

Strengths:

- Generally, courts have a good standing in their communities:
 - ❖ Recognition and involvement of foster parents in the court process;
 - ❖ Attention to biological parents and their involvement in court proceedings;
 - ❖ Engagement of children in the court process when appropriate;
 - ❖ Use of drug testing to address safety issues when children remain at home;
 - ❖ Some courts recognize the importance of dealing with cases involving children and families in an expeditious and meaningful fashion despite very full dockets even working on weekends to insure they are prepared to hear the matter;
 - ❖ Advanced calendaring; one court sets date for next hearing during current hearing to ensure timeliness, and
 - ❖ In some areas of the state, DFS receives good direction from the court and individual Judges seem to appreciate and consider others as part of an overall team.
- GAL's:
 - ❖ University of Wyoming Legal Services is suited and available to complete short term legal work at the fee DFS pays, and
 - ❖ GAL program has improved greatly in the last 18 months.
- Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) has a much higher compliancy standard.

Opportunities for Improvement:

- Length of time to adjudication:
 - Delays in court dockets which put adjudication off indefinitely;
 - Use of consent decrees to avoid adjudication, and
 - Consent decrees without DFS input or involvement.
- Delays in permanency for children:
 - Waiting to accept the relinquishment of one parent until both can be obtained or until a permanent placement is found for a child;
 - Reluctance of CA and court to pursue TPR, especially within federal time frames;
 - Court dockets which slow down the process including continuances exceeding 24 months;
 - Adoption cases have to start off as new civil cases even though there is an existing juvenile case causing delays in achieving permanency for children;
 - Court not recognizing or supporting concurrent planning, and
 - TPR filed at month 16; took a total of 4 years and 8 months.
- Coordination between CA, law enforcement, DFS, and court:
 - Sometimes result in public perception that there is not follow up on reports;
 - Delays in filing of petitions and notices to others which delays services to families;
 - Greater follow up on court ordered evaluation especially of parents;
 - Reunification of a child as part of a plea bargain for the male parent to admit to sexual abuse;
 - Sometimes assessments received by the court and not shared with others, and
 - Proper and complete representation in MDT's; one court is now ordering who will attend.
- Universal training around legal issues:
 - Some GAL's do not exhibit a desire to do GAL work; other GAL's would like further training and involvement in activities such as family partnerships;
 - How to prepare cases of termination of parental rights;
 - Investigation of sexual abuse;
 - Performing diligent searches, and
 - The new juvenile court rules particularly around discovery.