



**Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force
2021 Annual Reporting**

GRANT: Children's Bureau
Office on Child Abuse and Neglect
Children's Justice Act Grant FY 2021
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AGENCY FEDERAL ID: 03-6000274

AGENCY DUNS NUMBER: 80-937-6155

CLOSING DATE: May 28, 2021

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I. Task Force Membership:

a. Name, Title, Organization, Brief Description of relevant background, task force designation

Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force Membership Listing				
Task Force Membership Designation	Name	Title	Organization	Relevant Background/Experience
Law Enforcement	Marc Metayer	SIU Board Manager	VT Special Investigation Unit Board	Retired VT State Police
Criminal Court Judge	<i>Under Recruitment</i>			
Civil Court Judge	Judge Ben Joseph	Retired VT Court Judge	VT Court Administration	1998 to 2015: VT Superior Court Judge serving on Criminal, Civil and Family divisions. Current State Legislator
Prosecuting Attorney	Rose Kennedy	VT State's Attorney	VT State's Attorney Generals Office	Requested bio
Defense Attorney	Marshall Pahl	Chief Juvenile Defender	VT Defender General's Office	Former appellate and trial level criminal defense attorney.
Attorney for Children	Jennifer Hurlburt-Poehlmann Wendy Loomis (as back up)	Public policy/ legislative liaison Executive Director	Rutland Children's Advocacy Center & VT Children's Alliance State Chapter	Current Director of the Vermont Children's Alliance (CAC State Chapter) and the Executive Director of the Rutland CAC.
Child Advocate	Kelly Woodward	Victim Advocate	Franklin County State's Attorney's Office Northwest Unit for Special Investigations	For the past 24 years, Kelly has been the Victim Advocate at the Northwest Unit for Special Investigations, a Child Advocacy Center, and the Franklin County State's Attorney's Office. Her caseload is primarily providing victim services to children who have been abused. Prior to her current position, she was an investigative social worker for the Department of Children and Families. Her current memberships in Vermont include the Criminal Rules Committee, Franklin

				County Sexual Assault Team, NUSI MDT Team, Children's Justice Act, SANE Board, and she holds a National certification as a Sexual Assault Intervention Specialist, Advanced Level, through the National Organization of Victim Assistance.
Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)	Robert Post	Programs Mgr. Court Improvement GAL Director	VT Court Administration	Has worked as the interim GAL Director, currently hired permanently as the Program Manager.
Health Professional	Tracy Wagner	SANE RN VT SANE Board Pediatric Medical Director	VT SANE Board	Peds nurse for > 30 years: acute inpatient care, high-tech home care, visiting nurse, and peds. offices as a Nurse Educator, to Assistant Nurse Mgr. Has MA in nursing & certified Peds. in 2005, became a Forensic Nurse in 2009 & obtained national certification as a SANE-P in 2013. Is the Ped. Clinical Coordinator for the VT SANE Program, Nurse Clinician with the Child Safe Program at UVM. Experienced foster/adoptive parent and parenting children with complex medical, emotional, and physical disabilities.
Mental Health Professional	Gary Marvel	Supervision & Re-Entry Coordinator Co-Director of VT Center for Prevention & Treatment of Sexual Abuse	VT Dept of Corrections Agency of Human Services	Expertise in current best practice for supervision and treatment of adults with sexually harmful behaviors. Previous child welfare social worker.
Child Protective Services	Nancy Miller	Child Safety Manager	VT DCF/Family Services	Has been with Family Services Division since 2006, with experience in the front end, ongoing and JS population- 13 years conducting child abuse investigations and assessments and supervising that work. Nancy oversees policy and practice related to child safety interventions and child safety related decision making in the ongoing work. Additionally, Nancy provides

				consultation to the field and assists with training related to child safety.
Individual Experienced in Working with Children with Disabilities	Pam McCarthy	Vt Family Network	VT Family Network is a non-profit organization that seeks to empower and support families of children with special needs.	Pam McCarthy, M.Ed. is the President/CEO of Vermont Family Network (VFN), the federally designated Family to Family Health Information Center and Parent Training and Information Center for Vermont. She has been working in family support, advocacy, and systems change roles in Vermont since 1995, including as Parent Child Center Director and AHS Field Director in Franklin/Grand Isle. Prior to that, she helped launch the Parents as Teachers program in the state of Delaware, beginning as a home visitor with lived experience parenting two teens and two toddlers. She is committed to diverse family voices being well-represented at every level of the system.
Parent/ Representative of Parent Group	Larry Crist	Executive Director	VT Parent Representation Center	Holds a law degree & MSW, 45 years of legal & social service in government & non-profit. Managed legal & mental health services in correctional, court & community-based settings at the city, county & state levels. First Director of VT Child, Foster & Adoption Care Licensing, Deputy-Comm. Dept. of Health, Comm. of the Dept. of Aging & Disabilities. Currently serving as Exec. Dir. of the VT Parent Representation Center.
Adult Former Victim of Child Abuse and Neglect	Kelli Gile	Therapist	Private Practice	Kelli Gile holds an MSW from the University of Vermont and a BSW from the University of Maine, Orono. For the past 10 years, Kelli has practiced social work both in the states of Maine and Vermont, most recently as a Family Services Worker with the state of Vermont, DCF services. Currently, Kelli has her own practice as a child,

				adolescent, and adult therapist located in Barre, VT
Individual Experienced in Working with Homeless Children and Youth	Mark Redmond	Executive Director	Spectrum Youth and Family Services	Mark has been Spectrum's Executive Director since 2003. He has worked with homeless and at-risk youth since 1981 - in New York City; Westchester, NY; and Stamford, CT. Before coming to Spectrum, Mark was the Associate Executive Director of the Domus Foundation and helped start the city's first charter school for low-income middle school children. He has a Bachelor's degree in Finance from Villanova University and a Masters in Public Administration from New York University.

b. Function

- The purpose of the CJA Task Force is to oversee the appropriation of Vermont CJA funds to support the improvement and strengthening of the front-end, or the intake and investigative components of the child protection and child welfare system. This mission requires a spirit of collaboration and a positive working relationship between the Department for Children and Families (DCF) and the Children's Justice Act Task Force. As such, each party in the collaboration has a specific role to play. The respective roles are:

1. The role of The Department for Children and Families is to:

- a. Administer the CJA Grant and assign the function of Grant Manager to a position within the Department for Children and Families.
- b. Facilitate the appropriate business office process of grant funding allocation, based on recommendations it receives from the CJTF.

2. The role of Task Force members:

- a. Act with regard for the well-being and welfare of children and youth.
- b. Contribute to the review of applications for funding
- c. Contribute to the Three-Year Assessment review and evaluation process in their specific area of expertise.
- d. Adhere to state confidentiality requirements.
- e. Regularly attend and fully participate in all scheduled meetings.
- f. Meeting Facilitation: The Meeting Facilitator shall preside at the CJTF meetings and perform duties as appropriate to the mission of the CJTF. Each meeting agenda will contain a standing time to appoint a member for facilitation of the meeting. Members will volunteer to act as the facilitator and be noted in the meeting minutes.

3. The role of the State Coordinator/Grant Manager:

- a. Administer the CJA funds.
- b. Serve as grant administrator on CJA funded projects.
- c. Provide advice, guidance, technical assistance, and information regarding the expected role and function of the CJTF as mandated by the requirements of the CJA Program Instruction.
- d. Attend all CJTF meetings.
- e. Keep CJTF members apprised of the meeting schedules and distribute minutes and other pertinent mailings necessary for Task Force members to fulfill their responsibilities.
- f. Act as liaison between CJTF and the Federal Administration for

Children and Families to facilitate communication.

- g. Act as liaison between CJTF and the Vermont Department for Children and Families to facilitate communication.
- g. Present financial reports to task force members' status of CJA funds available for allocation to future projects.

Meetings

1. CJTF meetings will occur at least four times per year.
2. The State Coordinator/Grant Manager, in consultation with the Task Force, may schedule special meetings.
3. The Task Force sets the agenda for the regular and special meetings as a standing agenda item at each meeting.
4. The Grant Manager shall document in minutes all regularly scheduled and special CJTF meetings, including any major decisions, action items, recommendations from the CJTF to The Department for Children and Families, and responses from the Department for Children and Families regarding recommendations previously submitted.
5. Upon their approval by a majority of a quorum vote at the next scheduled CJTF meeting, the CJTF minutes will be made a permanent record and maintained by the State Coordinator/Grant Manager.

