinary teams (MDTs), and how to prepare effectively for legal defense of findings. (a)
- Cautiously deploy videoconferencing technology to allow MDT access in under-served sites, but with appropriate supervision and management of the technology. (a, b)
- Cautiously deploy enhanced videography/photography technology, and allied legal training on the appropriate uses and misuses of such technology so that children are not further victimized by improper use (a, b)

- Increase collaboration of mental health treatment with medical examiners for both victim and non-offender family/caretaker members, including evaluation (psychological and psychiatric testing/evaluation) and treatment resources (a)

Progress

- The Child Medical Evaluation Program (CMEP), established in 1976, is a cooperative effort of the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill (UNC) School of Medicine Department of Pediatrics, NC Division of Social Services, the NC General Assembly, local Departments of Social Services, and local medical and mental health providers. CMEP continues to provide training, consultation, and a statewide network of 400 local physicians and 180 local psychologists in 71 counties who perform assessments of children referred by DSS agencies to help determine the presence or extent of abuse and neglect.
- SANE nurses are being recruited and trained.
- Children's Justice Task Force will continue to support a statewide conference providing training on child abuse and neglect awareness, along with discipline-specific skills building.
- Children's Justice Task Force will continue to examine other issues and will consider funding relevant projects through CJA grants.

Improve Overall Training of Professionals

Findings

Training is, by far, the greatest perceived unmet need in the opinion of the members of the Task Force. Representatives of all disciplines expressed the need for more training, both joint training and agency-specific training.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- Training should have an interdisciplinary approach (including defining responsibilities of different agencies/organizations). Other training areas should include cultural competency, family support, information-sharing among groups (e.g., job fact sheets). (a)
- Agency-based training, which might include basic information about different agencies and might incorporate cross training.(a)
- Bring training to court, ensure consistency in training.(a)
- Provide training, programs, and services in rural areas. .(a)
- Provide training and best practices specific to child abuse/sexual assault. (a)
- Require Judges and Magistrates to have mandatory re-certification training in child abuse. (c)
- Provide training to and better coordinate indigent services attorneys. (a)
- Encourage multi-disciplinary regional training centers. (a, b)
- Develop and implement training for first responders (Medical, Fire, Emergency Medical Service, Police) and health care providers (ER staff, pediatricians, physician assistants, nurses, etc). (a)
- Training in recording and reporting for educators and childcare workers. (a)
- Provide e-training (online training) or other innovative distant learning opportunities for entire judicial staff in all districts. (b)
- Consider expanding the SWOP or similar programs where social workers or those trained in effective child abuse investigations and recognition ride along with first responders where feasible. (b)
- Ensure there is follow-up to training. (a)
- Enhance and promote training in advanced level, smaller courses that allow students to practice and test skills. (a)

Progress

- Children's Justice Task Force will continue to support a statewide conference providing training on discipline-specific skill building, such as investigative techniques. A number of professional associations; such as the Children's Advocacy Centers of NC, NC Bar Association, NC Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Prevent Child Abuse NC, NC Juvenile Officers Association, and the NC Professional Society on the Abuse of Children; provide excellent training on child abuse and neglect.
- GAL volunteers, who receive training prior to being assigned to a case, are being used in increasing numbers.
- Judges receive training and certification on juvenile issues, including child abuse and neglect, through the Institute of Government, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.
- The NC Justice Academy offers several courses in child abuse and neglect investigations.
- Children's Justice Task Force will continue to examine other issues and will consider funding relevant projects through CJA grants.

Judicial Handling

Increase Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Judicial Process in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases

