

1. Title

From Pause to Progress: One Family Treatment Court's Journey to Best Practice Alignment

2. Executive Summary

A Family Treatment Court (FTC) in a large, urbanizing Midwestern county with both urban and rural communities faced a critical turning point when data revealed that families exiting the FTC through expulsion or administrative discharge experienced significantly worse outcomes than those who graduated. These outcomes included lower rates of reunification, longer stays in foster care, higher rates of termination of parental rights, and reduced access to treatment and recovery support. With targeted, customized technical assistance from national FTC leaders at Children and Family Futures (CFF), the FTC paused referrals, restructured its operations, and realigned its practice and policies with the FTC Best Practice Standards. The transformation, guided by expert facilitation and strategic support, led to improved practices, renewed referrals, and recognition as a national leader.

3. The Challenge

This FTC found that they had high rates of unsuccessful exits and administrative discharges, which were linked to poor reunification outcomes for families. In one year, 70 percent of parents who exited the program did so unsuccessfully. With guidance from CFF, the team recognized that punitive responses to court orders, such as using program exit as a consequence for parents' actions, were ineffective and misaligned with best practices. This prompted a shift toward more supportive strategies focused on parents' re-engagement in services, individualized responses to behaviors, and sustained recovery.

4. The Approach/Solution

CFF Technical Assistance Liaisons conducted a virtual site visit that included stakeholder interviews, observation of staffing and court operations, and a review of program data. They recommended that the team pause new FTC referrals to create space for reflection and operational improvements.

The TA provided by CFF was customized to the site's specific needs, informed by stakeholder input, program data, and the team's readiness for change. The transformation unfolded over six to nine months, with early wins emerging in the first few months and deeper structural changes taking shape over time.

CFF facilitated a "Lunch & Learn" series with child welfare workers and supervisors, treatment providers, peer recovery support specialists, parent and agency attorneys, and guardians ad litem, that focused on the eight FTC Best Practice Standards. These sessions, designed and led by national experts, helped the FTC team assess their alignment with national standards and identify areas for improvement. The structured facilitation created a safe space for honest reflection and dialogue that included multiple agencies and disciplines.

The FTC team developed an action plan and prioritized changes that would strengthen parent engagement and family outcomes. CFF provided ongoing coaching, resources, and examples from other jurisdictions to help the team translate best practices into daily operations.

The team redesigned their FTC phases to shift the focus from compliance to recovery capital. Recovery capital refers to the strengths, supports, and resources a person can use to help them stay on track in their recovery, such as having a safe place to live, people who care about them, and goals they're working toward. They began conducting recovery capital assessments more frequently, especially when parents advanced or struggled to progress. This approach, informed by national examples and TA guidance, allowed the team to tailor support more effectively and promote long-term engagement in the FTC, treatment services, and their child welfare case plan.

5. Outcomes / Results

Following the implementation of key changes, which were developed and refined through customized technical assistance, the FTC site resumed referrals with renewed confidence and clarity. The team strengthened its practices to align with the FTC Best Practice Standards and fostered greater cohesion across partners. The site went on to be recognized as a national leader as part of the Peer Learning Court Program, featuring their use of data to fuel change during a national webinar.

6. Lessons Learned

This experience reinforced the value of data transparency and a willingness to adapt. By pausing operations, the team created space to reflect, recalibrate, and protect families from ineffective practices, a process guided by expert TA and facilitation.

Sustained progress required strong cross-system collaboration, ongoing training, and a shared commitment to continuous improvement, supported by national expertise and flexible TA delivery.

The site's journey underscores the importance of customized technical assistance that evolves with the FTC's needs and builds trust, momentum, and lasting change.

7. Call to Action

Aligning your FTC policy and practice with best practice standards is challenging. Are you ready to assess your practice and get support from national FTC leaders?

Connect with us to explore technical assistance and peer learning opportunities that support meaningful, lasting change. Whether you're facing a turning point or seeking to strengthen your foundation, expert guidance can help you move from pause to progress.

Request assistance from CFF or learn more about our offerings [here](#)