

The Dependency Case Processing Initiative

A Review and Recommendations

*State Foster Care Review Board
and the
Court Improvement Program*



Fiscal Year 2018

Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Dependency Case Processing Initiative	2
DCPI Initiatives from Around the State	3
Effective Parent Engagement	3
Maricopa County – Parent 4 Parent	4
Mohave County – Program Specialist.....	4
Pima County – Early Parent Engagement, Family Navigator	5
Yuma County – Family Support Specialist	6
Gila County – Progress Conference Program	6
Graham County – Community Coordinator.....	6
Mediation	7
Coconino County – Increased Mediation	7
Maricopa County – Enhanced Mediation	7
Navajo County – Enhanced Mediation	8
Pima County – Reunification Progress Mediation, Expansion of Mediation.....	8
Yavapai County – Mandatory Initial Progress Mediation (IPM)	9
Caseflow Management, Data Tracking, Information Sharing	9
Apache County – Caseflow Management.....	10
Maricopa County – Juvenile Access Exchange, Improvements to Current Data Tracking System, Improved Statistical Reporting.....	10
Specialized Programs	12
Maricopa County – Downtown Calendar Pilot, Expedited Permanency Process.....	12
Pima County – Dependency Alternative Program (DAP).....	13
Pinal County – Baby Court Calendar	14
Recommendations	14

The Dependency Case Processing Initiative

A Review and Recommendations by the State Foster Care Review Board and the Court Improvement Program, Fiscal Year 2018

Introduction

The Arizona Legislature established the Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) process in 1978 to review the case of each child who is in out-of-home placement and the subject of a dependency action. State Senator Jim Kolbe introduced the legislation, Governor Bruce Babbitt signed the bill into law, and the first “Board” of five volunteers met in 1979. Today, boards meet regularly in all 15 Arizona counties.

The FCRB is comprised of five member “Boards” that meet regularly to review the efforts of the child welfare agency, now the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS), in obtaining a permanent home for each child in-care. Based on information provided by the parties and professionals involved in the child’s case, and statements made by meeting attendees, the Board makes findings and recommendations to the assigned juvenile court judge.

On an administrative level, the State Foster Care Review Board, or State Board, with representatives from local Boards and the community at large, reviews and coordinates FCRB activities. The State Board has, in years past, reported on trends and promising practices related to the administration of dependency cases. In preparation for this report, State Board members were interested in the significant efforts being made by county courts as part of the Dependency Case Processing Initiative (DCPI) for which they were granted additional funding to expedite permanency for children in care. The following report provides information on these efforts and recommendations for future activities.

Dependency Case Processing Initiative

Arizona Juvenile Courts have a history of leadership in adopting innovative practices. With the introduction of the “model court” process in 1999, courts throughout the state adopted changes that would lead to significant changes, including a reduction in the time that children spend in foster care. Since that time, numerous initiatives have

been undertaken to improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of children. For example, courts led efforts to create local teams with representatives from child welfare and behavioral health to monitor and act on behalf of infants and toddlers in care. Recent efforts have seen Courts developing specialized protocols to govern practices around “crossover youth”, children involved in both juvenile dependency and delinquency matters. These are just two of many examples of how Arizona courts have led and continue to act as agents of positive change for Arizona’s most vulnerable children.

While Arizona Juvenile Courts have made consistent efforts on behalf of children and families, they have, however, been significantly affected by a dramatic increase in the number of children in care. At the end of FY2008 there were 10,200 children in care but, by the end of FY2012, there were more than 18,000 children in care. The system’s resources were severely strained and continued growth was expected. It became more difficult for courts to handle the caseloads and children began to spend more time in foster care.

With the passage of House Bill 2695 in 2016, the Arizona Legislature provided a one-time disbursement of three million dollars for juvenile courts to find ways to expedite permanency and safely reduce the number of children involved in the juvenile dependency process. The grant process, termed the *Dependency Case Processing Initiative (DCPI)*, provided monies to individual juvenile courts based on the number of children with an open dependency petition in their jurisdiction. The Dependent Children’s Services Division (DCSD) of the Administrative Office of the Courts worked with juvenile courts to develop and monitor plans to utilize the funding over the two-year grant cycle. Following are details about some of the extraordinary work done by our courts.