Voting

1. Each member of the CJTF shall have one vote.
2. Voting will take place in person at the meetings, phone in attendance, or electronic communication with a response time set by the coordinator.
3. A quorum for the transaction of business shall consist of one more than half of the current membership of the CJTF. The members in attendance at a meeting where a quorum is not present, may elect (by majority vote), to proceed with the business of the meeting subject to ratification when a quorum is present at the next meeting.
4. Any member who directly or individually may benefit from a grant application before the CJTF shall abstain from discussion and voting on the matter.
5. Any member with a conflict of interest in an issue being considered by the CJTF, shall make a declaration to that effect, and abstain from further discussion and voting on that issue.

II. Prior Year Performance Report May 2020 to May 2021

1. Guardian ad Litem Program

In Vermont, by statute, a Guardian ad Litem (GAL) is assigned to each child involved in a CHINS (child in need of care or supervision) case to act as an independent advocate for the best interests of the child. It is imperative to have a well-staffed and well-trained pool of volunteers to ensure competence and effective advocacy to assist the court and its state and community partners in the adjudication of cases involving abuse and neglect of children. Continued education and professional development for the GALs is a large part of preparing them for service.

a. Activity:

- i. Vermont Guardian ad Litem Program/ Office of Court Improvement GAL Statewide Training:

1. Following topics were presented at training:

- a. State of CHINS Policy and Practice.
- b. Assessing and Improving GAL Safety in the Community.
- c. What is Good Enough Parenting.
- d. Foster Family Panel.
- e. Juvenile Justice Reform in Vermont.
- f. Positive Mindful Communications.
- g. Self-Care.
- h. Best Practice Tips for GALs.
- i. Issues in Residential Placement.
- j. Trauma.
- k. Addressing the Educational Needs of Children.

b. The Current Task Force Recommendations(s)/goal(s) that would be addressed by this activity:

- i. Professional Training- Provide professional training on various aspects of child abuse and neglect to all who work with child abuse and neglect.
- ii. The Vermont Guardian ad Litem Program- Vermont's Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Program will be strengthened through regular training and increased outreach for active volunteers.

c. CJA Required Category:

- i. A, C.

d. Evaluation Methods:

- i. Participation Evaluation.
- ii. The GAL program regularly monitors the progress and performance of its volunteers. Each county is assigned a GAL coordinator whose job it is to make sure that GAL's are performing to standards and providing effective advocacy. GAL program management is also in close contact with judges

and attorneys who regularly provide feedback regarding GAL involvement in cases.

e. Outputs:

- i. 146 participants attended the training.

f. Outcomes:

- i. There are now 314 GALs in the State and every county has GALs.
- ii. All 2020 child cases that required a GAL were provided services.
- iii. Providing a well-trained and effective advocate to each child in a CHINS case ensures that the child has independent representation in addition to an attorney that focuses only on what is best for that child. This valuable input can assist the court in painting a more complete picture of the child's needs and interests as the case moves through court.

2. Vermont Children's Alliance

The Task Force voted to provide the CACs and the SIU equal portions of the total CJA award. Since these organizations are co-located and for financial management simplification, they agreed to have their individual amount combined as one sum and managed by the VT Children's Alliance.

a. Activity:

- i. The Child Advocacy Center at The Family Place acquisition of Cellebrite UFED 4PC Ultimate CLX obtained by The Family Place.
- ii. Bennington County Child Advocacy Center (BCCAC) installation of CaseCracker recording equipment for Forensic Interviews.
- iii. Reaccreditation/accreditation fees to The National Children's Alliance for the Northwest Unit for Special Investigations (NUSI) and the Lamoille County Special Investigative Unit (LCSIU) respectively.
- iv. "Monty's Day in Court" and "Girl/Boy Body Book" to be distributed to child advocacy center's statewide.

b. Subgrantee:

- i. The Child Advocacy Center at The Family Place.
- ii. Bennington County Child Advocacy Center.

c. The Current Task Force Recommendations(s)/goal(s) that would be addressed by this activity:

- i. Application for CJA Funding:
 - 1. Children's Advocacy Centers and Special Investigation Units- Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) and Special Investigation Units (SIUs) will exist statewide and have the necessary training, investigative equipment and technological resources to function effectively.

2. Access to Equipment- Professionals working with child abuse and neglect cases should have access to necessary equipment and technology to enhance performance in investigation, prosecution and treatment.

d. CJA Required Category:

- i. A, B, C.

e. Evaluation Method:

- i. The Child Advocacy Center at The Family Place acquisition of Cellebrite UFED 4PC Ultimate CLX obtained by The Family Place.
 1. Routine use of equipment at The Family Place, ongoing technical training, maintenance agreements and acquisition of updates: The Investigative Analyst at Hartford Police Department will attend an official Cellebrite training in order to be the primary operator of the Cellebrite system. Ongoing training needs, maintenance and license renewals have been approved and will continue to be included within the Hartford Police department's operating budget.
- ii. Bennington County Child Advocacy Center (BCCAC) installation of CaseCracker recording equipment for Forensic Interviews.
 1. The investigators at the BCCAC have completed initial training for using the equipment. Monitoring of the usage of the equipment to ensure that all investigators can independently utilize the system. During case review and peer review, concerns regarding the system can be brought up and addressed in a timely manner.
- iii. Reaccreditation/accreditation fees to The National Children's Alliance for the Northwest Unit for Special Investigations (NUSI) and the Lamoille County Special Investigative Unit (LCSIU) respectively.
 1. NUSI and LCSIU are reviewing and rewriting policies and procedures to ensure they meet the standards set forth by the accrediting body.
 2. By remaining (and becoming, respectively) a nationally accredited child advocacy center, NUSI and LCSIU will continue to provide the highest level of services to the children and their supporting family members in each respective county.
- iv. "Monty's Day in Court" and "Girl/Boy Body Book" to be distributed to child advocacy center's statewide

f. Outputs:

- i. The Child Advocacy Center at The Family Place acquisition of Cellebrite UFED 4PC Ultimate CLX obtained by The Family Place.

1. The Cellebrite UFED 4PC Ultimate CLX package includes Cellebrite's Analytics software which will help to perform link analysis between suspects that could be linked to the same crimes across multiple devices. The advantage of the Cellebrite UFED 4PC CLX is that it includes the Cloud analyzer which helps to recover data that may have been deleted and/or saved in cloud storage by the owner of the mobile devices. In the age of everchanging technology, more and more cases of child abuse and maltreatment include elements of pictures, conversation threads (texts, instant messages, etc.) and social media applications that memorialize the commission and, sometimes even capture, the confession of criminal activity. Devices are not limited to just phones, but computers, tablets, gaming devices and others. Yet now, there is an increasing need to extract information from the cloud which is not available on all Cellebrite products. The Cellebrite Analytics software combined with Cellebrite's Cloud Analyzer allows an investigative operator to extract information from an electronic device and the cloud, including deleted activity
- ii. Bennington County Child Advocacy Center (BCCAC) installation of CaseCracker recording equipment for Forensic Interviews.
 1. To replace the undependable outdated recording equipment at the BCCAC with reliable, user-friendly equipment designed specifically for law enforcement.
- iii. Reaccreditation/accreditation fees to The National Children's Alliance for the Northwest Unit for Special Investigations (NUSI) and the Lamoille County Special Investigative Unit (LCSIU) respectively.
 1. To successfully apply for reaccreditation of NUSI and initial accreditation of LCSIU.
 2. By remaining (and becoming, respectively) a nationally accredited child advocacy center, NUSI and LCSIU will continue to provide the highest level of services to the children and their supporting family members in each respective county.
- iv. "Monty's Day in Court" and "Girl/Boy Body Book" to be distributed to child advocacy center's statewide.
 1. The information in the books distributed statewide will provide knowledge of the judicial process to victims and better equip them for the experience of trial.

g. Outcomes:

- i. The Child Advocacy Center at The Family Place acquisition of Cellebrite UFED 4PC Ultimate CLX obtained by The Family Place.

