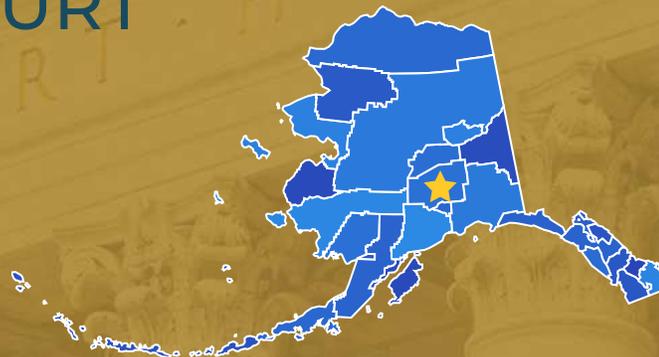


# FAMILIES WITH INFANTS AND TODDLERS (FIT) COURT

Palmer, Alaska

Lead Local Agency: Alaska Court System, Palmer Therapeutic Courts, Families with Infants and Toddlers Court

Court Model: 0-3 Safe Babies Court



## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Palmer FIT Court model focuses on reaching permanency for infants and toddlers through an expedited court process. The Court goals are to build treatment and supports for involved families by providing comprehensive services that address parental substance use, parenting skills, family safety and children's needs. The FIT Court seeks to achieve permanency within 12 months from entry into the program. The Palmer FIT Court has established effective collaborative relationships with regional stakeholders and holds monthly meetings to continue developing innovative strategies to meet the needs of children and families.

## TARGET POPULATION

The target population is families who have an active Child in Need of Aid (CINA) case and have at least one child in the family under three years of age.

## PALMER, ALASKA QUICK FACTS



**On average, new FIT Court families have been admitted within 25 days from the child welfare case opening.**



**75% of the children who have exited the program have been reunified with a parent. The statewide reunification rate is 56%.**



**63% of eligible children are enrolled in Early Head Start and 100% of children have accessed at least one service.**

## PROJECT GOALS

Goal 1: Ensure the FIT Court is operating efficiently and effectively using evidence-based practices.

Goal 2: Increase transparency and communication within and among the FIT Court Team, Steering Committee, Stakeholders and statewide partners to accomplish the mission of the FIT Court.

Goal 3: Improve the service array and communication within and among service providers.

Goal 4: Work collaboratively with state agencies in developing a project site to implement Plans of Safe Care in the community.

## LEVERAGING PARTNERSHIPS

Akeela Family Programs  
Alaska Court System  
Alaska Court Improvement Program  
Alaska Department of Law  
Alaska Department of Health & Social Services  
Alaska Family Services  
Alaska Office of Public Advocacy  
Alaska Public Defender Agency  
Chickaloon Village Traditional Council  
Compassionate Directions  
Knik Tribal Council  
Mat-Su Health Foundation  
Mat-Su Regional Medical Center  
Ptarmigan Connections  
R.O.C.K. Mat-Su  
Set Free Alaska

## PROGRAM OUTCOMES AND SUSTAINABILITY

The FIT Court emphasizes prompt assessment and service provision for participants. The program has a dedicated Office of Children's Services (OCS) case worker who works only with FIT Court participants. All children under three years old are referred for a multidisciplinary screening through a pediatric clinic specializing in high-risk infants. They then begin accessing a variety of medical, mental health, educational and social services. Family Team Meetings (FTMs) provide a collaborative framework to discuss treatment directions and interventions.

Services for parents are also a priority for the FIT Court. FIT Court parents undergo prompt substance use disorder (SUD) assessments and referrals to treatment. Treatment options include evidence-based services and curriculum, including Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT). Providers participate in the FTMs and in court hearings. The FIT Court coordinator ensures that all relevant agencies are informed and engage in delivery of services appropriate to the participating family.

The Palmer FIT Court has worked continuously to expand and enhance services for families and children in the Mat-Su region. Many of the FIT Court's efforts to enhance and expand services for families and children have influence well beyond the parameters of the Court. Thus, the Court's sustainability exists in part through its impact on child welfare throughout the Mat-Su region. The FIT Court Coordinator position and other supports were incorporated into the state budget, effective fiscal year 2021.

In an exit survey from FIT Court, one participant said they "liked the overall premise of the court saying we're going to be here to help you and support you and the overall idea that we care about your family. That's what made me opt into FIT court. They're going to give you services and care about keeping families together." Another participant wrote that the best thing about FIT Court is "learning how to believe in myself and accepting help and guidance from others. Learning how to turn mistakes into lessons and propel forward."

## PROJECT CONTACT

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