



A colorful mural was dedicated at the home of Montgomery County Court Care — a licensed child-care program for those doing business in the courts. About 2,600 children visit Court Care annually while their parents attend to various types of court business at the courthouse, including jury duty. The mural was unveiled amidst ceremonies marking the 21st anniversary of the program’s launching, believed to be the first of its kind in Pennsylvania. Funding was provided by the Montgomery County Commission on Women and Families and the County Bar Association’s Family Law Section. “This is the first impression that residents have of our courthouse and you can bet the kids are going to remember this mural,” Family Court Judge **Daniel J. Clifford** said. “And, if they have to come back for another court day, they’re obviously going to be anxious to come back.” [AOPC](#)

Helping abused and neglected children cope with separation from family and loved ones

A pilot program is underway in seven select counties that aims to ease the trauma faced by abused and neglected children under court supervision who are separated from family and loved ones.

The Family Engagement Initiative was developed by the Pennsylvania State Roundtable and is supported by the AOPC’s Office of Children and Families in the Courts, or OCFC. The roundtable initiative is a collaborative effort among state and national court and child welfare leaders.

Building upon past successes, the initiative will focus on enhancements to local child dependency systems that serve abused or neglected children and their families.

“The selected counties will get training from international experts to teach them cutting-edge practices rooted in research and science to enhance the way they help children and families,” Supreme Court Justice **Max Baer** said in announcing the initiative. “The counties will receive resources developed specifically for them. It’s exciting to be working with such a dedicated and motivated group of court and county leaders to improve the lives of our most vulnerable children.”

The seven participating counties include Adams, Blair, Clinton, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Northampton and Union. The selection process was statewide and competitive. Interested counties submitted a letter of interest with signatures from the lead dependency judge, the president judge, county commissioners and the child welfare director.

With a larger than expected number of counties applying, the selection process was rigorous. Final selections were made by the OCFC; Pennsylvania Department of Human Services’ Office of Children, Youth and Families; and Justice Baer.

Factors considered in the selection process included:

- strong collaboration between county courts and children and youth agencies
- current family engagement practices
- data reviews

“The initiative uses evidence-based practices that identify and meaningfully involve healthy family members and close friends in the lives of child welfare families,” **Sandy Moore**, OCFC director, said. “This requires the support of all local leaders within the selected counties.”

“Some of the many outcomes we hope to see from this collaboration include increased family involvement, reduced trauma to children and a reduction in the time children are separated from those who love and care about them.”

The state roundtable plans to expand the initiative to other counties in 2018. [AOPC](#)