1. When local law enforcement officers in Windsor County have consent to “dump” or have seized a device, they lack the proper equipment at their immediate disposal. They often must send the device to another agency for extraction. The wait time can average up to 6 months, however it is not uncommon for those delays to go much longer, due to priority and urgency of other major crime investigations. This waiting period does a disservice to the victims we serve and the justice they seek.
2. Windsor County expects a reduction in investigative delays having in house equipment to extract information from mobile devices.
- ii. Bennington County Child Advocacy Center (BCCAC) installation of CaseCracker recording equipment for Forensic Interviews.
 1. The installation of a HD system with improved sound recording capabilities at the Bennington County CAC allows for better playback for investigators and for court proceedings. A system with clearer picture, easy playback, and better sound quality will aid in prosecution of cases.
 2. Children interviewed at the BCCAC will have a clear, easily understood interview recorded to assist with the investigation and prosecution of their abuse.
- iii. Reaccreditation/accreditation fees to The National Children’s Alliance for the Northwest Unit for Special Investigations (NUSI) and the Lamoille County Special Investigative Unit (LCSIU) respectively.
 1. By remaining (and becoming, respectively) a nationally accredited child advocacy center, NUSI and LCSIU will continue to provide the highest level of services to the children and their supporting family members in each respective county.
 2. Child Advocacy Center at NUSI will be reaccredited with the National Children’s Alliance.
 3. Child Advocacy Center at LCSIU will be accredited with the National Children’s Alliance.
- iv. “Monty’s Day in Court” and “Girl/Boy Body Book” to be distributed to child advocacy center’s statewide.
 1. The information in the books distributed statewide will provide knowledge of the judicial process to victims and better equip them for the experience of trial.

3. SANE Program

Sexual and domestic violence is a serious public health problem for children and youth in Vermont. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 6 boys are sexually abused before their 18th birthdays. As with other forms of

violence, racial/ethnic and sexual minority groups are disproportionately impacted by sexual violence. According to the 2017 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) sexual violence and intimate partner (or dating) violence data highlight the following: 9% of female students report being physically forced to have sexual intercourse when they did not want to; students of color are significantly more likely than white, non- Hispanic students to have ever been forced to have sexual intercourse (9% vs. 6% overall), and LGBT students are more than three times as likely as heterosexual/cisgender students to have ever been forced to have sexual intercourse (18% vs. 6%). Among all students who dated during the past year 1 in 10 experienced sexual violence and 1 in 15 experienced physical violence. Of these, female students, students of color, and LGBT students are all significantly more likely than others to experience both physical and sexual violence.

Providing specialized medical care to child and adolescent victims of sexual and dating violence is an important component of victim healing. In addition, the timely and accurate collection and transportation and testing of forensic evidence in these cases improves timely resolution of these cases. Forensic nurses practicing in healthcare setting across the state provide specialized trauma-informed medical care and collect forensic evidence during highly technical exams.

a. Activity:

- i. Enhancing Clinical Knowledge of Pediatric and Adolescent Forensic Nurse Examiners: This project aimed to provide access to national learning opportunities to enhance best practice approaches for nurses providing specialized medical care to child and adolescent victims of sexual abuse and assault. Through the use of CJA funds, forensic nurses across the state were able to access the International Association of Forensic Nursing remote conference.
- ii. Improving Evidence Collection Systems for Forensic Nurse Examiners: This project aimed to improve Vermont's system for tracking forensic evidence in cases of suspected child abuse or assault. Through the use of CJA funds, Vermont is able to build capacity and resource a model system for tracking evidence kits from collection to transport, testing and storage.

b. The Current Task Force Recommendations(s)/goal(s) that would be addressed by this activity:

- a. Application for CJA Funding:
 - i. SANE Program-Maintain and further develop the Vermont Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program. Future development will include emphasis on the Pediatric SANE Program.
 - ii. Professional Training- Provide professional training on various aspects of child abuse and neglect to all who work with child

abuse and neglect.

c. CJA Required Category:

iii. A, B, C.

d. Evaluation Methods:

- i. Enhancing Clinical Knowledge of Pediatric and Adolescent Forensic Nurse Examiners: Participating nurses are asked to provide short, written feedback outlining their learning from the conference and asked to highlight one clinical or program learning which they plan to bring back to their hospitals for implementation.
- ii. Improving Evidence Collection Systems for Forensic Nurse Examiners: Quarterly reports of all kits sent to hospitals and utilized to identify any kits that have not been entered as received or those that have been used but not received by the Vermont Forensic Laboratory.

e. Outputs:

- i. Enhancing Clinical Knowledge of Pediatric and Adolescent Forensic Nurse Examiners:
 1. Send at least 10 pediatric or adolescent forensic nurses to the International Association of Forensic Nursing Conference to access professional development.
 2. Apply best practices presented at IAFN conference to clinical practice settings in Vermont to improve patient care.
- ii. Improving Evidence Collection Systems for Forensic Nurse Examiners:
 1. Utilization of a cloud-based kit tracking system by all hospitals in Vermont.

f. Outcomes:

- iii. Enhancing Clinical Knowledge of Pediatric and Adolescent Forensic Nurse Examiners:
 1. This project provided access to the International Association of Forensic Nurses remote conference for 11 pediatric and/or adolescent forensic nurses throughout Vermont. These providers are based in hospitals throughout the state of Vermont. Access to this learning opportunity improves consistency in patient care and allows Vermont hospitals access models of national best-practices in patient care.
- iv. Improving Evidence Collection Systems for Forensic Nurse Examiners:
 1. This project ensured that all forensic evidence kits collected in child sexual abuse and assault cases were tracked using a uniform, cloud-based electronic tracking

system (UPS Trackpad). Each kit has a unique identifier and its use, and location are tracked throughout the lifespan of the kit. This creates statewide assurance that forensic evidence is collected and tracked properly and can be located and utilized for legal proceedings, if needed.

- v. Both projects outlined build the capacity for the cadre of highly trained, specialized forensic nurses based at hospitals throughout Vermont to provide trauma informed medical responses to child victims of sexual abuse and assault. At rural hospitals, there is often a small number of nurses providing care to all of the sexual assault victims in the region. Providing access to learning opportunities such as at the International Association of Forensic Nursing conference reduces isolation and improves patient care. Ensuring that a well-functioning evidence collection process is available for evidence collected across the state prevents backlogs of evidence kits which has occurred in other states.
- vi. The COVID pandemic created significant strain on the systems of care and support for victims of child abuse and assault. The Vermont Forensic Nursing Program quickly provided guidance to nurses practicing in hospitals across the state and has worked to establish systems and protocols for remote victim advocacy to be provided during forensic exams.

4. Department for Children and Families Practice Improvement

- a. **Activity:** Participation in Good Lives Model Training: Treatment for Adolescents who have sexually harmful behaviors.
- b. **The Current Task Force Recommendations(s)/goal(s) that would be addressed by this activity:** There are now many evaluators trained in the Good Lives Model that division staff can access. Additional focus on implementation could involve intentional reference to the model as an innovative treatment approach.
- c. **CJA Required Category:**
 - i. B
- d. **Evaluation Methods:**
 - i. Participant feedback and evaluations
 - ii. Number of Clinicians who now provide this treatment
 - iii. Direct feedback from Family Service Workers and Community Partners on their understanding of the model
 - iv. Use of the model workbooks with youth with sexually harmful behaviors
- e. **Outputs:**
 - i. In February 4 -7 2019, a 4-day training was provided through funding from the Department of Corrections (DOC)

- ii. Clinicians, Family Services Workers and DOC personnel participated in this training together. Cross education provided rich discussion on the merits of the model, how each discipline could conduct wrap around services outside of the clinical setting based on the model and work collaboratively to achieve consistent behavioral responsibility of clients.
- iii. September 6, 2019 – David Prescott presented the model with the Family Services Leadership Team to provide an overview of the model, use of the model with adolescents and ways that FSD Field workers can transfer the content of workbooks to their case management of youth with sexually harmful behaviors

f. Outcomes:

- i. 62 Attendees at February 2019 training with David Prescott:
 - a. 5 Child Welfare/Family Services staff
 - b. 39 Clinicians
 - c. 5 Community Justice Center staff
 - d. 13 Department of Corrections staff
- ii. 45 Family Services District Directors, Operations Managers and Field Supervisors attended working session on September 6, 2019 with David Prescott to discuss use of the model with adolescents
- iii. All 12 Family Services District Offices, Woodside Juvenile Center and Central Office received copies of the *Good Lives, Young Men, Young Women: Becoming Who I Want to Be* Work Books and Case Management Guide
- iv. DOC and Family Services continue to meet quarterly through the VT Center for Prevention and Treatment of Sexual Abuse and the Good Lives Model continues to be an agenda item.
- v. Vermont has recently passed “Raising the Age” legislation for juvenile offenders and with this model in place is ready to provide appropriate treatment to a larger population of youth

5. The Vermont Children’s Justice Act Task Force

- a. **Activity:** Ongoing administration of the Task Force meetings, grant process and Federal requirements.
- b. **The Current Task Force Recommendations(s)/goal(s) that would be addressed by this activity:**
- c. **CJA Required Category:** A, B, C
- d. **Evaluation Methods:** Annual Report and Federal Three-Year Assessment.
- e. **Outputs:**
 - i. Task members are engaged and supported in a process to seek improvement areas and collaboration across disciplines that respond to

child abuse and neglect.

f. Outcomes:

- i. Task Force members regularly attend bi-monthly meetings.
- ii. Vermont organizations involved in the identification, investigation and prosecution of child abuse and neglect cases get funding for their work.
- iii. A review of the system response for investigation and prosecution of child abuse and neglect cases is undertaken by a diverse group of professionals.

