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ENHANCING THE OPERATION OF JUVENILE COURT IN THE 38TH JUDICIAL CIRCUIT OF MISSOURI

Juvenile court services have become a major focus in the 28th Judicial Circuit. Concerns have been expressed that the services are not being provided fairly and equally throughout the circuit. Judges, county commissioners, law enforcement, and victims of juvenile crimes also question the timeliness and efficiency of the services. These opinions reflect negatively on the other services provided by the circuit and do not accurately represent the attitudes of the staff of the juvenile office.

The goal of this research is to find ways to improve the efficiency of the juvenile office operations of the 28th Judicial Circuit. Identifying methods that are being used by similar operations, looking at techniques used in other industries, and encouraging recommendations from the staff of the 28th Circuit will be used in evaluating changes to enhance services.

Surveys (Appendix F-4) were distributed to twenty-five circuits (Appendix D) in Missouri that are similar to the 28th Judicial Circuit. With the results of these surveys a follow up group (Appendix E) was identified for personal interviews. The judges and staff of the 28th Circuit were interviewed to understand their thoughts about the juvenile office operation. Interviews were conducted with elementary school teachers and a representative of a health care organization to investigate how other disciplines approach providing services.

The cooperation among the circuits was excellent with an 84% return on the survey. The follow up group was equally cooperative and readily provided requested information. Results

showed that the other circuits are facing the same problems as that of the 28th Circuit. Two of the circuits in the follow up group have made progress in addressing these problems. In reviewing reference material, information was obtained on operating standards that have recently been developed for juvenile court administration by the Office of State Courts Administrator. This information, along with management processes used in other industries provided ideas for improving and enhancing services in the 28th Circuit.

The 28th Judicial Circuit Juvenile Court must make changes in its operations to move toward meeting standards developed by the Office of State Courts Administrator. Addressing these standards can present a service that will be respected by the people the circuit serves. More importantly, meeting these standards will improve the circuit's ability to provide the type of services to the juveniles of the circuit that support the mission with which the juvenile courts have been charged since their inception--that of a special court to shape and mold the child as a parent should.

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