

**Virginia Safe Families in Recovery
Project Memorandum**

MEMORANDUM

TO: Executive Directors, Community Service Boards
Mental Health/ Substance Abuse and Mental Retardation Directors and Program Managers, Community Service Boards
Directors, Departments of Social Services
Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court Judges
Court Related Professionals and Selected Members of the Bar
Health Care Providers
Other Virginia Stakeholders

FROM: The Honorable Jane H. Woods
Secretary of Health and Human Resources

Robert N. Baldwin
Executive Secretary, Supreme Court of Virginia

SUBJECT: SAFE FAMILIES IN RECOVERY PROJECT

The challenges of effectively serving families affected by substance abuse and addiction in the child welfare and court systems are complicated, yet critical. Consider this:

- 870 substance exposed newborns were reported to child protective services from July 1, 2001 - June 30, 2003; 496 of these families were served by the Community Service Boards during this same period. (DSS, DMHMRSAS)
- 30% of children in Virginia foster care (3001 children) were removed from their homes due to family substance abuse in 1999-2000. (DSS)
- 20% of the children known to Virginia's child welfare have substance abuse problems in their families. (DSS 1999-2002)
- Approximately 97,943 Virginia adults and adolescents (age ten and older) are estimated to be drug dependent and 226,494 are estimated to be alcohol dependent.
- Virginia's juvenile and domestic relations court caseloads are expected to increase by over 17% by 2010, with the domestic relations case filings accounting for the greatest part of the increase. (OES)

The pervasive and costly impact of substance abuse on the safety and well-being of children and families is a complicated problem that demands that we improve the way Virginia's child welfare, substance abuse treatment, and courts work together. We are pleased to inform you that, as a result of a successful collaborative application to the National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (NCSACW) submitted earlier this year, Virginia is now receiving technical assistance on improving outcomes for this vulnerable population. The two primary goals of Virginia's initiative, known as the **Safe Families in Recovery Project** are to:

- Create the necessary statewide infrastructure for improved coordination of systems. This infrastructure will draw on the strengths of communities and facilitate the development and/or enhancement of state and local interagency partnerships to improve child safety and parent recovery outcomes; and
- Achieve safe and timely permanency and well being for children and their families, in accordance with 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), with a particular focus on families' recovery from substance use disorders, by comprehensively addressing the needs of all family members.

Virginia's in-depth technical assistance will focus on those children and their families who may be affected by family substance use and substance use disorders and who are served by local social services departments through:

- new entries into the child protective services and foster care systems;
- current cases of children receiving child protective services in their own homes; and
- current cases of children foster care services who are before juvenile and domestic relations district courts.

Over the course of the next eight months, NCSACW will work with Virginia's **Safe Families in Recovery Project** Steering Committee to develop an **interagency strategic plan** that addresses the developmental, cognitive, psychological, health care, and safety needs of the target population. The Steering Committee will also spearhead the development of a "practice-oriented" **Memorandum of Understanding** at the state level between Virginia's Department of Social Services (DSS), the Supreme Court of Virginia's Office of the Executive Secretary (OES), and Virginia's Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services (DMHMRSAS) that can serve as a model for localities to adapt and adopt.

Safe Families in Recovery Project is expected to yield important results that will positively impact outcomes for children and families in the Commonwealth and has our full endorsement.

As a result of this initiative, it is expected that:

- State agencies and the courts will work more closely together
- Protocols will be in place to facilitate best practices across disciplines including innovative court processing and disposition of child dependency cases;
- State agencies will support local agencies responsible for implementing the identified best practices, across disciplines, including therapeutic justice courts, through the provision of, but not limited to, training and information sharing, including sharing of model protocols.
- Virginia will implement a 3–5 year interagency strategic plan to address:
 - Funding and sustainability
 - Professional development
 - Community development

- Improved access to care for the target population
- Information sharing between agencies and the courts

You have been identified as a stakeholder in this process, and are invited to participate in this exciting initiative as it unfolds throughout the Commonwealth. Members of the project team will be coming to your area in spring 2004 with information on our progress and specific opportunities to become involved.

If you have questions or would like further information, please contact one of the following individuals:

Martha Kurgans, DMHMRSAS, (804) 371-2184, mkurgans@dmhmrsas.state.va.us

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For additional information regarding the National Center for Substance Abuse and Child Welfare see their website at <http://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/>.

We are confident that we will improve outcomes for families by working together on this important effort. We look forward to your input and ongoing support.