Linkages between CJA and Other Children's Bureau Programming

Linkage to Anti-Trafficking Efforts

As indicated in the last APSR, the state of Vermont was awarded a \$1.2 million [grant](#) to combat human trafficking. This grant was designed to support the delivery of comprehensive and specialized services for all victims of human trafficking and the investigation and prosecution of sex and labor trafficking cases. The grant covers a three-year period which began October 1, 2018. Exploration of phase II of the grant is pending.

Vermont has a robust Human Trafficking State Level Task Force consists of a statewide steering committee and four sub-committees (Training/Outreach, Victim-Based Services, Law Enforcement, and Labor Trafficking). The statewide task force is focused on both adult and child/youth trafficking victims. Through this task force, Vermont currently has two Human Trafficking Case Managers for the state.

Within the Department for Children and Families (DCF), Family Services Division (FSD), a Human Trafficking of Minors Workgroup exists. Membership and linkage to the CJA Task Force includes:

- CJA Coordinator / FSD Child Safety Manager
- FSD Human Trafficking Consultant / ICPC and ICJ Compact Administrator
- FSD Policy and Planning Advisor
- FSD Domestic & Sexual Violence Unit Director and Specialists
- AGO Attorney
- FSD Family Services Workers, Supervisors, Directors, and Operations Managers
- Human Trafficking Case Managers
- Statewide Task Force Co-Chair
- Agency of Education (AOE)
- Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (VNADSV)
- Prevent Child Abuse Vermont (PCAV)
- Residential Treatment Program Staff, Clinicians, and Directors
- Community Agencies and Advocacy Groups

Emphasis continues to be placed on supporting consultation and multi-disciplinary team meetings because no one can combat trafficking alone. Consultation and MDTs have supported family services workers in obtaining ideas for potential resources in the community, learning more about a youth's individual risk factors, developing safety plans and case plans specific to trafficking, connecting youth to victims' services providers, and supporting criminal prosecution processes.

Linkage to other Children's Bureau Processes

Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP)

Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR)

Description of any activities undertaken in the last year to link/align the State's CJA work with work related to the State's Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR) and/or Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP).

The DCF Family Services Division (FSD) Policy and Planning Manager, who is responsible for the creation of Vermont's Annual Progress and Services Report and Child and Family Services Plan, attends the Children's Justice Act Task Force meetings twice a year or more as needed. She provides updates on these reports to the Task Force.

The Task Force receives copies of the APSR and the CFSP.

The Vermont APSR and CFSP are documents used in planning and research for our Three-Year Assessment.

Currently the CJA Coordinator and the Policy and Planning Manager are reviewing the 2021 CFSP, APSR 5-year reports, the Family Services Strategic Plan and the 2018-2021 Assessment for areas of overlap, opportunity to collaborate and areas of gaps. This review will result in a presentation to the CJA Task Force at the August 2019 meeting and potentially at other Departmental meetings and workgroups.

- i. December 20, 2019 Agenda: Family Services Quality Assurance Manager reviewed data points for the CFSP and APSR
 - o Foster Care Re-Entry Data
 - o FSD Worker child contact data
 - o Investigation commencement/assessment/completion times data
- ii. February 14, 2020 Agenda: CFSR & Program Improvement Plan presentation by the Policy and Planning Manager

Linkage to Court and Legal Representation Improvement Work

- CJA Task Force Agenda, January 18, 2019: Justice for Children Task Force Update: CHINS cases
- Discussion specific to parent legal representation

- April 19, 2019 CJA Agenda: *Bending the Curve Report*. This report was written and published by the VT Parent Representation Center and outlines recommendations for improvement in the DCF System.
- July 19, 2019 Agenda provided links to the Legal Representation Memo from the CJA Program Instructions for Task Force to review prior to future discussions.

CHINS Reform Workgroup Report:

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/CHINS-Reform-Wrkgrp-Report-12.11.18-Final.pdf>

Vermont Citizens Advisory Board Report:

<https://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/Boards/VCAB2019-20.pdf>

DCF Child Protection Report:

<https://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/Protection/docs/2019-CP-Report.pdf>

Linkage to Court Improvement Program

- The Programs Manager of the Court Administrators Office serves on the CJA Task Force.
- The Agenda included a report from the Programs Manager on current court improvement projects, current data from the court system and connections that can be made between the Task Force work and the CIP.
- January 18, 2019: Justice for Children Task Force Update: CHINS cases

III. Prior Year Line Item Budget Expenditure \$72,286.00- G-1901VTCJA1

1. The Vermont CJA Task Force, Department for Children and Families/ Family Services Division and the Department Business Office worked diligently to obligate and expend all CJA Funds within a one-year period to avoid overlap in dual VT Federal Fiscal Year (FY). The VT Federal FY is 10/01 to 09/30. We have found this creates less confusion, more effective and clear liquidations of the funds.
2. In partnership with Vermont CJA Task Force, Department for Children and Families/ Family Services Division (DCF/FSD) and the Department Business Office, it was determined that the most efficient and effective way to distribute CJA funding to the provider network was to establish three block grants with the following providers. The following block grant recipients are responsible for the development, administration, distribution and oversight to qualifying agencies hereby known as subgrantees that will improve the processes by which the State responds to cases of child abuse and neglect (Cases of child abuse and neglect includes child sexual abuse and exploitation and cases of suspected child abuse or neglect related fatalities). DCC/FSD monitors block grant recipient's, and subgrantees activities to ensure funds are being used per Federal Guidelines documented in the Program Instruction.
3. At the January 18, 2019 CJA Task Force Meeting 8 members were present and 7 absent. The 8 members present voted unanimously to divide the total CJA Grant award between the following recommended areas:
 - a. The Vermont SANE Program.
 - b. The Vermont Children's Alliance:
 - i. The Task Force voted to provide the CACs and the SIU equal portions of the total CJA award. Since these organizations are co-located and for financial management simplification, they agreed to have their individual amount combined as one sum and managed by the VT Children's Alliance.
 - c. The Vermont Guardian ad Litem Program.
 - d. Administrative: The Department billed administrative fees for the CJA Coordinators time.
 - e. Annual CJA Meeting: Please note DCF uses current fiscal year funding to pay for expenses rendered for annual CJA meeting that occurred in previous fiscal year.
 - f. Due to complications with our Business Office during the transition to a new block grant system \$21,224 (G-1801VTCJA1) was carried forward to VT FY 2020. The Task Force was not anticipating the delay and therefore had put voting on grant applications on hold waiting for the new system to begin. Vermont State Fiscal year is from July 1 through June 30.

FY20 CJA Line Budget			
FY-20 Total Federal Award		\$72,286.00 (G-1901VTCJA1)	
Grantee	Grant Number	FY	Amount
DCF	Admin	FY-20	\$4,343.51
DCF	Annual CJA meeting	FY-20	\$4,270.79
Total			\$8,614.00
Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence	03440-28383- VNADSV-CJA-FY20	FY-20	16,553.00
Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence	*Off contract SANE Conference	FY-20	4,679.00
Total			21,323.00
Vermont Children's Alliance	03440-28384-VT-CA_CJA-FY20	FY-19	21,256.00
		FY-20	21,208.00
Total			42,464.00
Vermont Guardian Ad Litem	03440-28386-MOU-GAL-CJA-FY20	FY-20	\$21,232.00
Total			
Total using FY-19 funds (G-1801VTCJA1)			\$21,256.00
Total using FY-20 funds (G-1901VTCJA1)			\$72,286.00
Total FY-20 Budget			\$93,542.00

*Please note \$4,679 had to be paid off contract due to the timing of the SANE Conference and the start date of their grant agreement.