Findings

At times, child victims may be subjected to lengthy court processes and judicial procedures that delay services, increase out-of-home placements, and may result in children falling through the gaps. The duration of sexual abuse cases and appeals is unacceptable. Additionally, District Courts can not analyze the extent of the problem due to the lack of a standard system of collecting and tracking data. The rules governing juvenile matters are deficient in clear guidance and enforcement. There should be greater coordination between Division of Social Services, District Attorney, Guardian ad Litem in civil and criminal cases. In military communities, there are collaboration issues associated with jurisdictional questions about how to handle investigations and prosecutions when abuse occurs on a federal installation.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- CJA committee and GCC will work with the NC Legislature to study and improve the ways that courts manage child abuse cases (a, c)
- The North Carolina Court Improvement Program (CIP) assesses, plans and implements improvements in the handling of child abuse and neglect, foster care and adoption cases. An evaluation of CIP indicated reductions in cases heard by multiple judges, continuances granted, out-of-home placements, and overall duration of cases. This model should be enhanced and expanded in all District Courts. (a, b)
- Encourage and expand the use of one family/one judge and Family Court models. Family Courts are charged with hearing "all matters involving intra-family rights, relationships, and obligations, and all juvenile justice matters" in one court. (a, b)
- Recruit more volunteers willing to serve as Guardian ad Litem GAL representatives (b)
- Provide alternatives to having child testify in court that are **systematically** practiced.(a)
- Provide more human resources in court. (a)
- Track timeline of cases processing. (a)
- Encourage projects that are piloted by at the county or district level.(b)
- Encourage the development and enforcement of juvenile court rules at the District Court level. (c)
- Examine ways to expedite and prioritize appeal process. (b)
- Study and remove barriers to case resolution. (a, c)
- Increase linkages between training of juvenile court and superior court judges and mental health / pediatric providers of services for victims of child sexual and physical abuse; areas to concentrate on include normal and abnormal child development, manifestations of symptomatology associated with child abuse and

neglect, along with understanding case management balance between offender accountability and the need for rapid case resolution to avoid re-victimization of children by the legal system (a)

- CJA Committee/GCC should work with federal agencies, state and local military and civilian communities to facilitate protocols where investigations are more smoothly and positively managed, and where prosecutions are coordinated so that victims are appropriately served and perpetrators appropriately investigated/managed by the responsible authorities. (a, c)

Progress

- Using FY 2003 funds from other sources, the Children's Justice Task Force plans to support Court Improvement Projects in the counties of Rowan and Wake and in the Eighth Judicial District.
- The NC Administrative Office of the Courts created a Court Improvement Advisory Committee to examine ways of improving the handling of child abuse and neglect cases. The Chief Justice issued an order to District Courts to update and modify juvenile court rules.
- The Children's Justice Task Force plans to support the positions of Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Volunteer Recruiter and Appellate Coordinator.
- In 1998, the Administrative Office of the Courts was instructed to establish family court pilot programs at the district court level. Three district court districts began implementing family courts April 1999 and the program was expanded to five additional districts by December 2000. District court districts 5 (New Hanover, Pender), 6A (Halifax), 8 (Greene, Lenore, Wayne), 12 (Cumberland), and 25 (Burke, Caldwell, Catawba) were chosen as new family court sites.
- Children's Justice Task Force will continue to examine other issues and will consider funding relevant projects through CJA grants.

Improve Legal Representation

Findings

There was a general agreement that child victims are not being adequately represented in court. Guardian ad Litem (GAL) representatives are insufficiently used and grossly underpaid as compared to public defenders. There is limited coordination with the new Office of Indigent Services.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- Increase funding for court-appointed victim advocates and Guardian ad Litem attorney advocates and services throughout the state. (a, b)
- Increase funding for victim advocacy services for both victim and non-offending/caretaking members. (a)
- Provide for crisis intervention and resolution where perpetrators are imminently at risk of re-offending due to slow legal resolution of cases (a)
- Recruit more volunteers willing to serve as GAL representatives. (b)
- Increase coordination between representatives of the Office of Indigent Services, Guardian ad Litem and victim advocacy programs.

Progress

- Last year, more than 80 attorneys provided pro bono services to the Guardian ad Litem offices across the state. These attorneys served as Guardians ad Litem, as conflict or back-up attorneys, and helped with appeals and special projects.
- GAL representatives are increasingly being used. Guardians ad Litem served 15,234 children in FY 01-02, an increase of 3.1% from the previous year.
- The Children's Justice Task Force plans to support the position of GAL Volunteer Recruiter and will support an Appellate Coordinator.

- Legislation in 2001 established the Office of Indigent Defense Services and the Commission on Indigent Defense Services in the Administrative Office of the Courts. (The commission is required to determine methods for delivering legal services to eligible persons and develop standards for each judicial district)
- The Task Force will continue to evaluate the recommendations and will consider, where appropriate, using CJA funds to that end.