DCPI Initiatives from Around the State

Effective Parent Engagement

The more a parent understands and is involved in their child welfare case, the more likely there will be positive outcomes. Parents participating in a class to orient them to the dependency court process, *Dependency 101*, showed improvements in compliance with the case plan, visitation, and attendance at court hearings.¹ This kind of class provides an opportunity for introductions and discussions with professionals (attorneys, social workers, etc.) about their role in these cases. These classes also provide an opportunity for mentor parents, those who have been through the process before, to interact with parents new to the dependency process. There has been an increase in the use of mentor parents, also known as *parent partners* or *veteran*

¹ NCJFCJ (2011). *Parent to Parent Outcome Evaluation* (King County).

parents, to improve parent involvement in child welfare services by providing much needed support, information, and advocacy.² Mentor parents are uniquely suited to build trusting relationships with parents new to the child welfare system. They provide support, encourage parents to participate, and serve as an example of the success to which a parent new to a dependency can aspire.³ Recognizing the potential for improved outcomes, several Arizona County Courts chose to initiate or enhance parent engagement efforts with their allotted DCPI funds.

Maricopa County – Parent 4 Parent

The court contracted with the Family Involvement Center (FIC) to implement the Parent 4 Parent (P4P) program. P4P is a peer outreach and education program that provides parents currently involved in a dependency matter with a “Parent Ally” who has successfully navigated the child welfare system. FIC and Parent Allies work with key court staff to deliver regular Helping Other Parents Engage (HOPE) orientation classes for parents currently involved in an open court case.

In the past year, 153 parents attended one of the monthly HOPE classes. In surveys completed after taking the HOPE class, parents were more apt to believe DCS would be fair and would help them get the support they needed. These parents also reported a better understanding of the roles of the professionals involved in their cases.

Efforts are underway to identify more funding to grow the P4P program. Parent Allies have begun to successfully help their clients navigate the court process as well as the medical and behavioral health systems. They are in a unique position to help parents and their children connect to valuable services.

Mohave County – Program Specialist

For cases involving a child aged birth to five, the Program Specialist engages family members and stakeholders to improve participation, answer questions, and positively impact overall case processes. The Program Specialist attends Court Team Steering Committee Meetings, the Statewide Child Welfare Roundtable, and other dependency stakeholder meetings to increase communication between the court and behavioral health agencies, MIKID parent support, DCS, and attorneys. Finally, the Program Specialist facilitates the Pre-hearing Conference and conducts most of the dependency mediations.

² Edward Cohen and Linda Canan (2006). *Closer to Home: Parent Mentors in Child Welfare*. Child Welfare, 85, 867-884.

³ T. Borkman. *Experiential Knowledge: A New Concept for the Analysis of Self-help Groups*. Social Service Review, 50, 445-446.

Prior to this initiative, the average number of days between the petition filing and first adjudication was 44 days but, with the introduction of the Program Specialist, this has been reduced to 21 days. Secondly, the average days from dependency petition filing to the Permanency Hearing was reduced from 221 to 163 days. And, lastly, the average days from dependency petition filing to either severance or case closure (cases closed for reunification, guardianship, or another permanency outcome) was reduced from 216 to 203 days.

The Program Specialist will continue to advance the dependency mediation program and coordinate with stakeholders to improve dependency court processes and outcomes.

Pima County – Early Parent Engagement, Family Navigator

Early Parent Engagement – The court contracted with Aviva Children’s Services to implement Parents 4 Parents (P4P), a peer outreach and education program that provides to parents currently involved in a dependency matter a “Parent Ally” who has successfully navigated the child welfare system.

Aviva Children’s Services initiated work on the model in December 2017 and the program officially kicked off on January 22, 2018.

From January 22, 2018 to June 30, 2018, Parent Allies met with 103 parents at court hearings. Of the 67 parents supported between January and March 2018, 11% attended Aviva’s “Parents Helping Parents” support group. Parent Allies referred 46 parents to the “What is Dependency” class held by the court.

Court staff will continue ongoing discussions with Aviva’s Executive Director regarding the program’s status, growth and sustainability.

Family Navigator – This position regularly received referrals from judges, attorneys, child welfare, and other professionals and offered parents a variety of services including a review of the court process, emotional support, transportation, housing, behavioral health enrollment, and referral to the Arizona Families First program.

From June 1, 2017 to June 30, 2018, Navigators spoke with 895 new parents and worked with 365 return parents. Family Navigators taught 40 “What is Dependency” classes, attended by 128 people.

The Family Navigator program ended in September 2018 when DCPI funding was no longer available.