IV. Application for Proposed Activities

1. The VT SANE Program:

a. **Narrative:** Enhancing the Professional and Clinical Development of Pediatric and Adolescent Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners in Vermont. The project aims to provide nationally recognized professional development and support the enhancement of clinical skills of pediatric and adolescent sexual assault nurse examiners across Vermont. The project will lead to best-practice, uniform approaches to the medical assessment of victims of child sexual abuse and assault and help ensure that high-quality forensic evidence and documentation is available in cases of child abuse and assault, when patients have been seen by a pediatric or adolescent sexual assault nurse examiner.

b. **Goals & Objectives:**

- i. Goal: Improve Medical Response to Child Sexual Abuse and Assault
 - a. Objective: Enhance professional development of pediatric and adolescent Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners through attending the International Association of Forensic Nursing Annual Conference. Attending SANEs will represent multiple regions in Vermont, including large and small or more rural hospitals.
- ii. Goal: Statewide Use of Best-Practice Approaches to Trauma-Informed Medical Care for Pediatric and Adolescent Sexual Abuse Victims
 - a. Objective: SANEs who attend the IAFN conference will work to adopt at least one learning in their practice setting, in partnership with other SANEs in their practice setting.

c. **Areas of Impact:** B

d. **Contributes to reform/improvement:** The project aims to provide nationally recognized professional development and support the enhancement of clinical skills of pediatric and adolescent sexual assault nurse examiners across Vermont. This project will lead to best-practice, uniform approaches to the medical assessment of victims of child sexual abuse and assault and help ensure that high-quality forensic evidence and documentation is available in cases of child abuse and assault, when patients have been seen by a pediatric or adolescent sexual assault nurse examiner.

e. **The Current Task Force Recommendations(s)/goal(s) that would be addressed by this activity:**

- i. SANE: Continued support for training, evidence kit distribution, collection and transport.

f. **Evaluation Methods:**

- i. Documenting attendance to ensure that SANEs representing a diversity of regions and hospital settings benefit from the enhancement of their professional and clinical skills.
- ii. SANEs will report on their adoption of best practice learning in their practice setting.

g. Outputs:

- i. Attendance of the International Association of Forensic Nursing Annual Conference.

h. Outcomes: SANEs provide highly specialized, trauma informed approaches to medical care for children and adolescents across the state. By supporting and enhancing the professional and clinical development of SANEs, child victims of abuse will receive consistent and best-practice evidence informed care. Injuries and abuse will be documented according to a standardized evidence collection kit, ensuring that this forensic evidence can assist in child abuse investigations and assessments.

2. The Vermont Children's Alliance:

- a. Narrative / Goals & Objectives/Subgrantee:** The Vermont Children's Alliance will subgrant with the following providers (SIU and CAC's) to allow for the implementation of the following forensic interviewing tools to provide the areas served through these organizations reliable interviewing tools to improve forensic interviewing capabilities.
 - i. Northwest Unit for Special Investigations/NUSI is implementing Case Cracker.
 - ii. Our House is Implementing IRecord.
 - iii. Chittenden County Child Advocacy Center is implementing Comtek.
- b. Area of Impact:** For all projects outlined above areas of impact is A.
- c. Contributes to reform/improvement:** Upgrading forensic interviewing equipment to newer, more reliable equipment will ensure the interviews are uninterrupted or rescheduled and will not need to be repeated, possibly causing (re)traumatization to the victim.
- d. The Current Task Force Recommendations(s)/goal(s) that would be addressed by this activity:**
 - i. CAC's and SIU's: Continued support for technological resources and trainings
- e. Evaluation Methods:** Routine use of equipment, ongoing technical training, maintenance agreements and acquisition of updates.
- f. Outputs:** To replace the undependable outdated forensic interviewing equipment with reliable, user-friendly equipment to ensure improved quality of forensic interviewing.
- g. Outcomes:** Upgrading the forensic interviewing equipment to newer, more reliable equipment for these programs will ensure the interviews are

uninterrupted or rescheduled and will not need to be repeated, possibly causing (re)traumatization to the victim.

4. The Vermont Department for Children and Families

- a. Narrative / Goals & Objectives:** The Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF) will strengthen its procedures for reviewing reported abuse and neglect as well as examine treatment service access and delivery.
- b. Area of Impact:** C
- c. Contributes to reform/improvement:** The Vermont Department for Children and Families is the sole agency legislated as responsible for collecting reports of child abuse and neglect. The federal and state requirements for this Department create a system of ongoing review, assessment and reform of practice and policy to ensure the best outcomes for child victims.
- d. Evaluation Methods:** Department for Children and Families employee surveys, Family Services Annual Progress and Services Report and Child and Family Services Plan.
- e. Outputs:** Number of projects directed at achieving best practice and/or promising practice that is driven by research.
- f. Outcomes:** Increase in knowledge, skills and attitudes, high satisfaction reports and lower turnover of professionals. Increase effective responses to child abuse and neglect, support to Family Services Workers engaged in cases of child abuse, neglect, sexual abuse/exploitation and human trafficking.

Proposed Sub-grantees: Individuals, units and workers within the Division of Family Services and/or the Vermont Center for Prevention and Treatment of Sexual Abuse.

5. The Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force

- a. Goals & Objectives:** The Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force (VCJATF) will continue to meet regularly, assess the needs of the state and participate in relevant trainings and activities.
- b. Area of Impact:** A, B, C
- c. Contributes to reform/improvement:** The Task Force reviews and monitors the system response to child abuse and neglect, seeking gaps and areas of potential improvement. Because the representation of the Task Force is made up of the very professionals who actively make up the child abuse and neglect response system, we are in a unique position to conduct this work.
- d. Evaluation Methods:** Self assessments, yearly reports and the Three Year Assessment
- e. Outputs:** Task Force membership complete, yearly recommendations

to Secretary achieved, annual application, reports and Three-Year Assessment completed as required, funds directed appropriately, attendance at the AnnualGrantees Meeting.

- f. **Outcomes:** Increased knowledge, skills and awareness of issues across the systemof response to child abuse and neglect cases in all disciplines involved in these cases.

Proposed Sub-grantee: Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force

5. The Vermont Guardian ad Litem Program

1. Narrative Description of proposed program/activity:

- a. Annual Guardian ad Litem Statewide Professional Development Training:
- b. Re-evaluation and Re-Design of the Vermont Guardian ad Litem (GAL) pre-service training and materials.

2. Goals & Objectives:

- a. **Goal:** To educate and prepare volunteer Guardians ad Litem to serve on CHINS cases advocating for the best interests of children.
 - i. **Objective:** Enhance training and education for GAL's to ensure volunteers are well informed and competent to serve as independent advocates for children who have experienced abuse and neglect. An effective GAL can be extremely valuable in their role to make certain that the child is seen and heard, and his/her best interests are being considered in judicial decision making.
- b. **Goal:** To educate and prepare volunteer Guardians ad Litem to serve on CHINS cases advocating for the best interests of children.
 - i. **Objective:** Enhance pre-service training to ensure volunteers are well informed and competent to serve as independent advocates for children who have experienced abuse and neglect. The information provided prepares the GAL to begin taking cases and interacting with our systems. The information provided must be current, valuable and organized so the GAL is prepared with the information needed to do the work. The project includes a rework of our GAL training manual as well as the GAL programs policy and procedure manual which will all reflect on current best practices.

3. Area of Impact:

- a. A.
- b. A and C.

