
COLLABORATING WITH CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES ON RETURNS: SURVEY SUMMARY



INTRODUCTION

In June 2023, the Interstate Commission for Juveniles surveyed state ICJ Offices about challenges they face when returning runaways to their home states, particularly when disclosures of abuse and/or neglect have been made.

The survey was distributed to ICJ Commissioners and staff in all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands. 50 responses were received from at least 31 states (State selection was not a required question).

This report summarizes data regarding responses related to collaboration, return processes, challenges, and strategies for resolution of challenges. Percentages are based on the number of respondents who selected each answer choice. The results will aid in the Commission's efforts to improve collaborations and ensure safe returns of juveniles who have disclosed abuse and/or neglect.

Collaboration

- 75% of respondents agree that their state ICJ office and Child Welfare Agency (CWA) collaborate well to ensure juveniles who are returned receive necessary services.
- 75% of respondents can identify a person in their state CWA to assist with resolution.
- Several state ICJ offices use the strategies below to improve collaborations:
 - Training for ICJ staff on CWA policies and procedures
 - Training for CWA agencies on ICJ policies and procedures
 - Participation of CWA in State Council for Interstate Juveniles Supervision
 - Participation of ICJ and CWA staff in other collaborations
- However, these strategies are used by less than half of respondents.

Return Processes

- 24% of respondents have no clear process for initiating returns (voluntary or non-voluntary).
- 56% of respondents have a clear process for initiating non-voluntary returns.
- 80% of respondents have a clear process for initiating voluntary returns.
- In most states, returns are initiated by a juvenile court counselor or probation/parole officer.

Challenges

- 40% of respondents indicated difficulties always or often arise when juveniles must be returned to their states following a disclosure of abuse or neglect.
- The most common difficulties cited were:
 - CWA declined to open investigation (61%)
 - CWA unaware of ICJ and its requirements (59%)
 - CWA declined to assist where guardian refused to file requisition (43%)
 - CWA refused to assist with returning the juveniles (43%)
- The most common reasons given by home/demanding state CWAs who declined to open an investigation were:
 - Youth is not currently in home/demanding state (61%)
 - Allegations do not rise to level of needing to take action (59%)
 - Youth is not in imminent danger (45%)
 - No information is given regarding whether investigation is open (25%)
 - No reason is given (23%)

Strategies for Resolving Challenges

Suggestions for Holding States

- Engage ICPC staff in home state to assist (48%)
- Engage agency leadership to contact leaders in home/demanding state (45%)
- Take custody of runaway by filing child welfare (or similar) petition (34%)
- Appoint a guardian ad litem (GAL) (31%)
- Engage the attorney general's office or other legal resource to assist with requisition (30%)
- Arrange kinship placement in holding state (16%)
- Conduct UCCJEA hearing (if juvenile has been abandoned) (11%)
- Other suggestions from respondents:
 - Ensure report of abuse/neglect is made directly to home state CWA (not holding state)
 - Provide top-down education on ICJ policies/procedures to CWA
 - Provide cross training with AG and CWA offices
 - Identify a point person for CWA who is responsible for coordinating the return and disseminating information to holding state's ICJ team

Suggestions for Home/Demanding States

- File a child welfare petition in home/demanding state (48%)
- Engage agency leadership to contact leaders in holding state (36%)
- Engage the attorney general's office or other legal resource to assist with requisition (34%)
- File a delinquency (status) offense petition (32%)
- Appoint a guardian ad litem (GAL) (30%)
- Arrange kinship placement in home/demanding state (30%)
- Other suggestions from respondents
 - Work with local agency for supportive methods and alternatives
 - Enlist ICPC staff to help navigate another states CWA
 - Establish strong relations with local CWA executives and attorney
 - Conduct annual information sessions/training for CWA regional directors, supervisors, and CPS teams
 - Provide more trainings, starting with local law enforcement
 - Assemble information, petition, and other forms for the attorney and/or judge