

## *Beyond the Numbers* Ohio's Response to the Child and Family Services Review

### For These Reasons and More

In Ohio in 2003, a total of 43,219 children were substantiated as victims of child abuse or neglect.

On an average day, Ohio has over 20,000 children under the care of Ohio's public children services agencies.

The number of children in foster care has nearly doubled since the mid-1980s.

Ohio, along with 16 other states, did not comply with *any* of the Children and Family Service Review (CFSR) standards in protecting children and finding safe, permanent homes for those who have suffered abuse or neglect. No state passed the entire review.

Up to \$50 million of fiscal sanctions each year could be Ohio's penalty for failing to improve our CFSR performance; money that could have gone to services for children in need.

### Project Summary

*Beyond the Numbers - Ohio's Response to the CFSR* is a Supreme Court of Ohio project designed to improve both local practice in abuse, neglect and dependency cases and our state's CFSR performance. Although driven by a judicial planning committee of judges and magistrates from across the state, it is designed to involve local and regional representatives from many disciplines. The ultimate goal of the project is to bring these interdisciplinary teams together to ensure the safety and well-being of the children at the heart of these cases by assisting them in achieving timely permanency and stability.

The Supreme Court of Ohio first piloted *Beyond the Numbers* in the northwest region of the state (Ohio Association of Juvenile Court Judges District 1). This region includes Defiance, Fulton, Hancock, Henry, Lucas, Ottawa, Paulding, Putnam, Sandusky, Seneca, Van Wert, Williams, and Wood counties. The project's three-stage process includes the following components:

1. **Statewide Judicial Symposium.** This symposium, titled *The Role of the Judiciary in Abuse, Neglect and Dependency Cases*, was held on May 7, 2004. The goal of this seminar was three-fold: (a) increase understanding of the CFSR findings and local data, (b) review the challenge of the courts, legal system and all stakeholders of the child protection system to see "through the eyes of the child," and (c) define and encourage effective and appropriate judicial leadership in this area.
2. **Regional Gatherings.** Regions are defined by the seven districts of the Ohio Association of Juvenile Court Judges. With each region, two regional gatherings were held as follows:

**Judicial District Meetings** were designed to allow judges, magistrates and court administrators to increase their awareness and understanding of the findings and possible sanctions of Ohio's CFSR, and to encourage judicial leadership in this area. The OAJCJ District 1 pilot group of judges met in June, 2004, in Bowling Green. Each judicial district held this initial meeting by the end of 2005.

**Regional Stakeholder Sessions** were held before and after local meetings, depending on the county, with at least a local judge and public children service agency director from each county invited to discuss their common goals, understand the local data and findings of the CFSR, and begin to identify systemic factors that could be improved through an action plan. By January 2006, all districts had held Regional Stakeholders' meetings, with judges and court staff and public children service agency directors and staff in attendance. The Supreme Court of Ohio, in consultation with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, developed and distributed an assessment tool for courts to use to identify systemic trends in abuse, neglect and dependency cases.

3. **Local/County Planning and Implementation.** Meetings will be on-going or as needed, convened by the juvenile court judge(s), and will include a variety of community stakeholders. This team will work together to evaluate current child protection practices, and design and commit to ways to improve and assess progress while strengthening oversight of these cases. To encourage and support local implementation, the Supreme Court of Ohio is providing every county in Ohio with the opportunity to attend a one and one half day caseload management workshop. The workshop, adapted from a national dependency caseload curriculum, consists of a series of structured exercises that allow each county's multidisciplinary team to analyze current practices, identify areas for change, and begin the development of a plan to improve local case management processes. Each team is assigned its own trained facilitator for the duration of the workshop. In addition, the Supreme Court of Ohio is providing facilitation assistance and support to counties to assist them in fully implementing the *Beyond the Numbers* initiative locally.

In December, 2004, the Ohio Association of Juvenile Court Judges adopted a resolution supporting the efforts of the *Beyond the Numbers* project and pledging full participation and cooperation in improving Ohio's compliance with the CFSR. To date, 79 of Ohio's 88 counties have participated in this initiative.

In May 2006, the Supreme Court of Ohio distributed the **DEPENDENCY DOCKET BENCH CARDS for Ohio Family and Juvenile Court Judges and Magistrates**, a resource developed to encourage consistent and sound practices that support both comprehensive and timely judicial action. The Bench Cards are designed to be used in conjunction with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges' Resource Guidelines. The Supreme Court is also providing resources, recommended meeting agendas, and other support to implement this project. For more information, contact Jessica Shimberg Lind, Program Manager, at (614)387-9453 or (800)826-9010 or via e-mail at [lindj@sconet.state.oh.us](mailto:lindj@sconet.state.oh.us).