4. Contributes to reform/improvement:

- a. Ongoing training and education for GAL's is vital to ensure volunteers are well informed and competent to serve as independent advocates for children who have experienced abuse and neglect. An effective GAL can be extremely valuable in their role to make certain that the child is seen and heard, and his/her best interests are being considered in judicial decision making.
 - b. Pre-service training is vital to ensure volunteers are well informed and competent to serve as independent advocates for children who have experienced abuse and neglect. The information provided prepares the GAL to begin taking cases and interacting with our systems. The information provided must be current, valuable and organized so the GAL is prepared with the information needed to do the work. The project includes a rework of GAL training manual as well as the GAL programs policy and procedure manual which will all reflect on current best practices.
- 5. The Current Task Force Recommendations(s)/goal(s) that would be addressed by this activity:**
 - a. GAL: Continued support for training.
- 6. Evaluation Methods:** The GAL program regularly monitors the progress and performance of its volunteers. Each county is assigned a GAL coordinator whose job it is to make sure that GAL's are performing to standards and providing effective advocacy. GAL program management is also in close contact with judges and attorneys who regularly provide feedback regarding GAL involvement in cases.
- 7. Outputs:** Numbers of trainings held, increases in numbers of GALs available and geographic access to them, lower turnover rates, increase knowledge to allow GALS to be more prepared and informed to serve vulnerable children in Vermont, GAL's have increased access to valuable information to better inform their practice and be prepared to serve children who have experienced abuse and neglect.
- 8. Outcomes:**
 - a. Providing a well-trained and effective advocate to each child in a CHINS case ensures that the child has independent representation in addition to an attorney that focuses only on what is best for that child. This valuable input can assist the court in painting a more complete picture of the child's needs and interests as the case moves through court.
 - b. Providing a well-trained and effective advocate to each child in a CHINS case ensures that the child has independent representation in addition to an attorney that focuses only on what is best for that child. This valuable input can assist the court in painting a more complete picture of the child's needs and interests as the case moves through court. Being able to provide a more robust better organized pre-service training will enable volunteers to

start their service as GAL's more informed and prepared to serve vulnerable children in Vermont.

V. Proposed Line Item Budget - \$72,220.00- G-2001VTCJA1

1. Line-item budget detailing proposed allocation of CJA funds for VT Federal Fiscal year 21.
2. The Vermont CJA Task Force, Department for Children and Families/ Family Services Division and the Department Business Office work diligently to obligate and expend all CJA Funds within a one-year period to avoid overlap in dual VT Federal Fiscal Year. The VT Federal FY is 10/01 to 09/30. We have found this creates less confusion, more effective and clear liquidations of the funds.
3. In partnership with Vermont CJA Task Force, Department for Children and Families/ Family Services Division (DCF/FSD) and the Department Business Office, it was determined that the most efficient and effective way to distribute CJA funding to the provider network was to establish three block grants with the following providers. The following block grant recipients are responsible for the development, administration, distribution and oversight to qualifying agencies hereby known as subgrantees that will improve the processes by which the State responds to cases of child abuse and neglect (Cases of child abuse and neglect includes child sexual abuse and exploitation and cases of suspected child abuse or neglect related fatalities). DCC/FSD monitors block grant recipient's, and subgrantees activities to ensure funds are being used per Federal Guidelines documented in the Program Instruction.
 - a. The Vermont SANE Program.
 - b. The Vermont Children's Alliance:
 - ii. The Task Force voted to provide the CACs and the SIU equal portions of the total CJA award. Since these organizations are co-located and for financial management simplification, they agreed to have their individual amount combined as one sum and managed by the VT Children's Alliance.
 - c. The Vermont Guardian ad Litem Program.
 - i. \$11,143.00 (G-1901VTCJA1) was carried over from VT FY20 for Vermont Guardian Ad Litem, grant #03440-28386-MOU-GAL-CJA-FY20. This occurred due to COVID-19 delaying the delivery of Vermont Guardian Ad Litem training.
4. Administrative.
 - i. The Department will bill administrative fees for the CJA Coordinators time. Originally, we capped the administrative fee at 5% (\$3,611.00) and set aside \$5,000.00 for the annual CJA meeting due to the unknown direction of the meeting. It was indicated on 3/2/2021 at a quarterly CJA meeting that the annual CJA meeting will be held virtually. Due to this DCF has reallocated \$5,000.00 to be used towards administrative fees for the CJA coordinators time.

FY21 CJA Line Budget			
FY-21 Total Federal Award		\$72,220.00 (G-2001VTCJA1)	
Grantee	Grant Number	FY	Amount
DCF	Admin	FY-21	\$8,611.00
Total			\$8,611.00
Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence	03440-28439-VNADSV-CJA-FY21	FY-21	15,902.25
Total			15,902.25
Vermont Guardian Ad Litem	03440-28437-MOU-GAL-CJA-FY21	**FY-20	11,143.91
		FY-21	15,902.25
Total			27,046.16
Vermont Children's Alliance	03440-28438-VTCA-CJA-FY21	FY-21	\$31,804.50
Total			\$31,804.50
Total using FY-20 funds (G-1901VTCJA1)			\$11,143.91
Total using FY-21 funds (G-2001VTCJA1)			\$72,220.00
Total FY-21 Budget			\$83,363.91

*Please note due to the Annual CJA Meeting occurring virtually \$5,000.00 was reallocated to DCF admin.

**Please note \$11,143.00 was carried over from VT FY20 for Vermont Guardian Ad Litem, grant # 03440-28437-MOU-GAL-CJA-FY21. This occurred due to COVID-19 delaying the delivery of Vermont Guardian Ad Litem training.



Three-Year Assessment 2021-2024

ABSTRACT

A three-year review of the systems involved in identification, investigation, and prosecution of child abuse and neglect cases in Vermont.

Nancy Miller

State CJA Coordinator

**2021 Children's Justice Act
Vermont Three-Year Assessment Report**

I. Overview of the CJA State Task Force

The purpose of the CJA Task Force is to oversee the appropriation of Vermont CJA funds to support the improvement and strengthening of the front-end, or the intake and investigative components of the child protection and child welfare system. This mission requires a spirit of collaboration and a positive working relationship between the Department for Children and Families (DCF) and the Children's Justice Act Task Force.

The Vermont Children's Justice Act Task Force was established in December of 1987.

II. Overview of systems improvements that were made to address the Task Force goals/recommendations that resulted from the previous 3 Year Assessment.

Progress made related to goals/recommendations from the 2018 – 2021 Assessment.

- **Vermont Guardian ad Litem (GAL):**
 - The Vermont Guardian ad Litem program has been strengthened through increased regular training and increased outreach for active volunteers that has increased awareness of the need for GAL services across the state, in doing so this has resulted in increase of knowledgeable volunteers. It is imperative to have a well-staffed and well-trained pool of volunteers to ensure competence and effective advocacy to assist the court and its state and community partners in the adjudication of cases involving abuse and neglect of children. Continued education and professional development for the GAL's is a large part of preparing them for service.
- **Vermont Children's Alliance:**
 - The Task Force voted to provide the CACs and the SIU equal portions of the total CJA award. Since these organizations are co-located and for financial management simplification, they agreed to have their individual amount combined as one sum and managed by the VT Children's Alliance.
 - Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) and Special Investigation Units (SIUs) have expanded statewide and have the necessary training, investigative equipment and technological resources that have enhanced performance in investigation, prosecution, and treatment. In doing so this has allowed child victims and non-offending family members a trauma informed location for the reporting and investigation of alleged child sexual and physical abuse, and working professional have increased their knowledge, skills and attitudes while working with these difficult cases that has increased the success in prosecution and holding abusers accountable. Please see access to equipment and training

outlined below for more information.

