

# Project ONE

**O** One family-one judge  
**n** No wrong door  
**e** Equal and coordinated access to justice

## PROJECT ONE KEY PRINCIPLES

*Adopted by the NCJFCJ Board of Trustees at their Annual Meeting, July 14, 2012, New Orleans, LA.*

### VISION

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) envisions an expedited and coordinated judicial system for cases involving children, youth, and families that ensures swift, fair justice and access to appropriate supportive services to promote positive outcomes and prevent unnecessary court involvement.

### MISSION

The mission of NCJFCJ's Project ONE is to provide judges and allied professionals with a guiding model, training, technical assistance, and supporting research while they examine and modify practice to maximize judicial coordination of dependency; delinquency; and family law, including domestic violence cases, both within and among courts.

### KEY PRINCIPLES

*All judges should appropriately engage families, professionals, organizations, and communities to effectively support child safety, permanency, and well-being; victim safety; offender accountability; healthy family functioning; and community protection. Accordingly, judges should appropriately engage the court system to "first, do no harm" recognizing that all persons appearing before the court do so with experience and concepts of self, family, community, culture, and history. These key principles provide a foundation for courts to exercise these critical duties.*

#### **ONE FAMILY-ONE JUDGE**

All children, youth, and families will be served by one family-one judge case assignments, to the extent possible. One judge should handle the hearings of all members of a family, in related cases, through all court processes. When one judge cannot be assigned to all cases involving a family, courts should develop protocols for communication and coordination to ensure that case plans and dispositions are integrated, reasonable, and achievable.



### **JUDICIAL LEADERSHIP**

All children, youth, and families deserve a justice system led by judges who convene and engage their communities in meaningful partnerships to promote the best outcomes possible for children, youth, families, victims, and the community. All courts should model and promote collaboration, mutual respect, and accountability among stakeholders in both the justice system and the community at large. Judges should promote on-going training for judges, allied-system professionals, court staff, and service providers to build internal capacity and enhance each individual's response to the wide-array of presenting issues that arise with system-involved children, youth, and families.

### **IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDED PRACTICE**

All children, youth and families deserve a justice system that has adopted key principles and guidelines for policy and practice in dependency; delinquency; and family law, including domestic violence cases. Within their own unique jurisdictions, judges should identify and acknowledge potential conflicts in system goals and collaborate in developing strategies to eliminate those conflicts, minimize unnecessary court involvement and promote the best possible outcomes for children, youth and families.

### **JUST AND TIMELY DECISIONS**

All children, youth and families deserve just and timely decisions, consistent with due process. Judges should do justice under the law, engaging in fair, impartial and timely decision-making which follows applicable law. Judges should ensure compliance with timeframes for the completion of adjudications, trials, and disposition or sentencing, that trials conclude without unnecessary continuances, and that court hearings are set and held at a time certain.

### **RESPECT**

All children, youth, families, crime victims, witnesses, and others deserve to be treated with respect, dignity, courtesy and cultural understanding by the justice system. Consistent with due process and legal requirements, court processes should be sufficiently flexible and responsive to meet the needs of people from a variety of backgrounds. Judges and other system professionals should view and work with those coming to the court not merely as system-involved, but more broadly as individuals with their own powerful historic and socioeconomic context.

### **ENGAGEMENT**

All children, youth, and families should be encouraged to participate in the court process and have the opportunity to be present at all court hearings, consistent with developmental appropriateness and safety. Judges and court staff should encourage family members to contribute to the development and implementation of intervention and case plans within established safety parameters, and ensure that those plans are limited in scope to include services rationally related to the jurisdictional findings of the court. Courts should be child and family-centered and court processes and communications (written, verbal, and non-verbal) should be accessible and understandable.

All hearings should be presumptively open to the public.



### **MULTICULTURALISM AND DIVERSITY**

All children, youth, and families deserve a justice system that recognizes and is responsive to different culture(s), life experiences, values and circumstances of individuals. Courts should be welcoming and respectful to people of all racial, legal, ethnic, sexual orientation, gender, disabilities, and socio-economic statuses and honor family in all its forms.

Judges should become aware of, and address, their own implicit biases that may affect decision-making, process, and demeanor. Valuing multiculturalism and diversity includes facilitating access to services that are respectful, culturally relevant, competent, and tailored to the unique strengths and concerns of families.

### **COLLABORATION**

All children, youth, and families deserve a justice system that collaborates with their community to present a comprehensive response in providing and enhancing resources and gathering and sharing of information across systems.

### **ADEQUATE RESOURCES**

All children, youth, and families deserve a justice system that is adequately supported; including access to competent coordinated representation; sufficient numbers of qualified judicial officers, staff, and courtrooms; separate and safe waiting areas for victims and offenders; secure holding facilities; and private meeting space.

Judges should continually assess the availability and advocate, as appropriate, for the development of effective and culturally responsive resources and services that families need.

### **DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND SHARING**

All children, youth, and families deserve a justice system that collects data for both performance measurement and for achieving operational efficiencies. Court staff should regularly generate aggregate data for monitoring, managing, improving, and reporting court performance.

### **SYSTEM ACCOUNTABILITY**

All children, youth, and families deserve a justice system where judges hold their systems and the systems of other juvenile, family, criminal, and civil court stakeholders accountable. Judges should ensure that the justice system has measurable goals, key principles, and objectives that serve as standards against which justice system performance is measured and made available to stakeholders and the public via an annual system “report card.”

### **VICTIM SAFETY AND EMPOWERMENT**

All children, youth, families, and communities deserve a justice system that promotes the safety and empowerment of victims. The need for information, efficiency, and compliance must be weighed against the need for confidentiality. To empower victims, courts and other stakeholders should respect victim autonomy related to service access and process, as well as provide all relief allowable under law while meeting a broad array of safety, socio-economic, and community restoration needs.



In domestic violence cases, victim autonomy related to decisions to leave a relationship or reunify should be emphasized whenever possible. Courts should treat the safety of children and adult victims of domestic violence with equal regard, and practice should demonstrate the understanding that the best interests, safety and resiliency of children are inextricably linked to the health, safety, and welfare of their battered parent.

#### **ADULT AND JUVENILE OFFENDERS ACCOUNTABILITY**

All children, youth, families, and communities deserve a justice system that emphasizes offender accountability as a necessary component of both victim safety and community protection. Courts should offer both adult and juvenile offenders the opportunity to rehabilitate themselves and should encourage and support their efforts to change behavior. Interventions should be individualized and need to be part of a comprehensive coordinated network of legal responses and community service.