Washington State's Statewide Interdisciplinary Program

How it has Improved Parent Representation and Outcomes

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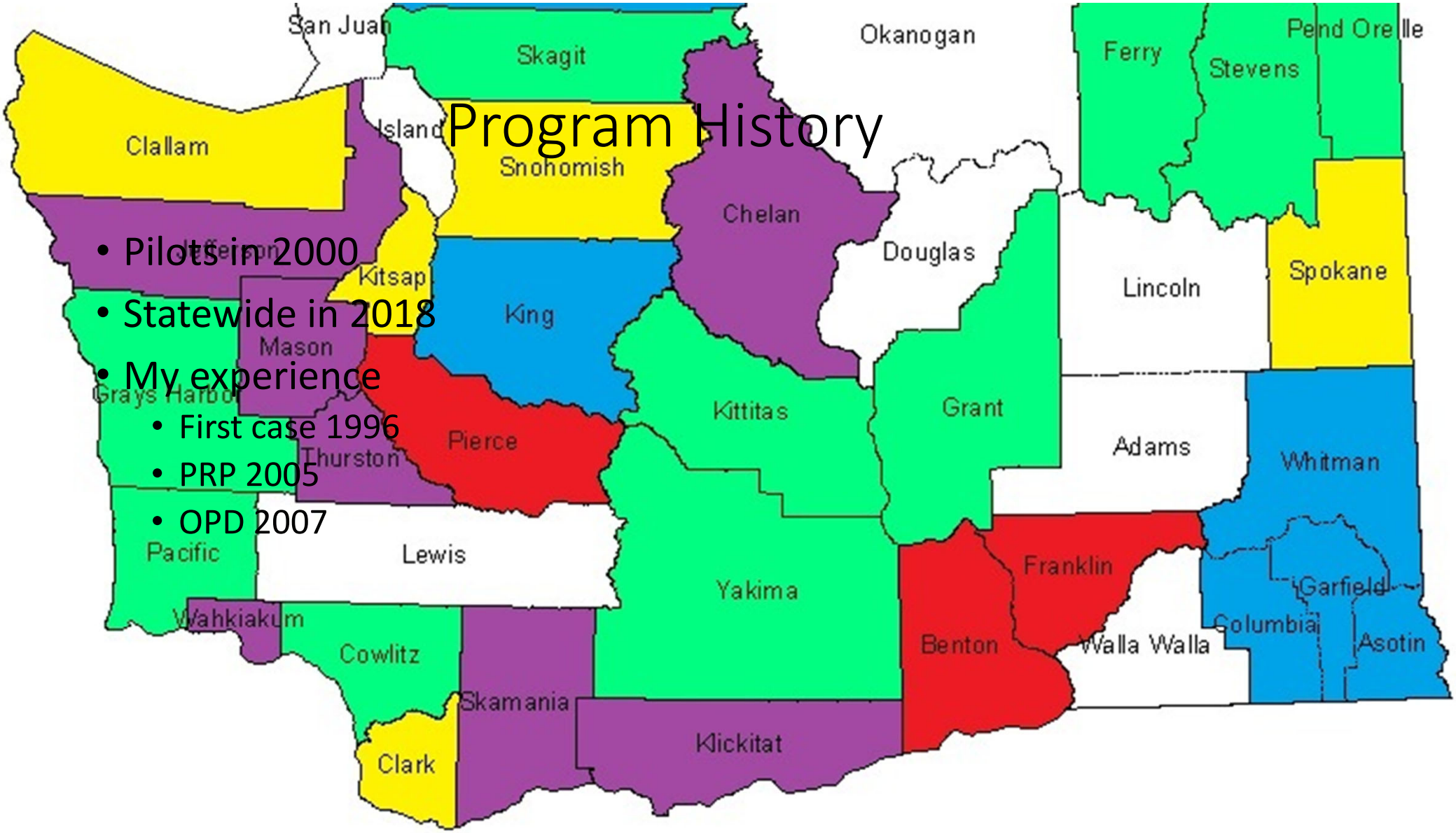
Washington State Office of Public Defense

UM School of Law 1995

Program History

- Pilots in 2000
- Statewide in 2018
- My experience
  - First case 1996
  - PRP 2005
  - OPD 2007



