

State Name: Vermont
 Date Strategic Plan Submitted: 7/31/25
 Timeframe Covered by Strategic Plan: 2025-2026

Overall Goal/Mission of CIP: Ensure children’s safety, permanency, and well-being through effective court proceedings.

Priority Area #1: Timeliness/Permanency

Outcome #1: *Improve the timeliness of court proceedings through mediation.*

Need Driving Activities & Data Source: *How do you know this is a need in your state?* Children and youth need safe, permanent families that love, nurture, and guide them through childhood and into adulthood. To achieve this goal, courts need to provide timely resolution of disputes in accordance with due process. *(Excerpt, Justice for Children Task Force Vision Statement)* In 2006, the Justice for Children Task Force identified performance outcome measures to track. These include the timeliness of numerous court milestones.

Despite ongoing efforts to improve the time to initial disposition, currently available court data indicate that the average time to disposition has lengthened. Vermont CIP will strive to improve time to disposition through activities outlined in the following objectives.

Theory of Change: CHINS mediation promotes a faster path to permanency by fostering collaboration, efficiency, and tailored solutions that prioritize the well-being and stability of children in need of services. By addressing concerns early and outside of court, mediation can help achieve lasting solutions more quickly than traditional legal processes alone.

Objective 1 : Establish Statewide CHINS Mediation Program

Activity or Project Description <i>Specific actions or project that will be completed to produce specific outputs and demonstrate progress toward the outcome.</i>	Collaborative Partners <i>Responsible parties and partners involved in implementation of the activity.</i>	Anticipated Outputs of Activity <i>What the CIP intends to produce, provide or accomplish through the activity.</i>	Goals of Activity (short and/or Long-term) <i>Where relevant and practical, provide specific, projected change in data the CIP intends to achieve. Goals should be measurable.</i>	Timeframe <i>Proposed completion date or, if appropriate, “ongoing”.</i>	Resources Needed <i>Where relevant identify the resources needed to complete the activity.</i>	Plans for Evaluating Activity <i>Where relevant, how will you measure or monitor change?</i>
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<p>Progress toward Outcome</p> <p>Briefly describe the overall activity or project that should help lead to the outcome identified above.</p>

<i>Action Step 1 – Create statewide CHINS Mediation Program to achieve faster permanency for children in Family Court</i>	CHINS Reform Workgroup DCF Partners	Work with strategic partners to install CHINS mediation in all 14 family courts and monitor outcomes	Develop a reporting mechanism that includes the reason the case has gone to mediation and resulting outcomes	Ongoing	CIP time and staff resources	Share a summary of progress and key factors and proposed JFCTF relevant others
<i>Action Step 2 – Review Reports to identify trends</i>	CHINS Mediation Workgroup CHINS Reform Workgroup	Monitor Trends	Improved Understanding of how CHINS mediation is working in Vermont		Odyssey Case Management System	Director of Trial Court Operations shares results with CIP Manager/Stakeholder partners on quarterly basis.

Priority Area #2: Quality Court Hearings

Outcome #1: Support existing Family Treatment Court Docket and assist in expansion to other Counties.

Need Driving Activities & Data Source: *How do you know this is a need in your state?* Opioid addiction and abuse in the state of Vermont drive drug trafficking and other criminal offenses, endangering Vermonters and eroding our way of life; harm children by afflicting their parents and undermining families; and cause tragic overdose deaths, particularly among young Vermonters.

The opioid epidemic in Vermont has contributed to exploding caseloads in the abuse and neglect (CHINS) docket in the Family Division. Abuse and neglect case filings increased 68% between FY 2013 and 2018. The use of family treatment docket techniques to promote rehabilitation by parents in the child welfare system has proven to be a successful intervention and leads to increased reunifications and positive permanency outcomes when best practices are followed. Family treatment dockets continue to be added all over the country.

Theory of Change: Family Treatment Dockets can lead to reunification, reduce a child’s time in the system, lower rearrest of the parent and reduce costs.

Objective 1 : Partner with Family Treatment Court Docket team to support and expand the docket to reach more Vermont families involved in the court system.