Yuma County – Family Support Specialist

The Family Support Specialist (FSS) position was created to engage and educate parents and help them navigate the dependency process. The court also offered *Dependency 101* classes to parents and developed a Parent Mentor Model that was to use Parent Allies to work with new parents involved in the system. However, the funding ended before the Parent Mentor Model could be implemented.

During FY2018, the court tracked the following statistics:

- 84 dependency petitions were filed during the year;
- 56 parents received FSS case management support and information;
- 16 parents participated and completed Dependency 101 class;
- The FSS attended 37 Preliminary Protective Conferences and 41 Preliminary Protective Hearings.

Due to the discontinuation of DCPI funding, the county will no longer be able to maintain the FSS position but is still committed to offering regular Dependency 101 classes.

Gila County – Progress Conference Program

At the Progress Conference, the Progress Facilitator meets with the parents, a designee from DCS, assigned attorneys, and local service providers. The focus is to help parents with the case plan through education and assistance with scheduling required services. The Progress Facilitator promptly provides the court with a detailed report on the services and the outcomes of the parent's efforts.

The data collected from this effort was not conclusive. While the Permanency hearing was held sooner for cases utilizing the Progress Conference Program (218 days from removal versus 235 days for those cases not using this process), the number of days to dismissal increased for those cases utilizing this model (313 days from removal versus 292 days for those cases not using this process). The court is requesting additional county funding to continue the model for one more year.

Graham County – Community Coordinator

The Community Coordinator position was established to deliver direct support to parents in dependency cases, in part, by providing consistent reminders regarding appointments, services, and court hearings, all to ensure greater parental participation and success.

The position was hired in June 2018 and was not able to begin working with parents until August 2018; therefore, the county did not provide any measurable outcomes but plans to continue the effort in FY2019.

Mediation

The use of alternative dispute resolution, or “mediation”, is seen by many court experts as an effective means to resolve issues in child abuse and neglect cases. Mediation is successful in producing agreements.⁴ It presents an option to the familiar adversarial proceeding which pits the child welfare agency against the parents, a conflict that frequently leads to poor communication and little collaboration. In a study of child welfare mediation, case processing timeframes were positively impacted by the mediation process, with cases randomly assigned to mediation reaching adjudication, disposition, and permanency more quickly than control group cases processed without the benefit of mediation. Mediation seems to facilitate more long-term permanency with lower reentry into care rates.⁵ When used correctly, mediation brings parties together on a more equal footing, allowing greater potential for agreement and buy in on tasks and activities that will ultimately affect the safety, permanency and well-being of the child. Understanding the potential benefits, several counties chose to utilize DCPI funds for mediation related efforts.

Coconino County – Increased Mediation

The court chose to increase the amount of mediation available for dependency cases. They continue to utilize facilitators and mediators for the Pre-hearing Conference and contested Dependency Adjudications.

The use of additional mediators/facilitators resulted in a significant reduction in Review of Temporary Custody (Rule 51) hearings and contested Dependency Adjudications. By the end of FY2018, 91% of the Preliminary Protective Hearings in which a facilitator led the Pre-hearing Conference did not require a separate Review of Temporary Custody Hearing. Additionally, the contested Adjudication Hearing was vacated in 31% of the cases utilizing mediation.

Coconino County will advocate for additional funds to provide facilitators and mediators as required by statute.

Maricopa County – Enhanced Mediation

Enhanced mediations were formally implemented across all three Maricopa County court locations in April 2017. Shortly after, the mediation workgroup,

⁴ Thoennes N. (2009). What We Know Now: Findings From Dependency Mediation Research. Family Court Review, 47(1), January 2009, 21-37.

⁵ Gatowski, S. (2005). Mediation in Child Protection Cases: An Evaluation of the Washington, D.C. Family Court Child Protection Mediation Program. NCJFCJ, April 2005.

comprised of representatives from various attorney groups, DCS, judicial officers, and court staff, developed a training curriculum that incorporated enhanced mediation and conference practices. The mediation workgroup continues to meet monthly to improve practices and has established goals including improvement of full disclosure rates prior to mediation. The workgroup produced a Mediation Referral Form to help improve timely disclosure.

Successful future efforts will allow staff to:

- Perform issue-specific mediations;
- Hold “mediation on demand” when attorneys and case managers request mediation without the prompting of a judge;
- Conduct mediations for probation matters;
- Conduct “permanency” or “reunification at risk” mediations when a case is not moving forward and/or when a party is planning to request a change in the case plan;
- Improve mediation data tracking and reporting.

