

## Washington State's Parents for Parents Program

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The Parents for Parents program is a court-based parent engagement, mentoring and education program that promotes the safe and timely reunification of children with their parents, or an alternative permanency outcome when reunification is not a viable goal. The program serves families who are in the dependency system and services are initiated when a child is at risk or has been removed from his or her home by Child Protective Services (CPS). Dependency court is the place parents must engage when a petition has been filed by CPS.

Parents navigating child welfare cases often come to court feeling frightened, confused, angry, and alone. The purpose of the Parents for Parents program (P4P) is to provide these parents with information, support and hope during one of the most challenging times in their life. Through peer mentoring, P4P provides early outreach and education that helps shift parental attitudes from anger and resentment to acknowledgment and acceptance and enhances parents' engagement in their court-ordered plans. Mentoring is provided by Parent Allies (PAs) – parents who have successfully navigated the child welfare system, demonstrate professionalism, accept responsibility for the factors involved in their child's dependency, and are eager to help other parents succeed. PAs receive extensive and on-going training, as well as supervision, to ensure they are the most effective when helping and encouraging parents to engage in the process of working with the professionals and navigating the court system.

### Program Components

There are three main components to the P4P program- support at court hearings, an educational Dependency 101 class, and on-going peer mentoring support. Strong partnerships with all child welfare system stakeholders helps to carry out its mission.

**Shelter Care Outreach** – Parent Allies meet with parents in the courthouse prior to their Shelter Care Hearing (hearing following children being removed by CPS.) Parents are often feeling terrified, confused, angry and alone. The PA introduces him/herself as someone who was once in the parents' shoes and got their kids back. This gives parents someone they can relate to and offers them hope that reunification is possible. This, in turn, helps diffuse negative attitudes, and encourages parents to be open-minded and engage in the process. PAs also share information about available resources and invite parents to attend a Dependency 101 class.

**Dependency 101** - This one-time two-hour PA led class educates parents about the dependency system they must navigate in order to have their children returned. It provides tools and resources that empower parents to be successful and to understand and support the needs of their children. Several PAs share their success stories, and child welfare system stakeholders (defense attorney, Department of Children, Youth and Families social worker, Court Appointed Special Advocate, Assistant Attorney General, Family Treatment Court representative, etc.) provide information about their roles in the system and what parents can do to succeed. All speakers reinforce the message that return of the child is everyone's top priority.

## **On-going Support**

- Parent Allies deliver outreach to parents attending additional dependency hearings throughout the duration of their case, providing them with follow-up support and encouragement. PAs work to ensure parents have the resources and information they need to complete their court-ordered services and help to diffuse any anger, resentment or confusion regarding the process of their case. PAs also encourage the parents to utilize their involvement in their case as an opportunity to exit the system stronger and better than when they entered.
- Parent Allies provide ongoing telephone support to assist and encourage parents to overcome barriers to success in their case. This includes reminding parents about the Dependency 101 class and checking in on any potential barriers, while also providing telephone mentoring to parents to make sure they are able to receive support in navigating their case when they are not in court. This ensures long periods of time do not go by before parents get their questions answered.
- Additional support varies across the state to include the offering of support or curriculum-based groups to address ongoing barriers, meeting with parents currently incarcerated at local jails, and support for parents at Family Team Decision Making meetings.

## **Program History, Current Sites and Evaluation**

The Parents for Parents Program was developed in Pierce County, Washington in 2005 by Parent Ally, Brenda Lopez; Supervisor CASA/GAL, Julie Lowery; and the Pierce County Superior Court. The original program design focused on mentoring families present at court for their first 72-hour Shelter Care Hearing and offered parents the Dependency 101 class. A University of Washington Partners for Our Children evaluation of their program model in 2009 motivated statewide interest for the program.

In prior years, some Parents for Parents programs have utilized Court Improvement Program (CIP) funds for program start-up, and P4P programs are currently active in the following counties:

- Benton, Franklin, and Walla Walla Counties hosted by Safe Harbor
- Columbia, Garfield, Asotin and Whitman Counties hosted by Safe Harbor
- Clallam County hosted by Clallam County Superior Court
- Clark County\* hosted by Xchange Recovery
- Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties hosted by Grays Harbor Court Appointed Special Advocate agency
- Grant\*, Kittitas, Adams, Klickitat, and Yakima Counties hosted by Reunified Services
- King County hosted by the King County Superior Court
- Kitsap County hosted by the Kitsap County Juvenile Court
- Pierce County hosted by Multicultural Child and Family Hope Center
- Snohomish County\* hosted by the YWCA
- Spokane County\* hosted by the Catholic Charites
- Thurston\*, Mason, Lewis Counties hosted by Family Education and Support Services
- Whatcom County\* hosted by Whatcom County Superior Court
- Skagit, San Juan and Island Counties hosted by Brigid Collins
- Cowlitz County\* hosted by Community House
- Pend Oreille, Stevens, Ferry and Okanogan\* Counties hosted by Hope Transportation

\* Programs established through CIP contract

Additionally, P4P is scheduled to be statewide in Washington State by July 2021. In partnership with the Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts, Children’s Home Society of Washington provided technical support to start-up all programs with the exception of Pierce and King Counties. Furthermore, CHSW partnered with Casey Family Programs to expand the program into Maricopa County, Arizona in 2016 and Kansas City, Missouri in 2020.