Activity or Project Description	Collaborative Partners	Anticipated Outputs of Activity	Goals of Activity (short and/or Long-term)	Timeframe	Resources Needed	Plans for Evaluating Activity
<i>Specific actions or project that will be completed to produce specific outputs and demonstrate progress toward the outcome.</i>	<i>Responsible parties and partners involved in implementation of the activity.</i>	<i>What the CIP intends to produce, provide or accomplish through the activity.</i>	<i>Where relevant and practical, provide specific, projected change in data the CIP intends to achieve. Goals should be measurable.</i>	<i>Proposed completion date or, if appropriate, “ongoing”.</i>	<i>Where relevant identify the resources needed to complete the activity.</i>	<i>Where relevant, how will you measure or monitor change?</i>

			<i>Progress toward Outcome</i>			
Briefly describe the overall activity or project that should help lead to the outcome identified above.						
Action Step 1 – Serve as Program Manager of the Vermont Family Treatment Docket and remain a member of the Steering Committee	Chief Superior Court Judge FTD Operational team Chief of Trial Court Operations Community Stakeholder Partners	CIP will manage the FTD and will be able to assist FTD with connections to National Best Practices and resources. As well as monitor day to day operations	Expand FTD to other counties where appropriate	2021 and ongoing		CIP manager reports to JFCTF and other strategic partners

Objective 2 : Provide training to court staff and judges working on FTD

Action Step 1- Identify best practice trainings for judges and court staff. Work to provide training and training materials.	Chief Superior Court Judge FTD Operational Team Chief of Trial Court Operations Community Stakeholder Partners	Provide at least one training event annually focusing on relevant best practices.	Better trained and informed court staff and judges will lead to better outcomes for children and families in the FTD.	2021 and ongoing	CIP funding for training	FTD Program Manager will report to JFCTF and other strategic partners
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Priority Area #3: Quality Legal Representation

Outcome #1: Improve recruitment and retention of trained parent/child attorneys to ensure parties receive high quality legal representation.

Need Driving Activities & Data Source: *How do you know this is a need in your state?* Quality representation is essential to improving outcomes for children and families. In its oversight role, the court should ensure that parties have access to competent representation. The competency and skill of all professionals involved in child abuse/neglect cases impacts the quality and depth of hearings. This is a highly specialized area of court practice.

The Defender General’s Office contracts with private attorneys to represent parties in cases where the public defender has a conflict or is otherwise unable to represent a party. These “assigned counsel contractor” attorneys represent both parents and children, but often parents.

The Justice for Children Task Force supports system reforms that promote the best legal representation possible for parties in child welfare proceedings. Since 2008, the Justice for Children Task Force has heightened its focus on legal representation of parents and pursued strategies that support parents’ attorneys. The following objectives will promote the outcome of high-quality legal representation.

Theory of Change: High quality legal representation contributes to efficiency, engagement, reduced time in foster care, and better outcomes for families.

Objective 1 : Explore the National Center for State Courts Study of CHINS case processing in Vermont and select recommendations to promote high quality legal representation for parents and children.

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<i>Action Step 1 – Further explore NCSC recommendations regarding quality legal representation with JFCTF and stakeholder</i>	Chief Superior Court Judge Office of the Defender General	Better understanding of NCSC recommendations and suggested best practices. Identify key projects for further exploration. Develop		September 2021	TBD	Subcommittee shares results with JFCTF and offers a recommendation .

partners		legal representation subcommittee.				
Action Step 2 – Decide how to proceed	Chief Superior Court Judge Office of the Defender General	Decide on next steps Update CIP plan	TBD	December 2021	TBD	subcommittee reports to the JFC Task Force. CIP Strategic Plan will be updated to reflect activities resulting from this objective.
Action Step 3 – Leverage Title IV-E funding available to support legal representation for parents and children	Office of the Defender General DCF Family Services Division	Increased funding for attorneys and non-attorney staff.	Increased high quality legal representation	Ongoing	Technical assistance for DCF data system	Track progress with JFCTF

Objective 2- Attorneys receive specialized child welfare (juvenile law) training.

Action Step 1 – Office of the Defender General provides training opportunities twice a year.	Office of the Defender General	Parents’ and children’s attorneys attend 3 or more hours/year of quality specialized juvenile law training.	ODG (based on the # and % of attorneys in the target group who attend 3 hours/ year of specialized training during the reporting period.)	October 2021	CIP funding to support ODG training events and presenters	ODG provides data to CIP with training evaluation responses
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Priority Area #3: Interagency Collaboration

Outcome #1: Continue collaboration between the court, agency and other partners in the child welfare system.