Navajo County – Enhanced Mediation

The county initially utilized a retired judicial officer as a mediator and, when this position became vacant, they hired an attorney into the role.

They saw a 25% reduction in the average number of days to case closure from 2015 (585 days) to 2016 (436 days). They will continue to utilize the current mediator and will track how long cases remain open to illustrate the effectiveness of a well-managed mediation process.

Pima County – Reunification Progress Mediation, Expansion of Mediation

Reunification Progress Mediation (RPM) – In cases where all children subject to the petition are under the age of three at the time of removal, mediations are scheduled very early in the case. The issues addressed in the sessions are based on the needs of each family member, and may include services, placement, visitation, family strengths, transition planning, barriers to reunification, and concurrent case planning.

The Reunification Progress Mediation (RPM) pilot was initiated in three court divisions and, from its initiation in October 2017 through June 2018, there were 12 RPM sessions. Given the relatively low number of cases assigned an RPM, the court reviewed, and made changes to, the process by which this assignment occurs. There were 24 sessions scheduled between July 1, 2018 and December 31, 2018. The court will continue to use the RPM process.

Expansion of Mediation (Dispute Resolution) – The Dispute Resolution Program now includes mediation, pre-hearing conference facilitation, the Family Navigator Program, the Dependency Alternative Program, and the Adoptions Program. The Mediation Program handbook and Administrative Assistant Training manual were finalized and distributed to staff.

The support from additional administrative staff continues to help the expansion of the program in several critical areas including Family Law Protocols, the Dependency Alternative Program, Reunification Progress Mediations, child support mediation training and development, and the development of a program handbook. A total of 3,623 mediation sessions were scheduled and 3,065 hours were spent in mediation sessions:

- FY2017 – 1,717 hours spent in mediation, 84% of mediations reached an agreement.
- FY2018 – 1,347 hours spent in mediation, 86% of mediations reached an agreement.

The initiative to expand and enhance the mediation program will continue; however, Pima County will not permanently fund the DCPI mediation positions. The county plans on finalizing protocols and training to provide child support mediations.

Yavapai County – Mandatory Initial Progress Mediation (IPM)

The county found that IPM was invaluable in preventing case details from falling through the cracks. During the IPM, parents are assured that the case plan is family reunification and that the team will work hard to make that happen. The court has received positive feedback on IPM participant surveys.

A total of 168 IPMs were held. Parents reported a better understanding of the steps necessary to reunify with their children and indicated that they were given a safe forum in which to express their own opinions and receive needed clarification. Additionally, the court showed the following decrease in the number of days from removal to case closure:

- FY16 – 569 days;
- FY17 – 535 days;
- FY18 – 410 days.

They are beginning to combine the IPMs and Dependency Mediations and are seeking alternative funding to support the continued use of IPMs.

Caseflow Management, Data Tracking, Information Sharing

To achieve successful permanency for children and their families, effective caseflow is critical. Ensuring progress toward the correct permanency option for a child, whether

through reunification or placement in another home, is critical and demands that the court avoid delays while monitoring the agency's efforts to finalize the permanency plan.⁶ The court is required to ensure that proceedings happen within a timely manner. It is important that the court collect case information, especially regarding hearing dates and timelines, so that performance can be monitored and adjustments made to improve timely permanency for children in care.⁷ Additionally, successful courts make concerted efforts to ensure effective communication and information flow between involved parties in the form of hearing dates and times, updated case information, and focused discussion regarding what a parent needs to do to successfully meet the requirements of their case plan. Appreciating the potential benefits, several counties chose to utilize DCPI funds for data and information sharing efforts.

Apache County – Caseflow Management

The county increased the amount of hearing time spent on dependency matters and improved their efforts to enter updated case related information into the court data tracking system.

Apache County has experienced an improvement in case clearance rates (incoming versus outgoing cases) and caseflow management. An Assistant Attorney General (AAG) has been assigned to the county and dependency related hearings can now be calendared every week. Case clearance rates have improved significantly since the beginning of this initiative:

- FY2015 54% (24 incoming, 13 outgoing)
- FY2016 76% (25 incoming, 19 outgoing)
- FY2017 300% (15 incoming, 45 outgoing)
- FY2018 258% (7 incoming, 18 outgoing)

Caseflow will be monitored with monthly reporting. In order to resolve any issues that interfere with case progress, a team will meet 90 days after the Preliminary Protective Hearing and can include CASA staff and advocates, DCS caseworkers, the AAG, counselors, attorneys, parents, and Guardians ad Litem.