Caseload Standards Make a Difference

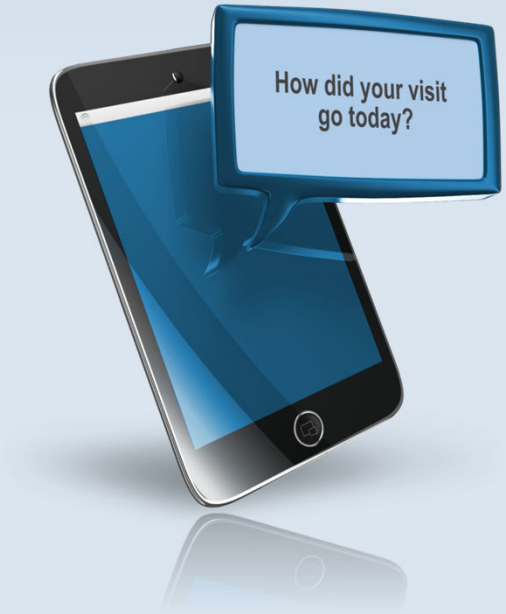
- 80 cases counted by the client
- Lack of Caseload standards leads to “Courthouse Steps” representation
- Without a caseload standard, other standards are almost impossible to implement

Enhanced Client Communication Builds Trust

About 30% of attorneys time spent communicating with clients

- Client Directed Representation
- Tailored to meet the needs of the specific client
- Office or other private space
- Timely
- Allows clients to be heard
- Trauma responsive
- Prepares client for court and staffings

Almost all attorneys have incorporated texting in their communication plan



Impact on Attorney Practice

- Know more about your client which helps build better relationships between client and social worker
- Develop meaningful relationships with clients
- Give good advice including best interest of child advice
- Client more likely to listen to advice

Expert Service Use

In 2011 the top 4 used experts were:

-Psychological Evaluations	27%
-Expert Testimony	11%
-Polygraph	10%
-Forensic Social Worker	7%

In 2021, the top 4 were:

-Medical Forensic Review	22%
-Parenting Evaluations	15%
-Psychological Evaluations	14%
-Forensic Social Worker	13%

OPD Social Worker

- Same qualifications as DCYF
- Case Support for parent
- Translator of social work principles for attorneys
- Translator of legal and social work principles for the parent
- Helps parent engage
- Limited Resource
- Empower the parent to take charge of their service plan
- Impact

Parent for Parent

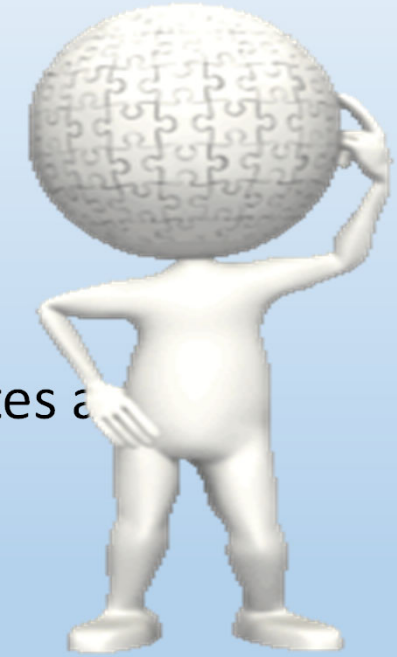
- Parents with experience in child welfare system assist in educating parents currently in the system and helping them more fully engage
- Uniquely situated to give hope to parents in the system
- Helps with client engagement and empowerment.

Oversight by OPD

- Training
- Technical assistance
- Monitoring of caseloads
- Monitoring of hours spent on cases
- Monitoring of client communication hours
- Complaint process
- Attorney reviews and court observations

Does it work?

