

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

Juvenile Justice Model Courts



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“Assessing our performance as a court and as a probation department through the Key Principles of the Juvenile Delinquency Guidelines allowed us to see how successful we were in some areas and also challenged us to improve in others. Through the Model Court process, we have created an environment of continual self-assessment, improvement, and evaluation in the context of a working collaboration of child-serving agencies. We are focused on using detention and probation only for the right purposes, and not inappropriately pulling youth further into the juvenile justice system.”

HONORABLE PATRICIA ESCHER
PIMA COUNTY, ARIZONA

INTRODUCTION

The **VISION** of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges is for a society in which every family and child has access to fair, equal, effective, and timely justice.

The **MISSION** of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges is to provide all judges, courts, and related agencies involved with juvenile, family, and domestic violence cases with the knowledge and skills to improve the lives of the families and children who seek justice.

JUVENILE DELINQUENCY GUIDELINES

Juvenile and family court judges, Congressional leaders, federal agencies, and private foundations have long-recognized the need for a national effort focusing on improving court practice in juvenile delinquency cases. To this end, the project sought to mirror the successful NCJFCJ Victim Act Model Courts Project (dependency court) effort and began recruiting implementation sites across the nation. After three years of work by over 100 experts in juvenile justice and allied fields, the *Juvenile Delinquency Guidelines: Improving Court Practice in Juvenile Delinquency Cases* was published in 2005 for use by judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, child advocates, probation officers, law enforcement, and service providers nationwide.

JUVENILE JUSTICE MODEL COURTS PROJECT

Since the publication of the Juvenile Delinquency Guidelines, the focus of the project has been to disseminate the document and encourage its use by jurisdictions to help guide system reform and improve practice in delinquency cases. To this end, the project sought to mirror the successful NCJFCJ Victim Act Model Courts Project (dependency court) effort and began recruiting implementation sites across the nation. These Juvenile Justice Model Courts work closely with NCJFCJ staff to implement the 16 Key Principles and numerous recommendations for practice in the Juvenile Delinquency Guidelines to help achieve improved delinquency case processing and outcomes for youth, families, and communities. Participation is an intensive effort, involving all stakeholders in the system for which NCJFCJ provides training, technical assistance, assessment, and strategic planning so that “Model” Courts can serve as laboratories for systems change and improvement. As part of this effort, judicial leadership and effective collaboration are viewed as essential for project success.

16 KEY PRINCIPLES OF THE JUVENILE DELINQUENCY GUIDELINES

1. Juvenile delinquency court judges should engage in judicial leadership and encourage system collaboration.
2. Juvenile delinquency systems must have adequate staff, facilities, and program resources.
3. Juvenile delinquency courts and juvenile abuse and neglect courts should have integrated one family-one judge case assignments.
4. Juvenile delinquency court judges should have the same status as the highest level of trial court in the state and should have multiple year or permanent assignments.
5. All members of the juvenile delinquency court shall treat youth, families, crime victims, witnesses, and others with respect, dignity, courtesy, and cultural understanding.
6. Juvenile delinquency court judges should ensure their systems divert cases to alternative systems whenever possible and appropriate.
7. Youth charged in the formal juvenile delinquency court must have qualified and adequately compensated legal representation.
8. Juvenile delinquency court judges should ensure crime victims have access to all phases of the juvenile delinquency court process and receive all services to which they are entitled by law.
9. Juvenile delinquency courts should render timely and just decisions and trials should conclude without continuances.
10. Juvenile delinquency system staff should engage parents and families at all stages of the juvenile delinquency court process to encourage family members to participate fully in the development and implementation of the youth's intervention plan.
11. The juvenile delinquency court should engage the school and other community support systems as stakeholders in each individual youth's case.
12. Juvenile delinquency court judges should ensure court dispositions are individualized and include graduated responses, both sanctions and incentives.
13. Juvenile delinquency court judges should ensure effective post-disposition review is provided to each delinquent youth as long as the youth is involved in any component of the juvenile justice system.
14. Juvenile delinquency court judges should hold their systems and the systems of other juvenile delinquency court stakeholders accountable.
15. Juvenile delinquency court judges should ensure the court has an information system that can generate the data necessary to evaluate performance, facilitate information sharing with appropriate agencies, and manage operations information.
16. The juvenile delinquency court judge is responsible to ensure that the judiciary, court staff, and all system participants are both individually trained and trained across systems and roles.



Model Court Success

“The Juvenile Justice Model Courts Project allowed our community the freedom to experiment with new service plans for youth. We were able to collaborate with treatment agencies and get the kids the mental health, substance abuse and family counseling that they need, while still providing for public safety.”

— **Honorable Paul Buchanan**
Erie County, New York

“The very concept of the Juvenile Justice Model Court enabled Hamilton County Juvenile Court to take a constructive review of our process, operations, and services. The Key Principles helped us to see where we were and where we wanted to go. We haven't looked back since.”

— **Honorable Thomas Lipps and Mr. John Shore**
Hamilton County, Ohio

For more information on the NCJFCJ or Juvenile Justice Model Courts Project, please visit www.ncjfcj.org or e-mail jfld@ncjfcj.org

Model Court Success Cont'd



The Pima County Juvenile Court, a Juvenile Justice Model Court site since 2005, publishes an Annual Report Card to Stakeholders on its performance around ensuring community safety, offender accountability, and competency development. For example, Pima County reported in 2008 that 65% of closed cases had paid all restitution obligations, and 92% of closed cases had paid at least some portion of restitution obligations.

The Erie County Juvenile Court, a Juvenile Justice Model Court site since 2007, engaged the University at Buffalo, SUNY, Program Evaluation Center to conduct an ongoing evaluation of its Model Court efforts. Findings from these evaluations revealed a significant reduction in system penetration for youth, and a significant reduction in number of days to disposition for youth in the system. As a result, the evaluators recommended that the interventions developed through the project "...should be replicated in other model courts that also want to improve the[se] two outcomes."

In Salt Lake County, Utah, since the implementation of process changes related to the Juvenile Delinquency Guidelines, the median number of the days from offense to arraignment for detained youth was reduced from six to three days, the median number of hearings from arraignment to adjudication was reduced from two to one hearing, and the percent of incidents adjudicated within 30 days of the offense increased from 57% to 75%.



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