Need Driving Activities & Data Source: *How do you know this is a need in your state?* Systems change is people driven. Collaboration between the courts and the child welfare agency is essential to improving the child protection system and ensuring better outcomes for children and families. (Building A Better Collaboration, NCJFCJ, 2004) In its purpose statement, the Justice for Children Task Force’s Best Practices subcommittee acknowledges that “outcomes for children and families would be improved if all system stakeholders followed recognized best practices. Local courts and their partners need the tools and technology to monitor and meet performance standards.” The following objectives will help achieve this outcome of strengthening collaboration across systems.

Theory of Change: Stronger collaboration across systems will produce better outcomes for children.

Objective 1 : The courts, DCF, and other child welfare system partners collaborate to provide multidisciplinary education and training

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<p>Briefly describe the overall activity or project that should help lead to the outcome identified above.</p>						
<p><i>Action Step 1</i> – Identify and provide opportunities for multi-disciplinary training and education.</p>	<p>JFCTF University of Vermont training partnership Dept. Of Ed. Office of the Defender General GAL Program Dept. of States Attorney</p>	<p>Child welfare professionals have learning opportunities with professionals from outside their respective discipline.</p>	<p>At least three programs or events a year (local or statewide)</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>CIP funding to host training and support presenters</p>	<p>Summary in CIP Annual Report</p>

Objective 2: Continue interagency data sharing as a catalyst for local collaborative improvement efforts.

Action Step 1- Use new court case management system and DCF data to guide local collaborative improvement efforts	DCF Family Services Division	Quarterly data sharing reports	Improved data collection and sharing will lead to common goal indicatives and collaboration	Ongoing	The courts Research and information technology department	Report to JFCTF and produce quarterly data reports and analysis.
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Objective 3: CIP participation in Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR)

Action step 1- Through agency/ court collaboration, address court related issues and concerns identified in the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR).	DCF Chief Administrative Judge JFCTF	CIP will communicate to the courts about upcoming reviews. If needed, CIP facilitates the provision of available, relevant court data to the CFSR team preparing for the review. CIP attends CFSR exit interview. CIP reports court related PIP activities (if any) to PIP Team	Continued interagency collaboration and outcomes	As needed and ongoing	TBD	DCF-FSD will communicate with Administrative Judge and CIP regarding the CFSR final report. CIP will report on activities in the Annual CIP report.
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Objective 4: CIP participation in Title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Reviews

Action Step 1- Through agency/ court collaboration, address court related issues.	DCF Family Services Division Chief Administrative Judge	Court orders will contain required judicial findings CIP will communicate to the courts about upcoming reviews and results.	No child becomes IV-E ineligible because of non-compliant IV-E judicial determinations.	As needed and ongoing	TBD	DCF-FSD IV-E eligibility staff tracks the # of court orders non-compliant with IV-E requirements & communicates goal for improvement.
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Priority Area #4: DATA

Outcome #1: Courts have automated tools and information technology to enable them to exercise oversight over child welfare cases

Need Driving Activities & Data Source: *How do you know this is a need in your state?* Vermont needed better data systems to monitor progress and measure success. With the rollout of the courts new Odyssey case management system data can be more readily accessible to the courts and agency. Local courts and their partners need to leverage these tools and technology to monitor and meet performance standards. The Justice for Children Task Force and its subcommittees will work on projects that will provide data to both courts and systems partners. Any new system requires implementation strategies, and these following objectives will work towards leveraging the technology for better outcomes.

Theory of Change: Better data creation and sharing will lead to better outcomes for children and systems.

Objective 1 : Develop a data dashboard using Odyssey for judges

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Action Step 1 – Develop and implement a data extraction tool for judges using Odyssey.	Research and Information Services DCF-FSD Outside contractor	Contract with a data specialist to lead this project. Assemble a group to identify key data. Provide training to judges & court staff on effective use of data tool.	Increased access to court data for judges. Once implemented Survey users to see how often they use reports, then survey to see how often they use the data tool to determine if usage increases. Adjust as necessary.	December 2021 And ongoing development	CIP funding to contract with specialist.	Feedback from Family Division judges and court management CIP will report on activities in the Annual CIP report.

Objective 2: Implement a process for court/agency data sharing.