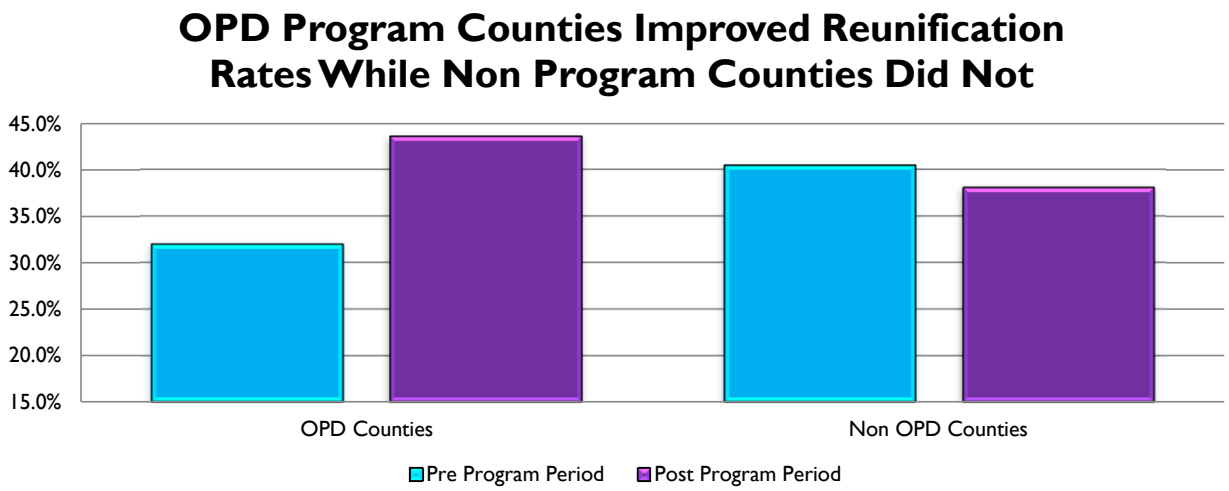
- OPD Studies
- New York Study
  - Children and Youth Services Review 102 (2019) 42-55
    - Builds off of Washington study
    - Children go home 118 days sooner
- Colorado has reported and increase in reunification rates a decrease in termination of parental rights



Evaluations and Data

2010 and 2011 OPD and Washington State

Center for Court Research Data



partners forourchildren.

Partners for Our Children is committed to improving the lives of Washington state foster children through rigorous research, analysis and evidence-based information. The organization, founded in 2007, is a collaborative effort of the University of Washington School of Social Work, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services and private funders.

ISSUE BRIEF
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Washington's Parents Representation Program

Helping Children in Child Welfare System Reach Permanency

KEY MESSAGES

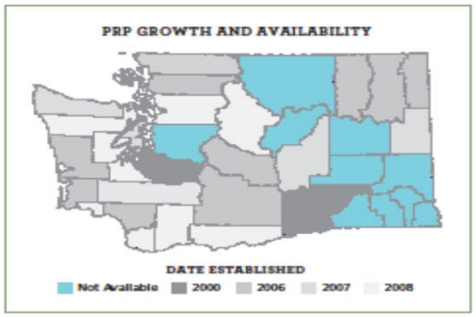
- The Parents Representation Program is helpful in moving children from the child welfare system to permanent homes.
- The Parents Representation Program cuts the time it takes for children to reach permanency:*

Reunifications occur 1 MONTH sooner**	Adoptions and Guardianships occur 1 YEAR sooner**

**Based on a projection of statewide implementation on a cohort of children entering care in 2001 **Approximations*

Summary

Legal representation in juvenile court has been recognized by most states as an essential protection for parents when children have been removed from their custody. A 1999 study called into question whether parents in Washington were receiving adequate legal representation in processes that have significant consequences for parents and children.[1] The Parents Representation Program (PRP) was developed by the Washington State Office of Public Defense (OPD) and the Washington State Legislature to enhance the quality of defense representation for parents in dependency and termination hearings. The program aims to reduce the number of continuances requested by attorneys, limit caseloads (no more than 80 cases per attorney) and supports their work by ensuring attorneys have reasonable time to prepare cases and work with clients. The program provides social workers, expert resources, periodic trainings, and oversight through OPD. Piloted initially in three counties in 2000, the program has now expanded to 25 counties across the state. See Map.



In 2010, Partners for Our Children at the University of Washington conducted a study on the impact of PRP, looking at the program's influence on the speed with which children are reunified, adopted or enter guardianships.[2]

1 Washington State Office of Public Defense (1999). Costs of Defense and Children's Representation in Dependency and Termination Cases. Olympia, WA: Author.

2 To date, the PRP is the only program of parental representation in juvenile dependency proceedings known by the authors to have been the subject of evaluation research.

Cost Avoidance

- If you know:
  - Amount of increased reunifications and speedier permanency
  - Cost of foster care, relative care, services, adoption and guardianship subsidies
  - Data from the exits from care and length of time in care
- Then: You can derive the cost avoidance to the state
- In Washington State, PRP paid for itself within just a few years, and more than pays for itself in subsequent years
- Other programs in California, New York, and Michigan have also reported savings to their child welfare systems