Addressing Judicial and Courtroom Issues

Findings

The courtroom is often an adversarial environment for child victims and their families. Juvenile and family court facilities are typically not suited to the needs of children. There are limited private places within courthouses where children can go to be interviewed and few places for a child to get away from the stress of the courtroom and the generally chaotic courthouse environment. In criminal sexual abuse cases, the child must face the offender.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- Juvenile and family court facilities should be made more child friendly. Create child friendly waiting and testimony areas, where developmentally nonthreatening environments can help relieve some of the stress and tensions associated with children victims or witnesses having to testify in a legal hearing. (a,c)
- When appropriate, allow children to testify in chambers. (a,c)
- Increase the use of GAL representatives to help children through the judicial process. (a,b)
- Provide additional training to judges in child abuse and neglect issues. (a,c)

Progress

- GAL representatives are increasingly being used. Guardians ad Litem served 15,234 children in FY 01-02, an increase of 3.1% from the previous year.
- Judges receive training and certification on juvenile issues, including child abuse and neglect, through the Institute of Government, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.
- Children's Justice Task Force will continue to examine other issues and will consider funding relevant projects through CJA grants.

Collect Court Data for Monitoring Successful Judicial Handling of Child Abuse Cases

Findings

Insufficient data systems constrain the state's ability to monitor the handling of child abuse and neglect cases. The Children's Justice Task Force partnered with the NC Department of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention (NC DJJDP) to develop a joint information system to track children involved in the juvenile justice system. The state implemented Phase 1-Intake, which includes information about violence in the child's family. However, that system will capture information only about the control and supervision of juvenile offenders, but lacks a method of gauging and sharing processing and tracking of juvenile cases through the courts. An integrated digital data network would improve efficiency, reduce court and processing time, and reduce trauma to child victims. A pilot program in the 11th District using a standard data system, Juvenile Casewise (JWise), noted success in tracking and monitoring child abuse and neglect cases, while ensuring confidentiality.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- Implement a standard data system to collect basic court statistics and track cases (a, b)
- Train court personnel on using the new data system (a, b)

Progress

- Several District Courts are piloting a standard data system to track and analyze the processing of cases with funding from the Governor's Crime Commission.
- The NC Administrative Office of the Courts plans to make JWisE operational in all District Courts within two years.
- NC Children's Justice Task Force plans to support the training of court personnel on JWisE.
- Children's Justice Task Force will continue to examine other issues and will consider funding relevant projects through CJA grants.

Investigative Handling

Enhance Investigative Expertise and Coordination in Order to Reduce Trauma to Child Victims

Findings

Another consistent theme was the limited knowledge and skills to conduct child abuse and neglect investigations. There is limited access to training due to cuts in budgets and knowledge of opportunities. A 6.5% increase of reports to NC Division of Social Services (NC DSS) over the last three years has increased the demand for training and skill building. With an increase in reports there is a greater need for coordination, particularly, among law enforcement, NC DSS, and (in child care settings) Division of Child Development.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- Improve collaboration among organizations that provide child abuse investigative training. (a)
- Enhance and promote training opportunities, especially in discipline-specific skill building, cultural competence, working with Latino families, domestic violence, and identifying resources. The greatest training needs are in advanced level, smaller courses that allow students to practice and test skills. (a)
- Coordinate efforts of key agencies in the investigation of child abuse and neglect. Increase funds allocated to the development of multi-disciplinary teams. (a)
- Enhance and expand efforts of Child Advocacy Centers (CAC). Twenty Child Advocacy Centers operate in North Carolina, mostly located in the Western half of the state. (a, b)
- Enhance funding for the development of service reporting and outcome management of CACs, their services, and the effectiveness of their programs. (a, b)
- Develop or enhance regional centers of resources, expertise, and training. (b)
- Link the Child Fatality Task Forces (CFTFs) to prevention efforts and the development of Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) across the state. (a, b)
- Consider integrating CFTFs into CACs and related agency operations where available to avoid duplication of service efforts and duplication of Multi-disciplinary Team (MDT) activities (a, b)

Progress

- Prevent Child Abuse NC has initiated a discussion with Children's Advocacy Centers of North Carolina and the Governor's Crime Commission to build capacity of Child Advocacy Centers across the state. The Governor's Crime Commission has supported 6 CACs with Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) and Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) funding since 2000.
- Children's Justice Task Force will continue to support a statewide conference providing training on discipline-specific skill building, such as investigative techniques.
- The NC Justice Academy offers several courses in child abuse investigative techniques and interviewing/evidence handling, especially pertaining to child sexual abuse.
- The Task Force will continue to review these recommendations and consider providing CJA funds in applicable areas where appropriate.

