

## **FACTORS THAT MAY HINDER OR ACCELERATE THE IMPLEMENTAION OF INFANT COURT TEAMS**

There is critical need for collaborative approaches in implementing an effective court team approach that impacts the outcomes for infants, toddlers, and their families; from systemic collaboration to more intimate one on one interactions.

Circumstances that may accelerate and/or hinder fluid implementation of court teams practices vary within communities according to laws, policies, and practices. Through Safe Babies Court Teams, ZTT has found mindful judicial leadership that is aware of the comprehensive needs of the family beyond the circumstances of the removal helps influence the progress of internalized change in behaviors from families to professionals. Thus when consistent professional players such as legal representatives, child welfare workers, service providers, and early childhood development and mental health experts are an active part of, first, the family change, but also the systemic change, then not only do individual families reap the benefits of the expanded awareness, but entire systems are influenced by the change in mind set and approach. Cases are no longer taken at face value but of historical context that have impacted decision making from family dynamics to systems of care. Historically, professionals have worked in silos. Not because they resist collaborative partnerships, but more because of the lack of time and access to knowledge about resources that can help families. With a court team, those are available for immediate access because of the behind the scenes work a coordinator is responsible for, in order to build a community capacity of knowledge about comprehensive needs of children and families beyond imminent danger and toward sustainable internalized change. Court teams operates more as an approach as opposed to a model because every case can create a new and unique situation, that when addressed can impact practice in future work with systems and families. However the use of evidence based practices within the court team structure ensures that interventions have effective practice history.

Small change impacts the bigger picture, however court teams are not effective by implementing one - small change in practice, but by multiple changes that impact the entire context. There is a need for ongoing training from a national level of expertise, to local procurement of resources, to working one on one not only with direct care professionals, but with families to help them become the experts of their child's development. Families also need the strongest support at the initiation of and toward the end of the case. Early engagement and finding non system support for post case closure is critical to families. -- Issues of confidentiality and information sharing can hinder timely interventions and need addressed at a systemic level. Court teams can create rapid responses when a family comes to care so that the exchange of information can be implemented at the onset of the case while still honoring the families right to confidentiality. Because parent engagement is so critical to internalized change in order to decrease recidivism, sanctions against the parents hinder effective implementation of the court team practice. If parents believe a court team is operating behind the premise of "reward or punishment", true engagement and trust is jeopardized-thus hindering true internalized change and stopping short at "compliance based" behaviors.

Resistance to change hinders implementation. Professionals involved have to want to "do better" with families. Effective approach implementation is an hour-glass shaped process of change and must start from the top of the system leadership (judges, policy makers, state child welfare systems, agency directors), then narrows to the practice of "doing and studying" (on the ground court interventions and learning by doing), then ultimately returning to the larger system leadership to actively implement change from a broader perspective. Without the multi-tiered investment, change will be temporary and systems will simply comply instead of actively owning and embracing change. A court team approach ensures continued investment in better practices through ongoing trainings, awareness, partnerships, collaboratives, and reflections in an environment that allows for changes big and small that improve the support and delivery of services to children and families.