- **SANE Program:**
 - The SANE Program aimed to provide access to national learning opportunities to enhance best practice approaches for nurses providing specialized medical care to child and adolescent victims of sexual abuse and assault.
 - The SANE Program aimed to improve Vermont's system for tracking forensic evidence in cases of suspected child abuse or assault by building capacity and resource a model system for tracking evidence kits from collection to transport, testing and storage.
- **Access to Equipment:**
 - Various CACs and the SIU working with child abuse and neglect cases throughout Vermont received funding to access necessary equipment and technology to enhance performance investigation, prosecution, and treatment. CACs and the SIU have expanded statewide and have the necessary investigative equipment and technological resources that have enhanced performance in investigation, prosecution, and treatment. In doing so this has allowed child victims and non-offending family members a trauma informed location for the reporting and investigation of alleged child sexual and physical abuse.
 - Access to Equipment included but are not limited to the following:
 - The Family Place upgraded their video surveillance equipment to the iRecord system to improve quality of audio and video recordings of forensic interviews.
 - Windham County Safe Place purchased Case Cracker to improve the investigation of child/youth sexual abuse cases.
 - Caledonia SUI replaced their existing interviewing recording equipment to the iRecord system to improve quality of audio and video recordings of forensic interviews.
- **Access to Professional Training:**
 - Various professionals working with child abuse and neglect cases, CACs and SIU throughout Vermont were provided the opportunity to receive professional training on various aspects of child abuse and neglect.
 - Professional training included but are not limited to the following:
 - Bennington SIU Extended Forensic Interviewing training in Burlington VT.
 - Improvements to CAC/SIU practice & policy through knowledge gained at conference, improved interviewing relationships that are built with the victim, victims can be interviewed in multi-session settings that are less re-traumatizing, and Children with developmental delays or

- cognitive disabilities benefit from this type of interview
- Bennington SIU States Attorney Conference.
 - Additional attorneys were trained which resulted in an increase knowledge in handling sexual assault cases and a better understanding of how relationships between the States Attorney and victim benefit in effectiveness of the case.
- Bennington SIU, Child First Advocacy Center and ☐ Caledonia SUI attended the International Symposium on Child Abuse.
 - The International Symposium on Child Abuse is a premiere conference that provides expert training and numerous networking opportunities to professionals in the child maltreatment field and is one of the few conferences that addresses all aspects of child maltreatment, including but not limited physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, exposure to violence, poly-victimization, exploitation, intervention, trafficking and prevention. Allowing those who attended the training to receive current and best practice professional development and gain knowledge to continue to support victims of sexual abuse and improve outcomes for children/youth who have experienced maltreatment.
- Lamoille SIU MDT SANE member attended New Orleans Conference.
 - Lamoille MTD received increased knowledge in how to improve forensic examinations in sexual abuse/ violence cases allowing for victims to receive quality care.
- Northwest Unit for Special Investigations (NWUSI) multidisciplinary team attended the International Association of Human Trafficking.
 - (NWUSI) multidisciplinary team received knowledge in the area of Human Trafficking to provide the highest levels of services to victims of aforementioned crimes.

III. Overview of the process used to complete the 2021 3YA.

The Task Force was presented with and reviewed the landscape of available data, outcomes, evaluative reports, and other measures used to survey the child protection system within Vermont, developed by groups such as the Court Improvement Project, the CHINS Reform Workgroup, Vermont Parent Representation Center and Family Services Continuous Quality Improvement Unit. From this array, the Task Force chose to focus on areas of ongoing funding (CACs, SIUs, GAL, and SANE programs) plus a report generated by a parent advocacy organization, and hearsay rules of evidence in child abuse criminal cases as topics for further exploration and possible recommendations.

The VT CJA Task Force reviewed the following topics to prepare to make recommendations in the 2021 -2023 3-Year Assessment: presentations on the Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR), CHINS Cases, Bending the Curve Report from the VT Parent Representation Center, CHINS Report, FSD Quality Assurance & Data re: case closure, face to face contact, and foster care reentry, CFSR and Program Improvement Plan, Accreditation of CACs, Legislative Act 804A.

- June 22, 2018: Topic Reviewed -Family Service Division APSR provided by Family Services Division Policy and Planning Manager Suzanne Shibley (Section 107 Area: C)
- September 21, 2018: Topic Reviewed -Court Improvement Project, (Section 107 Area: A & C)
- Jan 19, 2019: Topic Reviewed - Justice for Children Task Force: CHINS Cases, CHINS Report – Court Improvement Programs Manager, GAL Director and Task Force member Robert Post (Section 107 Area: A & C)
- April 19, 2019: Topic Reviewed – Bending the Curve Report, VT Parent Representation Center Executive Director and Task Force member Larry Crist (Section 107 Area: A & C)
- July 19, 2019: Topic Reviewed – Presentation by CJA Coordinator on Program Instructions for a 3 Year Assessment. Future Agenda Topics picked for review: CHINS Workgroup, Investigation Timelines, FSD Case Reads, PIP, Child Fatality Review Report (Section 107 Area: N/A)
- October 18, 2019 Topic Reviewed – CHINS Reform Workgroup Report Robert Post and VT DCF Commissioner Ken Schatz (Section 107 Area: A & C)
- December 20, 2019 Topic Reviewed – Case Closure, Face to face contact with children, Foster Care Re-Entry, Family Services Quality Assurance Supervisor, Margo Bryce (Section 107 Area: A & C)
- February 14, 2020 Topic Reviewed – Child and Family Services Review & Program Improvement Plan Suzanne Shibley, Topic Reviewed- Vermont’s SIU’s and CAC’s. SIU Program Grant Manager Marc Metayer (Section 107 Area: A & C)
- June 19, 2020 Topic Reviewed – Children’s Advocacy Center NCA Accreditation SIU Program Grant Manager Marc Metayer; Topic reviewed: Legislative Act 804 A: How it looks in the Court Room. Rose Mary Kennedy, Marshall Pahl, (Section 107 Area: A & C)

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in conjunction with the retirement of the previous CJA coordinator, there was a gap in meetings between June 2020 and January 2021. The task force met in January and April 2021 to develop the recommendations detailed in section IV.

IV. Outline of the policy and training recommendations that resulted from the 2021 3YA process, which will guide the work of the Task Force for the next three-year period.

During the focused Three-Year Assessment Meeting the Task Force highlighted the following areas to focus on as top priorities during 2021 through 2024:

- **Special Investigation Units and Child Advocacy Centers**

Vermont currently has twelve Special Investigation Units (SIU) that are functionally centered within Child Advocacy Centers (CAC). The twelve SIUs provide a multi-disciplinary response to allegations of child sexual abuse and physical abuse reported within each of Vermont's fourteen counties. The CACs are formed in accordance with the standards of the National Children's Alliance (NCA). Thirteen Child Advocacy Centers are operational in Vermont (one county-based SIU has two centers to cover the population centers in that county).

The Vermont CJA Task Force has focused support of the SIU/CAC model by funding efforts to achieve formal NCA Accreditation by each CAC and to expand the resource of established CACs throughout the state. The NCA Accreditation standards provide a roadmap for ensuring best-practice standards are in place for a trauma-informed, culturally relevant response to child physical and sexual abuse. In 2005, only four of seven CACs were NCA Accredited centers. As of 2020, Vermont has eleven fully accredited Child Advocacy Centers (out of thirteen) with the remaining two centers awaiting accreditation site review during 2021.

In addition to supporting discipline specific training opportunities and accreditation compliance, Vermont has also supported equipment enhancements within the CACs. Updated interview recording systems and forensic technological examination devices have been procured. Existing interview recording systems had reached technical obsolescence and were prone to unacceptable rates of failure. The updated systems have established a consistent standard of performance and have enhanced the evidentiary value of recorded, child forensic interviews.

The procurement of forensic technological examination devices has improved the timeliness of investigations by reducing time-consuming transportation of digital electronic devices for third-party examination. This has been especially effective in more remote areas of Vermont and has lessened the workload and backlog previously experienced by existing digital forensic examination centers.

The recommendation is for continued block grant funding for the Vermont Children's Alliance to help pay for training, technological resources and trainings

- **Areas of impact: A, B, C.**

- **Collaboration with Parent Advocacy Organization**

The Vermont Parent Representation Center, Inc. (VPRC) a private not-for-profit agency whose mission is “ensuring, through advocacy and support, that children who can live safely with their parents are afforded a real opportunity to do so” was created in 2009. VPRC has operated multi-disciplinary legal representation pilot programs, operates a state-wide HelpLine providing information regarding the child protection system, parent rights and obligations, and is engaged in data collection, analysis and publication. Additionally, direct advocacy and support in case development and planning, and support in hearings has been a focus in identifying areas of child protection in need of improvement.

In 2020, VPRC initiated a pilot program involving assistance to parents substantiated for abuse/neglect, as well as assisting attorneys who had been engaged by parents for similar purposes. VPRC served as the primary advocate in fifteen (15) hearings and as a co-advocate to attorneys in 3 additional hearings at the administrative and quasi-judicial hearing levels. The result being that 17 of the 18 hearings resulted in substantiations being overturned or dismissed. One hearing is currently pending. The following recommendations stem from this pilot program.