Strengthen Law Enforcement Response

Findings

Law Enforcement personnel are insufficiently trained in the area of interviewing child victims and suspected abusers. There is high turnover or reassignment of committed, dedicated and well-trained criminal child abuse investigators. Budget cuts have forced local law enforcement departments to restrict or eliminate training. Lack of data sharing and collaboration with other agencies results in poor case tracking.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- Increase **competency based training** through the Justice Academies, regional and local training opportunities, being careful to understand the issues associated with anatomically correct dolls, the uses/misuses and vulnerabilities they can cause in case interviewing. (a)
- Increase linkages to MDTs, provide incentives for local law enforcement to send/link their staffs to MDTs (e.g., provide travel and training stipends or reimbursements, computer access and training to utilize technology in a team format), and train law enforcement officers in effective professional MDT roles/responsibilities. (a)
- Increase training resources to allow law enforcement linkages to state, regional and local child medical evaluation training events/centers, supervision/collaboration, etc. so that law enforcement can see themselves as effective correlates to physical, psychosocial and forensic management of child abuse cases. (a)
- Increase technology resources and training to law enforcement for multi-agency data sharing and collaboration. (a)
- Provide children with victim advocates throughout the investigative and judicial process. (a, b).

Progress

- Law Enforcement personnel are being included in multi-disciplinary teams in communities with CACs.
- Guardian ad Litem (GAL) representatives are increasingly being used to assist victims during the judicial process.
- Children's Justice Task Force will continue to support a statewide conference providing training on discipline-specific skill building, such as investigative techniques.
- The Task Force will continue to review these recommendations and consider providing CJA funds for applicable projects where appropriate.

Expand the Use of Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs)

Findings

Children's Justice Task Force members and workshop participants consistently reported greater need for collaborative efforts, such as Multi-Disciplinary Teams, to reduce duplication and the number of interviews to which child victims are subjected and to pool resources.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- Consider integrating Child Fatality Task Forces (CFTFs) into Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) and related agency operations where available to avoid duplication of service efforts and duplication of MDT activities. (a, b)
- Increase funds allocated to the development of MDTs in rural and urban centers around the state. (b)
- Cultivate "lead agency" capacity for under-served areas where CACs or other medical centers will not be available. (a, b)
- Cautiously deploy videoconferencing technology to allow MDT access in under-served sites, but with appropriate supervision and management of the technology. (a, b)

- Increase funding to develop and implement training for members of MDTs, especially in discipline-specific skill building, cultural competence, working with Latino families, domestic violence, and identifying resources. The greatest training needs are in advanced level, smaller courses that allow students to practice and test skills. (a)

Progress

- Multi-Disciplinary Teams are utilized in Child Advocacy Centers across the state.
- The Task Force will continue to review these recommendations and will consider the appropriate use of CJA funds.

Increase Prosecutorial Effectiveness

Findings

Task Force members felt that child maltreatment cases are not highly prioritized or aggressively prosecuted.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- Enhance child victim advocacy programs operating in the offices of District Attorneys. (b)
- Provide more and better trained prosecutorial and judicial staff (a)
- Utilize data systems that effectively track/calendar/expedite case resolution (a, b)
- Improve coordination with Child Advocacy Centers (CAC), local law enforcement, and Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). (b)
- In collaboration with the Governor's Crime Commission, professional associations, and the Administrative Office of the Courts, encourage District Attorneys to place more importance on effective, serious prosecution of child abuse charges in their districts.

Progress

- The NC Attorney General's Office operates a Child Victim Assistance Program (CVAP) in 3 prosecutorial districts. CVAP advocates refer child victim and non-offending parent to needed services, participate on multidisciplinary teams, accompany victim to court, and provide assistance to Prosecutor to expedite cases. The Child Victim Assistance Program provides assistance to an average of 600 children annually.
- District Attorneys are partners in Multi-disciplinary Teams in areas with Child Advocacy Center, according to the latest survey of Child Advocacy Centers (1999).
- Children's Justice Task Force will continue to examine other issues and will consider funding relevant projects through CJA grants.