Maricopa County – Juvenile Access Exchange, Improvements to Current Data Tracking System, Improved Statistical Reporting

Juvenile Communications Access Exchange (JAX) – Answering the need for a secure portal through which professionals and parents could have access to selective case information, JAX was developed. Whether uploading and sharing court reports

⁶ Solomon, M. & Somerlot, D. (1986). *Caseflow Management in the Trial Court: Now and for the Future*, American Bar Association.

⁷ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, OJJDP (2008). *Toolkit for Court Performance Measures in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases*.

among professionals involved in a case or allowing parties access to the court calendar so that future hearing dates may be more easily identified, the new system is designed to provide some valuable support to a very busy court.

JAX only recently began to see significant use. Estimates of overall effectiveness of the new technology are not yet available.

Improvements to the Data Tracking System – Improved accuracy of the juvenile court data tracking system allows for better case management, data-driven decision making, continuous quality improvement, and measurement of outcomes. Because of these changes:

- Divisions receive reports to help identify priority cases.
- Case assignment equity reports inform balanced caseloads.
- Outcome analyses support decisions about resource allocations.
- Data can be used to inform decisions around expanding piloted processes.
- Reporting is more reader-friendly, increasing the likelihood that the reports will be used.

Improved Statistical Reporting – The new court data tracking system, iCISng, was designed with fields needed to accurately assess performance on time standards, enhanced mediation, expedited permanency, the Dependency Case Management Plan, and outcomes associated with the implementation of new safety related efforts.

In May 2017, the Juvenile Bench finalized a comprehensive Dependency Case Management Plan outlining consistent processes and best practices. In June 2017, the Dependency Unit published its first monthly Dependency Data Connections Report summarizing process and outcome measures for key priorities.

Future efforts will be made to:

- Enhance dependency quality assurance reports identifying missing or incorrectly entered data;
- Publish quarterly dependency performance-based reports detailing compliance with all statutory timeframes;
- Diversify routine statistical reporting to include performance metrics for Cradle to Crayons, Family Treatment Court, and the Court Appointed Special Advocate Programs;
- Perform return of investment studies to demonstrate cost savings due to increased reunification rates and expeditious time to legal permanency;
- Expand efforts to engage parents by becoming a more trauma informed court;
- Maximize opportunities for families to use Medicaid funds to receive trauma therapy.

Walkaway Orders – This program allows parents to leave the court with an understandable record of what happened and what they are expected to accomplish prior to the next hearing. Court dependency experts met with developers of the iCISng system to map out the elements required to develop walkaway orders for the different dependency hearing types. iCISng will allow courtroom staff to generate walkaway orders automatically. Once successfully piloted in one courtroom, the new orders will be made available court wide.

Early Notification Process (ENP) – To increase the attendance of parents at the Preliminary Protective Hearing (PPH), the court developed the ENP protocol. Parents receiving notice via the new ENP protocol attended 80% of PPH proceedings whereas those not receiving this notice attended 65% of the time. Future efforts will include early notice for attorneys so that they might meet with their clients prior to the first court hearing.

Specialized Programs

Dependency cases are complex, requiring the coordination of state and local agencies to assure the safety of children while, at the same time, providing for their permanency and well-being. Juvenile courts are tasked with the need to identify innovative approaches to address the needs of the children and families under their supervision.⁸ More effective case flow management helps courts make needed adjustments and allows them to better monitor the child welfare agency in their efforts to consistently provide the required services.⁹ Arizona courts have a history of developing and implementing creative and thoughtful processes to make needed improvements. Several county courts utilized DCPI funds to implement very effective programs designed to positively impact outcomes for dependent children.

Maricopa County – Downtown Calendar Pilot, Expedited Permanency Process

Downtown Calendar Pilot – A Commissioner was assigned to hear all PPHs for the three downtown Judges, perform weekly shelter hearings, and review motions to terminate parental rights or establish a guardianship.

The Downtown Calendar Pilot has had some very positive outcomes:

- The time from petition filing to a dependency finding decreased by 4 days for the first parent and by 14 days for the last parent.
- The time from the filing of a motion for guardianship to the final order decreased by 13 days.

⁸ Edwards, L.P. (1992), The Juvenile Court and the Role of the Juvenile Court Judge. *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, 43(2).

⁹ Solomon, M. & Somerlot, D. (1986). *Caseflow Management in the Trial Court: Now and for the Future*, American Bar Association.