Recognizing families’ need for continued support, the King County program began providing court outreach to parents at all stages of their dependency case, as opposed to just initially at the 72-hour Shelter Care Hearing. This model was evaluated by The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges in both 2011 and 2013. Some key findings from these evaluations included:

- Increased compliance in the court-ordered case plan by both mothers and fathers (2011)
- Significant increases in parents’ compliance with court-ordered visitation at the review hearing (2011)
- Increased participation by the mother at key court events; mothers were more likely to be present for court hearings by 13% (2011)
- Dependency 101 participants had greater rates of reunification and lower rates of termination of parental rights compared to non-participants-*not statistically significant* (2013)
- Caucasian families who participated in Dependency 101 were more likely to be reunified and less likely to have their parental rights terminated-*statistically significant* (2013)
- Native American women who participated in Dependency 101 were more likely to be in some form of compliance at their review hearing-*statistically significant* (2013)
- African American men who participated in Dependency 101 were more likely to be in some form of compliance with services at review and permanency hearings-*statistically significant* (2013)

Findings were also reported in the *Children and Youth Services Review* (volume 34, 2012, pp. 2036-2041) on the effectiveness of the program participants and include:

- Positive change in attitudes
- Increased trust in child protective services
- Better understanding of the role of stakeholders
- Increased awareness of case issues
- Increased belief that parents have control over their case outcomes
- Increased engagement in the juvenile dependency court process
- Increased compliance with court orders and case plans
- Increased participation in visitation

Based upon these evaluations, the Parents for Parents program was identified as a Promising Practice by the University of Washington’s Evidence Based Practice Institute. In 2015, the program was written into state law per Senate Bill 5486 and was recognized as a statewide program. Children’s Home Society of Washington administers the programs statewide and ensures model fidelity to the evaluated King County model. CHSW also oversaw an additional evaluation conducted by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

Additionally, in January 2020, the University of Nevada and the Children’s Bureau Capacity Building Center for Courts released a quasi-experimental design, long-term, multi-site evaluation conducted on P4P. Findings include:

- A positive relationship was demonstrated between parent participation in Dependency 101 and increased reunification rates- a difference of 17%
  - 70% of parents who participated in Dependency 101 reunified with their children
  - 53% of parents who did not participate in Dependency 101 reunified with their children
- A positive relationship between parent participation in Dependency 101 decreased TPR- a difference of 13%
  - 26% of parents who participated in Dependency 101 had their parental rights terminated
  - 39% of parents who did not participate in Dependency 101 had their parental rights terminated
- For cases that received 101 plus additional peer mentoring, increased reunification rates (79% of the cases reunified compared to the comparison group of 53%)- a difference of 26%
- For cases that received 101 plus additional peer mentoring, decrease in TPR rates (19% in P4P group compared to 39% in the comparison group)- a difference of 20%
- There was no statistical relationship between parent participation in the one-time 2-hour Dependency 101 class and length of time until permanency. This may suggest that future studies should explore the additional parent support components the program offers and their time to permanency.

Based upon these evaluations, CHSW submitted an application on behalf of the Parents for Parents program to be reviewed by the Title 4-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse in order to be considered to draw down federal funding through the Family First Prevention Services Act. Additionally, the growing and development of this peer mentor model has involved numerous partnerships spanning over a 15-year period of time. P4P began by a parent, is led at the local level by parents, and administered statewide by parents. CHSW continues to work with local programs and state partners in order to continue to demonstrate the effectiveness of the model, as well as ensure all parents have access to this support despite their geographic location. The Administrative Office of the Courts has been a key partner in identifying funding for evaluations and the State of Washington Office of Public Defense has been pertinent to ensuring the program can expand statewide.

Evaluations can be accessed at: <http://www.uwcita.org/parents-for-parents-education-and-engagement-for-parents-in-dependency/>

## **Court Support**

For additional clarifying information, court support of the Parents for Parents program is paramount to the success of the program since Parent Allies are interacting with parents at court who are currently navigating a dependency case in order to help empower them to overcome challenging obstacles and instill hope that change is possible. Stakeholder feedback over the years has alluded to the fact that having Parent Allies at court has helped shift perspectives and interactions to become a more strengths-based environment for both families and stakeholders alike.

For some of the current programs, the courts are the host organization for the program, while some non-profits host the program in other communities. Nonetheless, court support is crucial and many court representatives have established relationships with Parent Allies in their community to ensure families have direct access to the program.

## **Responsibilities of the Host Organization**

- Assume financial management and accountability for the program
- Hire/contract with the Parent Ally P4P Coordinator
- Provide supervision and training of the Parent Ally P4P Coordinator and other Parent Allies
- Support Parent Ally Lead in coordination and oversight of other Parent Allies involved in the program
- Provide for working space, telephone, copy machine and computer access for the Parent Ally P4P Coordinator
- Provide for accessible meeting space for Dependency 101 and other Parents for Parents meetings
- Provide for the liability insurance of the program
- Partner with the P4P Steering Committee to find sustainable funding for the program

## **Responsibilities of the Parent Ally Coordinator**

- Provide overall coordination of the program, ensuring that all aspects of the program are consistently implemented with fidelity to the program model
- Directly or through oversight of other Parent Allies, ensure the presence of a Parent Ally at all Shelter Care Hearings and additional dependency related hearings attended by parents
- Ensure the availability of Parent Ally and stakeholder leadership at each Dependency 101 class
- Ensure that all client and program data is collected and entered into a client data base
- Provide leadership at regular meetings including the P4P Steering Committee
- Assist in the recruitment and training of additional Parent Allies working with the program
- Maintain records of Parent Ally training and activities

**For more information please visit [Family Preservation — Children's Home Society of Washington \(childrenshomesociety.org\)](http://Family Preservation — Children's Home Society of Washington (childrenshomesociety.org))**

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