Improve Child Fatality Responses

Findings

Continued work is needed to improve responses to child fatalities. In 1997, the NC General Assembly established the state Child Fatality Review Team to conduct in-depth reviews of any child fatalities, in families involved with Social Services, due to maltreatment. The collaborative, multi-disciplinary reviews provide learning tools to prevent and improve response to child fatalities. The assessments revealed areas of improvement in public education, collaboration, consistent protocols, and Division of Social Services (DSS) intake tools. Inconsistency has been noted in the prosecution and adjudication of perpetrators. Counties with military bases (Cumberland and Onslow) are witnessing the highest rates of child fatalities in the state. In military communities, there are collaboration issues associated with jurisdictional questions about how to handle investigations and prosecutions when abuse occurs on a federal installation.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- DSS should improve assessment, particularly around issues of current safety, risk of future harm, and broad-based family assessments. (c)
- All agencies investigating child fatalities should use consistent protocols in response. (c)
- Continue efforts to educate and encourage the public and community professionals to report suspected child abuse and neglect (a)
- Improve CPS intake and in recognizing when information on open cases constitutes a new report. (c)
- Improve information sharing among community agencies, across NC county lines, and among states. (a)
- Improve collaboration between the Division of Social Services and mental health agencies. (a, c)
- Provide public education on child safety issues. (a)
- Link the Child Fatality Task Forces (CFTFs) to prevention efforts and the development of Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) across the state (a, b)
- Continue to fund CFTFs for important post-fatality information fact-finding, community awareness, and interagency collaboration (a)
- Consider integrating CFTFs into CACs and related agency operations where available to avoid duplication of service efforts and duplication of MDT activities. (a, b)
- CJA Committee/GCC should work with federal agencies, state and local military and civilian communities to facilitate protocols where investigations are more smoothly and positively managed, and where prosecutions are coordinated so that victims are appropriately served and perpetrators appropriately investigated/managed by the responsible authorities. (a, c)

Progress

- The Children's Justice Task Force continues to support dissemination and training on *Not Invisible, Not in Vain*, a "best practice" manual for the 32 agencies and professions that may be involved in the aftermath of a child maltreatment fatality.
- The Children's Justice Task Force is supporting the publication and distribution of a first-ever, long-term (1985-2001) study of child homicide rates for all 100 NC counties, due for release by Fall 2003. The first report from the study, analysis on mothers of abandoned or killed NC newborns, has been published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA). Additionally, this research examines the criminal consequences of child abuse homicide in North Carolina.
- In session 2001, the NC General Assembly passed HB 275/SB 252 (Infant Homicide Prevention Act) to decriminalize abandonment of an infant under the age of seven days in certain circumstances.
- Children's Justice Task Force plans to support public education and professional training on the Infant Homicide Prevention Act.
- Children's Justice Task Force will continue to examine other issues and will consider funding relevant projects through CJA grants.

Administrative Handling

Improve Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect to Social Services

Findings

Inconsistent handling and suspected under-reporting of Social Services cases exist across counties and districts. The North Carolina Child Protection system is supervised by the state, but administered by the counties, allowing for great variation in interpretation of rules. Although reports of child abuse and neglect have increased, the public, particularly within the Latino community, lacks education on identification of abuse, how to report, and protection for reporters. Under-reporting and inconsistencies also have been found in governmental agencies (juvenile detention centers and training schools) that assume temporary custody of children. State agencies are subject to investigation by local departments of social services, which is a conflict of interest.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- Address which agency should be responsible for investigation of governmental caretakers. (c)
- Clarify and provide training on administrative rules and procedures for reporting and investigating suspected abuse and neglect of children who are temporarily in custody of other government agencies (a, c)
- Enhance the Multiple Response System implemented and supported by NC Division of Social Services (NC DSS) (b, c)
- Address inconsistencies among county social services departments—staff education, screened out reports, basis of substantiation (a, c)
- Increase public awareness of reporting laws. (a)
- Consider creating an 1-800 phone number to report child abuse and neglect (b)
- Review of policies/procedures from a family point of view.(c)
- Identify and improve state level collection of data on child abuse and neglect reports. Identify the data being collected and the gaps in data. Study the causes and underlying issues of increased reporting (a)
- Work with the NCDSS to develop training across the state that standardizes definitions and interpretations of “substantiation”, using example case situations that translate into data interpretation and data input – training social workers not only how to define and substantiate abuse in standard ways, work with databases and data screens to more effectively document case findings and case progress. (a, c)
- Work with county DSS directors to develop standardization techniques and methods for improving substantiation definitions, documentation and data. (a, c)
- Develop software programs that force clear choices for data definitions based on county and state DSS input, such as pull-down menus or pick lists that standardize child abuse investigative findings and case progress indicators in county. (b)
- Define how data from MRS pilot counties will differ from traditional response counties. (b)
- Enhance and promote training opportunities, especially in discipline-specific skill building, cultural competence, working with Latino families, domestic violence, and identifying resources. The greatest training needs are in advanced level, smaller courses that allow students to practice and test skills, and in cross training. (a)