- The time from the filing of a motion to terminate parental rights to the final order decreased by 29 days.
- The average days children were placed in an emergency shelter care setting dropped from 210 days to 67 days.
-

Success in the downtown court has led to the project being replicated at the Durango and Southeast Court facilities. Consideration will be given to using the Commissioner downtown to hear weekly immigration and refugee cases to mitigate scheduling conflicts with interpreters and to free judicial calendars by forty-five minutes per hearing.

Expedited Permanency Process – An Expedited Permanency Director was assigned to cases open more than 24 months to conduct case conferences and minimize barriers to permanency. This position focused on children from two to nine years of age and in foster care for more than 24 months. Judicial officers began referring children to the program in September 2017.

Four out of five children (or 80%) with active dependency cases at the end of FY2015 still had active cases at the end of FY2017. By the end of FY2018, that percentage decreased to 12%. Children in this program have a greater chance of finding a permanent home quickly, being adopted by a biological family member, reuniting with siblings, and transitioning out of congregate care more quickly.

As of 7/1/18, the Expedited Permanency Process had 89 active children assigned to one staff member. The court is in the process of hiring a second Expedited Permanency Specialist. While the court has 18 full time judicial officers, 80% of children referred to this program are referred by the same two judicial officers.

Pima County – Dependency Alternative Program (DAP)

The DAP diverts cases from the dependency system by providing easy access to legal support, mediation, and other community services. The program is in the implementation and evaluation phase. DAP staff have created a program handbook that can be used to maintain program consistency and to aid other courts interested in initiating a similar process. Court staff continue to track key data elements that help to illustrate the Program’s success:

- 105 cases were diverted from the dependency system;
- 175 children avoided DCS custody;
- 132 new program referrals;
- 122 mediations held;
- 97% of DAP children remained out of the dependency system for at least one year.

Pinal County – Baby Court Calendar

The court utilized DCPI funds to expand the dependency calendar, allowing increased frequency of dependency hearings, including specialized hearings for cases with children birth to three years of age. The court has also been able to utilize a Community Coordinator position to provide support for families with younger children and has begun to use specially trained “Baby CASAs” for these cases.

Statistical reporting shows improvements in the time to permanency for all children.

- Children birth to three years of age averaged 696 days in care in 2017 but, in 2018, this decreased to 621 days.
- Older children averaged 739 days in care in 2017 but, in 2018, this decreased to 651 days.

The court plans to continue to utilize the specialized Baby Court Calendar.

Recommendations

1. **Parent Allies** – Parents who are new to the dependency process and the child welfare system frequently feel lost. They may not understand what is expected of them and how they can facilitate their child’s return to their home. Parent Allies are successful at engaging new parents because they have been through the process themselves. They offer encouragement, helping parents navigate the system and providing a compassionate voice of support.

Noting the successful use of this model in several county courts, the State Foster Care Review Board recommends expanding the use of Parent Allies statewide.

2. **Walk Away Orders** – Far too often, a parent understands little about what happened in court or about the decisions that were made during the court hearing. Walkaway Orders allow a parent to leave court with an understandable listing of what transpired and what they are expected to accomplish prior to the next hearing. With a better understanding and an improved sense of being part of the process, a parent is more likely to participate in the plan, improving the chances of reunification and faster permanency for their child.

A parent should be given the tools necessary to support successful reunification with their child and Walk Away Orders are one of these tools. The State Foster Care Review Board, therefore, recommends each

county court develop and provide Walk Away Orders to parents in dependency cases.

3. **DAP** – Pima County’s Dependency Alternative Program, or DAP, has processed 203 cases since its inception in July 2015. Of those cases, 179 (88%) were successfully resolved without the need to file a dependency petition. This program positively impacted 308 children.

Given the remarkable success of the DAP, the State Foster Care Review Board recommends that efforts be made to expand the program in Pima County and implement similar programs in juvenile courts statewide.

4. **Mediation** – Several Arizona courts utilized one-time DCPI monies to enhance their mediation efforts. Three of the courts chose to strengthen existing practices, standardizing training and clearly communicating with all participants that mediation would play a significant role in the dependency process. Two courts designed and implemented specialized mediation to be introduced at critical times in the dependency. While two courts provided some reporting regarding the positive effect of enhanced mediation efforts, the other courts were not yet able to report on similar measures.

The State Board, therefore, recommends that additional funding be made available to county courts wishing to enhance juvenile dependency mediation efforts and that these courts be required to develop, track, and provide reporting designed to illustrate the level of success of dependency mediation services.