

RESPONDENT PARENTS:

The Power of Engagement- The Travis County Model:

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TRAVIS COUNTY OFFICE OF PARENTAL REPRESENTATION:

■ What is it?

- A Public Defender modeled office created to provide legal representation and advocacy services to indigent, primary parents who are involved with DFPS.

TRAVIS COUNTY OFFICE OF PARENTAL REPRESENTATION:

■ When did it begin?

- The Travis County OPR accepted their first case in May, 2009.

TRAVIS COUNTY OFFICE OF PARENTAL REPRESENTATION:

■ Staff

- The Travis County OPR has 8 full time employees:
 - Managing Attorney
 - 3-Staff Attorneys
 - 1-Social Worker/Disproportionality Specialist
 - 1-Paralegal
 - 1-Legal Secretary
 - 1-Administrative Associate
 - 8- Interns

TRAVIS COUNTY OFFICE OF PARENTAL REPRESENTATION:

■ Mission:

- ***The Mission of the Travis County Office of Parental Representation is to PRESERVE, STRENGTHEN and SUPPORT Travis County families by: providing early, effective and consistent legal representation and advocacy to indigent parents; and by promoting SELF-SUFFICIENCY through the combined efforts of the family, the community and the court.***
 - ***"TO PRESERVE, STRENGTHEN, and SUPPORT".***

TRAVIS COUNTY OFFICE OF PARENTAL REPRESENTATION:

■ Vision:

- ***The Vision of the Travis County Office of Parental Representation is for Travis County to be a community where families of all cultures and socio-economic groups are RESPECTED and ENCOURAGED to identify and utilize family based and community based supports and services as needed to ensure the safety and permanency of their children while knowing that their family unit will be protected and preserved.***
 - ***"RESPECT AND ENCOURAGE".***

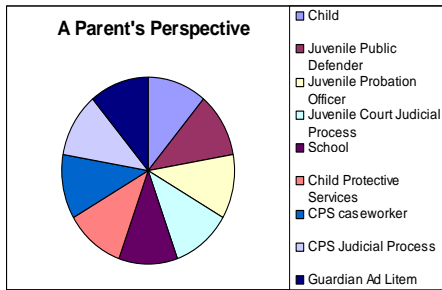
TRAVIS COUNTY OFFICE OF PARENTAL REPRESENTATION:

■ Introduction of our client:

- 33% are African American
- 46% are Latino
- 19% are Fathers
- 14% are Teenagers
- Many do not have high school diplomas.
- Some have substance abuse issues.
- Some have mental health issues.
- Some are victims of domestic violence.
- Most have juvenile history when they were a child and or were involved in the child welfare system.



A Parent's Perspective



PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT DEFINED

■ Parents who are emotionally involved; physically present; and spiritually committed to safe, permanent and protective living environments for their children. © Stephanie Smith Ledesma, 2010.



PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT: HOW DO YOU ACCOMPLISH THIS?

- Treat each parent as an individual.
 - Depending on your role, utilize individualized interview questionnaires.
 - Psycho-Social evaluations.



PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT: HOW DO YOU ACCOMPLISH THIS?

Identify specific parental obstacles.

- Poverty
- Substance Abuse
- Mental Health History
- Housing



PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT: HOW DO YOU ACCOMPLISH THIS?

Identify specific resources that will help overcome the identified parental obstacles.

- Community Roundtables
- Collaborative Partner Case Reviews
- Family Group Decision Making



PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT: HOW DO YOU ACCOMPLISH THIS?

Reduce to writing clear expectations for all parties involved.

- Engagement Letters
- Contracts of Expectation
- Execute Commitment Letters
- Family Service Plans

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT: HOW DO YOU ACCOMPLISH THIS?

Acknowledge the importance of parental bonds and encourage participation in services that strengthen those bonds.

- Family Therapy
- Group Therapy
- Support Groups

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT: HOW DO YOU ACCOMPLISH THIS?

Identify family generational patterns.

- Genograms

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT: HOW DO YOU ACCOMPLISH THIS?

Be aware of your own personal prejudices.

- Be slow to judge.



PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT: HOW DO YOU ACCOMPLISH THIS?

Be empathetic.

- Look at the entire person and not the last worst event.



PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT: HOW DO YOU ACCOMPLISH THIS?

Be empathetic.



PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT: HOW DO YOU ACCOMPLISH THIS?

Acknowledge the importance of racial and cultural identity.

- Disproportionality
- Disparate treatment

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- Outcomes for children improve when families are served.
- Permanency for children is obtained faster, when permanency for families is addressed sooner.

PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- Remember-
 - The recommendation that you make today not only touches that particular child today, but it touches that child and his/her family for generations to come.

THANK YOU!

■ Being involved in the life of a child requires you to be a historian, a prophet and a master of all that is good in the world.