Progress

- NC DSS is piloting an alternative system of response to reports of abuse and neglect, which incorporates and builds on family strengths, involves families in decisions and services for child, and promotes greater collaboration with economic resources and investigation partners. The Multiple Response System, MRS, offers two approaches to abuse and neglect reports—the traditional, forensic approach for severe cases and an alternative approach that partners with families and provides services for less severe cases. Families are fully engaged in MRS through shared decision making even if child is placed outside of the home. MRS is currently being piloted and evaluated in ten counties.
- The Children’s Justice Task Force continues to support public education on reporting child abuse and neglect.
- Children’s Justice Task Force will continue to examine other issues and will consider funding relevant projects through CJA grants.

Address Problems Faced by Children’s Services Workers

Findings

One of the consistently echoed themes before the Task Force was problems faced by NC DSS Children’s Services workers. These include insufficient salaries, high turnover, unmanageable caseloads, lack of training, and transportation. Training and professional development, in particular, are a great need. Approximately 30%

of Children's Services workers are professionally educated as social workers (statewide data). Some agencies may not have an MSW (Master of Social Work degree) on staff.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- Work with the NC Legislature and State Personnel to find ways to more adequately compensate Children's Services workers, to reduce staff turnover, and to fully train them as functioning members of Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs) along with their child protection legal responsibilities. (a, c)
- Work with NCDSS to find ways to decrease Children's Services caseloads so that more effective investigations and case management approaches can be implemented and evaluated (reallocation of resources, realign divisions, etc.). (a)
- Increase federal, state or local funding to enhance Children's Services working practice, including funding for transportation, supervision of visitation and/or appointment-keeping, etc. (a)
- Increase competency-based training in the specifics of child abuse investigations including (but not limited to) legal issues, chain of evidence, judicial aspects, psychological and psychosocial/emotional correlates, effective case management practices, and MDT integration/involvement. Provide training in skill building, cultural competence, working with Latino families, domestic violence, and identifying resources. The greatest training needs are in advanced level, smaller courses that allow students to practice and test skills, and in cross training. (a)
- Enhance funding to provide more Children's Services workers across the state (a, c)

Progress

- Social workers are usually included in Multi-Disciplinary Teams in communities with Child Advocacy Center (CACs).
- Children's Justice Task Force will continue to support a statewide conference providing training on child abuse and neglect awareness, along with discipline-specific skills building.
- This year, Prevent Child Abuse NC, with support from the Children's Task Force, organized professional training series, Building Skills to Support Latino Families, in the Central, Western and Eastern regions of the state.
- The Task Force will continue to study these recommendations and where appropriate consider CJA grants for programs which further these recommendations.

Legislative Review Child Abuse and Neglect Statutes

Findings

The language in the North Carolina statutes criminalize abuse and neglect in a way that affects service provision to families in need and essential protection for children at risk of further victimization.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- Conduct a comprehensive review of the statutes to avoid the continual piecemeal changes and to decriminalize the neglect and abuse statutes as much as possible by moving towards families and children in need of protection/services (c).
- Encourage consistent and fair consequences for perpetrators of child abuse and neglect. (c)
- Address limitations in statutes that restrict information sharing among professionals involved in child abuse and neglect cases and may compromise a child's safety (c).
- Determine the jurisdiction of cases diverted from the court process and ensure child victims, their families, and offender receive access to needed services.(c)

Progress

- In session 2001, the NC General Assembly passes two laws mandating consistency in sexual abuse cases and decriminalizing infant abandonment. HB 1276 closed the legal loophole that exists under the state's incest laws by equalizing punishments for crimes committed against children without regard to familial status. HB 275/SB 252 (Infant Homicide Prevention Act) decriminalized abandonment of an infant under the age of seven days in certain circumstances.
- Children's Justice Task Force will continue to examine other issues and will consider funding relevant projects through CJA grants.

