

## Advances Seen in Court-Social Agency Collaborations in Grafton County 11.4.05

An interim evaluation has been completed at the midpoint of a five-year demonstration project underway in Grafton County to bring together the court system, child protective services and domestic violence agencies to better address the needs of families when there is the co-occurrence of domestic violence and child abuse and neglect.

Grafton County is one of six demonstration sites that are part of the Greenbook Project, a federally funded family violence initiative. "Greenbook" is the name given to the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges' publication, *Effective Intervention in Domestic Violence & Child Maltreatment Cases: Guidelines for Policy and Practice*.

According to the national Greenbook Web site, the project is already developing models of best practices in the handling of the difficult and conflicting issues in families where the interests of protecting children suffering abuse and neglect may clash with the goals of assisting parents accused of abuse who may also be victims of violence.

"At the midpoint of the initiative, the sites had focused a number of implementation activities on screening for co-occurrence in the child welfare system," states

the executive summary of the interim evaluation report posted on the Web site. "These activities include changes to screening and referral processes and a safety audit to identify key decision points and outcomes through the life of a case." The report noted also that different levels of courts were concentrating on finding ways to share information without violating victim confidentiality or jeopardizing safety.

Local research partners Kathy Kopiec and Glenda Kaufman Kantor have completed the interim evaluation based on results from data from the DCYF (Department of Children, Youth and Families) covering 2001 and 2003 cases. The findings from 2003 are summarized and compared to findings from 2001, and show greater awareness of domestic violence issues in families where abuse and neglect has been alleged. The records show increases in the number of referrals made to crisis centers, and batterer intervention programs, and fewer out-of-home placements for children. Among the key findings:

- In 2001 and 2003, domestic violence was present in roughly one third of founded cases of abuse and/or neglect.

- Almost all 2001 and 2003 court-involved cases involved some type of neglect of a child.

- The adult victim of domestic violence was identified as the perpetrator of abuse and/or neglect in close to two-thirds of the co-occurrence cases in 2001 and 2003.

- Parental substance abuse was evident in nearly half of the 2003 co-occurrence cases.

- There was a notable increase in the percentage of initial referrals (intake summaries) that referenced domestic violence in 2003 compared to 2001.

- A higher percentage of 2003 cases included documented evidence of screening for domestic violence.

- A higher percentage of 2003 cases included documented evidence that domestic violence victims were referred to crisis centers.

- A higher percentage of 2003 cases included documented evidence that domestic violence perpetrators were referred to Batterer Intervention Programs.

- A lower percentage of the 2003 co-occurrences cases resulted in out-of-home placements for child abuse/neglect victims.

- File data from both years indicated that out-of-home placements are extremely rare in cases in which domestic violence is the sole form of identified abuse/neglect.