VPRC found that:

- Statutory timeframes relating to due process reviews were uniformly unmet;
- Conflicting statutory requirements regarding provision of redacted and un-redacted investigative reports results in due process issues and significant delay in compliance with timeframes.
- There was a lack of clarity as to what constitutes a basis for expungement, or reversal, of a substantiation when a later judicial ruling negates the substantiation.

Recommendation for the upcoming 3 Year Plan: That the CJA Task Force:

- With the CRRU review statutory timeframes, redaction of records, relevance of evidence, the use of ex parte communication and other issues as identified;
- With the CRRU, Human Services Board and the Attorney General’s Office review the issue of dual standards of proof and social/economic justice concerns; review the findings arising from requests for Reviews and Fair Hearings relative to instances where individuals represented themselves, or were assisted by advocates.

- **Areas of impact: A, B, C.**

- **Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program**

The Vermont Forensic Nursing Program (VFNP) coordinates the medical forensic response for children and youth who have experienced maltreatment. Critical components of the VFNP include ensuring availability and practice competency of

pediatric/adolescent forensic nurse examiners (FNE) in order to provide specialized, trauma-informed medical care and collect forensic evidence. The VFNP also coordinates the accurate collection and transportation of evidence collection kits through the UPS Trackpad system and routine auditing to improve timely resolution of cases, reduce additional trauma to patients and families, while ensuring procedural fairness to the accused.

Recommendation: Build capacity for medical providers and FNEs to respond to and provide evidence-based care for children and adolescents who have experienced maltreatment through access to the highest national standard of information and professional development.

Activity:

1. Support FNE attendance at the International Association of Forensic Nurses Annual conference in September 2021
2. Provide two cross-disciplinary trainings in topics of child maltreatment, particularly pediatric strangulation, over the next year.

Recommendation: Ensure that Vermont has a reliable and transparent system for tracking evidence collection kits from the forensic exam to the VT Forensic Laboratory. This is achieved through the use of an electronic tracking system and ongoing education to nurses, law enforcement and forensic laboratory staff.

Activity:

1. Support a series of protocols and procedures to guide forensic evidence kit distribution, accurate collection and timely transport.

▪ **Areas of impact: A,B,C.**

If the Task Force identifies multiple recommendations in areas A, B, and/or C, please list the recommendations in order of priority within each category. Reminder: The Task Force must make at least one recommendation for each required topical area.

Block Grant Recipients: The following providers will continue to receive CJA funding.

- In partnership with Vermont CJA Task Force, Department for Children and Families/ Family Services Division (DCF/FSD) and the Department Business Office, it was determined that the most efficient and effective way to distribute CJA funding to the provider network was to establish three block grants with the following providers. The following block grant recipients are responsible for the development, administration, distribution and oversight to qualifying agencies hereby known as subgrantees that will improve the processes by which the State responds to cases of child abuse and neglect (Cases of child abuse and neglect includes child sexual abuse and

exploitation and cases of suspected child abuse or neglect related fatalities). DCC/FSD monitors block grant recipient's, and subgrantees activities to ensure funds are being used per Federal Guidelines documented in the Program Instruction.

- Vermont Children's Alliance.
 - The Task Force voted to provide the CACs and the SIU equal portions of the total CJA award. Since these organizations are co-located and for financial management simplification, they agreed to have their individual amount combined as one sum and managed by the VT Children's Alliance.
 - Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) and Special Investigation Units (SIUs) will exist statewide and have the necessary training, investigative equipment and technological resources to function effectively.
 - **Areas of impact: A,B,C.**
- SANE Program
 - Maintain and further develop the Vermont Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner Program. The project aims to provide nationally recognized professional development and support the enhancement of clinical skills of pediatric and adolescent sexual assault nurse examiners across Vermont. The project will lead to best-practice, uniform approaches to the medical assessment of victims of child sexual abuse and assault and help ensure that high-quality forensic evidence and documentation is available in cases of child abuse and assault, when patients have been seen by a pediatric or adolescent sexual assault nurse examiner. evidence in cases of suspected child abuse or assault. The project aims to Enhance professional development of pediatric and adolescent Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners through attending the International Association of Forensic Nursing Annual Conference. Attending SANEs will represent multiple regions in Vermont, including large and small or more rural hospitals.
 - **Areas of impact: A,B,C.**
- Guardian ad Litem Program
 - Vermont's Guardian ad Litem (GAL) Program will be strengthened through regular training and increased outreach for active volunteers.
 - **Areas of impact: A,C.**

V. Description of Task Force plans to incorporate the new recommendations into the work of CJA

Plans for informational sections of Task Force meetings:

- Court Improvement Project: Five-year strategic plan report to become available in 2021
- Rule 804a Hearsay exception
- CHINS reform workgroup pilot programs updates
- Drivers of custody rates in Vermont; University of Vermont; legislative study
- Safe Systems Learning Reviews; child fatality and critical incident review process
- Commissioner's Registry Review Unit
- Exploration of possible merger with Vermont Citizen's Advisory Board

The informational section of the Task Force Meeting will be intentional in the format so that the following is accomplished:

- Information is provided to the Task Force
- Questions and suggestions to the specific organization/discipline presented by Task Force members
- Next step action items created to further the work

The Application for CJA funding will be reviewed and modified for requests in 2021 and beyond.

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Agency of Human Services

May 28, 2021

Elizabeth Darling, Commissioner
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Mary E. Switzer Building
330 C Street, SW Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Commissioner Darling;

This letter is provided in support of Vermont's application for the FY 2021 Children's Justice Act Grant available to states under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. Thank you for your consideration of this application. I am aware of the challenges faced by the children and families impacted by child abuse and neglect and Vermont is committed to continuing to support projects and activities that increase the safety and well-being of our children. The Children's Justice Act grant funds help us to sustain and build upon those efforts.

Vermont received the FY 2020 Child Abuse and Neglect Basic State Grant and continues to comply with the requirements stipulated in Section I 06(b) of the Act. The State has maintained and will continue to maintain a multi-disciplinary Task Force on Children's Justice. We have already adopted many Task Force recommendations and continue to make progress in realizing additional recommendations.

When required, the State will make reports to the Secretary and will provide an annual report on the manner in which assistance was received and was expended throughout the state for this program. The annual report will pay particular attention to the handling of child abuse and neglect cases, the handling of cases of suspected child abuse or neglect-related fatalities and the investigation and prosecution of cases of child abuse and neglect, with particular attention to child sexual abuse and exploitation as described in paragraphs (1) through (3) of Section 107(a). Vermont will maintain and provide access to records relating to activities under the Children's Justice Act.

The State of Vermont will also participate in at least one federally initiated CJA meeting each year that the grant is in effect and will utilize CJA funds to cover travel and per diem expenses for two CJA representatives to attend the meeting.

Sincerely,

Thank you,



Sean Brown, Commissioner
Department for Children and Families



CERTIFICATION REGARDING LOBBYING

Certification for Contracts, Grants, Loans, and Cooperative Agreements

The undersigned certifies, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

(1) No Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid, by or on behalf of the undersigned, to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of an agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with the awarding of any Federal contract, the making of any Federal grant, the making of any Federal loan, the entering into of any cooperative agreement, and the extension, continuation, renewal, amendment, or modification of any Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement.

(2) If any funds other than Federal appropriated funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this Federal contract, grant, loan, or cooperative agreement, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure Form to Report Lobbying," in accordance with its instructions.

(3) The undersigned shall require that the language of this certification be included in the award documents for all subawards at all tiers (including subcontracts, subgrants, and contracts under grants, loans, and cooperative agreements) and that all subrecipients shall certify and disclose accordingly. This certification is a material representation of fact upon which reliance was placed when this transaction was made or entered into. Submission of this certification is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required certification shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Statement for Loan Guarantees and Loan Insurance

The undersigned states, to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, that:

If any funds have been paid or will be paid to any person for influencing or attempting to influence an officer or employee of any agency, a Member of Congress, an officer or employee of Congress, or an employee of a Member of Congress in connection with this commitment providing for the United States to insure or guarantee a loan, the undersigned shall complete and submit Standard Form-LLL, "Disclosure Form to Report Lobbying," in accordance with its instructions. Submission of this statement is a prerequisite for making or entering into this transaction imposed by section 1352, title 31, U.S. Code. Any person who fails to file the required statement shall be subject to a civil penalty of not less than \$10,000 and not more than \$100,000 for each such failure.

Signature



5/28/2021

Title:

Commissioner

Organization: Vermont Department for Children and Families