Services

Expand and Enhance Services for Spanish-Speaking Victims

Findings

The Latino population is the fastest growing of any state. The Latino population has increased an estimated 400% over the last ten years and projected to continue to grow. There is a significant deficiency of bi-lingual service providers and training on cultural competency.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- Enhance bi-lingual services for victims and their families, as well as bi-lingual court assistance (a, b)
- Enhance cross-cultural and competency training to all professionals who work with Latino families. (a)
- Increase the number of bi-lingual and bi-cultural professionals to work with Latino families through active recruitment of Latino students/professionals and providing innovative incentives to retain trained staff. (a, b)

Progress

- This year, Prevent Child Abuse NC, with support from the Children's Task Force, organized professional training series, Building Skills to Support Latino Families, in the Central, Western and Eastern regions of the state.
- Children's Justice Task Force will continue to examine other issues and will consider funding relevant projects through CJA grants.

Enhance the Provision of Services to Abused Children

Findings

Support and treatment services for child victims, offenders, non-offending parents, and families are not widely available and readily accessible, particularly for families at-risk of abuse and neglect. There are not enough services and staff for Spanish-speaking victims and families. Financial reimbursement for child victims is routinely delayed and insufficient to cover all expenses.

Recommendations (CJA Categories)

- Provide funding for immediate psychological and physical treatment for victims of child abuse, to include services that may not necessarily be included in current NC Mental Health System Reform recommendations (e.g., psychological testing through Local Management Entities (LMEs) and not limited to only the Child Medical Evaluation (CME) program; home-based crisis evaluation and treatment services in a limited set of sessions for family evaluation and stabilization) (b, c)
- Provide training, technical resources, and funding for treatment of family support members (e.g., non-offenders, extended family) (a)

- Provide case management and case follow-up funding to ensure appropriate integration of Multi-disciplinary team-developed and implemented services; link case outcomes via data systems so that all team members can follow benchmarks and know case progress both in the legal and treatment systems. (a, b)
- Enhance bi-lingual services for victims and their families, as well as bi-lingual court assistance. (a, b)
- Enhance cross-cultural and competency training for all professionals. (a)
- Enhance skill-based and competency-driven training for all professionals who may work with victims. (a)
- Consider moving toward a certification or credentialing program that identifies child protective services (CPS), law enforcement, forensic, and mental health professionals as having achieved certain core skills to effectively work with victims and their families. (a, b, c)
- Expand and enhance funding to the Child Medical Evaluation (CME) program, including the development of additional medical and evaluation centers in under-served portions of the state. (a)
- Develop and implement flexible funding streams to allow CPS, medical and other crisis responders to purchase emergency care, supplies, and shelter for qualifying families. (b, c)
- Enhance and expand funding for court-appointed attorneys for victims. (a, b)
- Enhance and expand funding for the development of Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) in under-served portions of the state; provide training and technical assistance (CAC-to-CAC mentoring) to help new sites formulate their programs/services. (a, b)
- Enhance the development and utilization of multi-disciplinary teams across the state, locating lead agencies where Child Advocacy Centers are not available. (a, b)
- In collaboration with Victim's Compensation, explore ways to enhance compensation for child victims and expand the definition of services eligible for compensation. (a, b, c)
- Provide more treatment resources for non-offending parents, child victims and offenders. (a, b, c)
- Develop Family Resource centers. (b)

Progress

- The Children's Justice Task Force utilizes funding from other sources administered by the Governor's Crime Commission, in addition to CJA funds, to enhance services for victims of child abuse and neglect.

Sources

Child Well-Being and Domestic Violence Task Force, *Final Report (February 2003)*;

Children's Services Section, NC Department of Health & Human Services, *State Child Fatality Review Report (January 2003)*.

North Carolina Administrative Office of the Courts, *Abuse and Neglect Complaints Alleged in Juvenile Petitions (July 1, 2001-June 30, 2002)* and *Adjudicatory Hearings for Juvenile Petitions (July 1, 2001-June 30, 2002)*.

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North Carolina Department of Health & Human Services, Division of Social Services, *(State Fiscal Years 2000-2002)*;

Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina, *Child Abuse Trends in North Carolina-Draft #4 (State Fiscal Years 1996-1999)*;