Action Step 1- Develop a mechanism and process for sharing and exchanging data using new case management system.	Research and Information Services data specialist	Continue to work with RIS to produce a list of data that can be realistically shared and exchanged, and develop a timeline and frequency protocols	Easily accessible and accurate court data that can be shared easily with interagency partners and stakeholders.	Ongoing	CIP grant funds for data specialist	Data Specialist, CIP and RIS staff will share progress with court and DCF
Action Step 2- Implement	RIS Staff Data specialist JFCTF	Train users and refine process	Improved data sharing and exchange. Improved data quality and accuracy.	March 2022	CIP grant funds for specialist	User feedback
Action Step 3 – Asses (CQI)	Data Specialist DCF IT staff Court IT staff	CIP and Data Specialist leads efforts to improve process if needed	Set ongoing target improvements	Ongoing after implementation	CIP grant funds	CIP and data specialist report to JFCTF and subcommittees

Priority Area #5: Quality Court Hearings/Trauma Informed

Outcome #1: Judges and court personnel are knowledgeable and prepared to work with child welfare cases.

Need Driving Activities & Data Source: *How do you know this is a need in your state?* The juvenile docket is one of the more complex trial court dockets. To be effective in processing cases and interacting with litigants, judges and court personnel must receive some specialized training before working in this docket, as well as opportunities for ongoing training and professional development. CIP grant funds are needed to maintain these efforts.

Theory of Change: Knowledgeable and specially trained judges and court staff will lead to better and more timely proceedings leading to better outcomes for children and families.

Objective 1 : Judges Newly assigned to the juvenile docket receive specialized training

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Briefly describe the overall activity or project that should help lead to the outcome identified above.						
<i>Action Step 1</i> – New judges assigned to the juvenile docket court receive relevant education within the first 3 months of assignment.	Chief Administrative Judge	<p>Court offers foundation seminar to new judge(s) on juvenile law and policy.</p> <p>Judges understand their unique leader-ship role in child welfare cases.</p>	<p>Judges receive core training within the first three months of being assigned to a juvenile caseload.</p> <p>Judges attend the NCJFCJ's <i>Child Abuse and Neglect Institute</i> within a year of being assigned to a juvenile docket.</p>	As needed and ongoing	CIP funding to support training	Court staff will report whether target improvements are met for judges newly assigned to the juvenile docket. This information will be reported in annual CIP report.

Objective 2: Judges have opportunities for professional development.

Action Step 1- Provide judges with opportunities for professional development, both with their judicial colleagues and also in multi-disciplinary settings.	<p>Chief Administrative Judge</p> <p>Judicial Education Staff</p>	<p>Judges receive timely information about changes in juvenile law or policy.</p> <p>Judges are informed about recent developments in relevant law, policy, science, and best practices.</p> <p>Judges appreciate the unique leadership role they play in this docket.</p>	<p>Identify programs which will meet a judge's needs when rotating into family court.</p> <p>Judges receive education as needed prior to or coincident with a juvenile docket assignment.</p>	Annually and dependent on judge rotation schedule.	CIP funding to support training	Court staff will report to the Chief of Trial Court Operations & CIP Manager regarding whether target improvement is met.
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Objective 3: Court personnel newly assigned to the juvenile docket receive specialized training.

Action Step 1- Provide court personnel newly assigned to the juvenile docket with juvenile orientation materials and relevant training	Chief Administrative Judge Chief of Trial Court Operations	New court personnel review orientation packet. Adequate orientation reinforces importance of data accuracy and timely case processing.	Court staff newly assigned to the juvenile docket receive specialized training within the first three months of assignment.	As needed	CIP funding to support training	Court staff will report to the Chief of Trial Court Operations & CIP Manager regarding whether target improvement is met.
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Objective 4: Court personnel assigned to the juvenile docket have opportunities for professional development.

Action Step 1- Provide in-service training to court personnel on juvenile court procedures, record keeping, and best practices	Chief of Trial Court Operations	Court staff are informed of changes in policy and procedure. Improve accuracy of data entry.	At least two people assigned to the juvenile docket from each court unit attends training when offered.	As needed	CIP funding to support training	Attendance and feedback from participants is shared with the Chief of Trial Court Operations and CIP manager

Priority Area #6: Well-Being

Outcome #1: Guardians ad Litem in juvenile proceedings are adequately trained and supervised.

Need Driving Activities & Data Source: *How do you know this is a need in your state?* Guardians ad Litem in Vermont are volunteers who advocate for the best interests of children. In child protection cases, they are often the “eyes and ears” of the child’s attorney. Most of the work the GALs do is out of court and involves gathering information, interviewing the parties, and working with other professionals in the case to work toward attaining the goal of safeguarding the child’s best interest and rights. (VT Rule of Family Proceedings 6) *The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)* requires that in every case involving an abused or neglected child that results in a judicial proceeding, a GAL who has received training appropriate to the role shall be appointed.¹ CAPTA bars appointment of untrained or poorly trained court-appointed representatives for children. Furthermore, GALs need specialized in-service training to help them better serve youth. Ongoing recruitment efforts are essential to increase the number of volunteer GALs serving children, and to replenish the pool of qualified and trained GALs due to attrition. Ongoing support, supervision, and coaching is also needed to integrate new GALs into the program, assist active GALs to handle difficult and complex issues, and improve retention of volunteer GALs. Finally, the GAL Program needs an effective system for collecting and reporting data to measure results of recruitment, training, and supervision efforts.

¹ The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act as Amended by P.L. 111-320, the CAPTA Reauthorization Act of 2010; see SEC. 106. GRANTS TO STATES FOR CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT PREVENTION AND TREATMENT PROGRAMS, 42 U.S.C. § 5106a (b)(2)(B)(xiii).

Theory of Change: Knowledgeable and specially trained GAL’s protect the best interests of children and lead to better outcomes for the children they serve.

Objective 1 : Train GAL volunteers to advocate for children’s best interests in juvenile proceedings

Activity or Project Description <i>Specific actions or project that will be completed to produce specific outputs and demonstrate progress toward the outcome.</i>	Collaborative Partners <i>Responsible parties and partners involved in implementation of the activity.</i>	Anticipated Outputs of Activity <i>What the CIP intends to produce, provide or accomplish through the activity.</i>	Goals of Activity (short and/or Long-term) <i>Where relevant and practical, provide specific, projected change in data the CIP intends to achieve. Goals should be measurable.</i> Progress toward Outcome	Timeframe <i>Proposed completion date or, if appropriate, “ongoing”.</i>	Resources Needed <i>Where relevant identify the resources needed to complete the activity.</i>	Plans for Evaluating Activity <i>Where relevant, how will you measure or monitor change?</i>
Briefly describe the overall activity or project that should help lead to the outcome identified above.						
Action Step 1 – Train new GAL volunteers to advocate for abused and neglected children.	GAL Program	Offer at least three 32-hour pre-service training programs to new GAL volunteers.	Train 50 new volunteers a year. Increase the number of trained GALs to serve as court advocates for abused and neglected children in court.	ongoing	CIP funding to support training	GAL Program reports to GAL Advisory Committee, National CASA Association, & CIP CIP Manager will share information with the JFCTF
Action Step 2- Provide in-service training to active GAL volunteers.	GAL Program	GALs have professional development opportunities on relevant child welfare topics.	All GAL volunteers attended at least one professional development training a year.	ongoing	CIP funding to support training	GAL Program will report to GAL Advisory Committee and to CIP Manager and the JFCTF

Objective 2: GALs in juvenile proceedings are adequately supervised.

Action Step 1- Ensure one GAL coordinator is available for all counties and its volunteers.	GAL Program GAL Advisory Committee Court Administrators Office	The number of supervision contacts with GALs will increase. Offer in-service training events on relevant child welfare topics on a local as well as statewide level	GAL’s will be better supervised, trained and supported.	Ongoing	CIP funding to support training and staffing	GAL Program reports to GAL Advisory Committee and National CASA Association. Summary of results will be provided to CIP Manager
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		GAL retention rates in the first-year post-training will continue to improve				
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Objective 3: Enhance the GAL Program’s ability to report data.

Action Step 1- Leverage new case management system to design data reports to meet National CASA/GAL reporting requirements	GAL Program GAL Advisory Committee	GAL Program will have accurate data reports available to meet CASA statistical reporting standards for Vermont in 2021 and beyond.	Better, more accurate and timely data collection and dissemination.	September 2021	TBD	GAL Program will be able to provide data required for CASA statistical reporting standards, and will report to National CASA Association. Summary of results will be provided to CIP Manager
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