



As we have journeyed throughout Wisconsin, we have talked with many county staff who work with adolescent substance abuse and co-occurring mental illness. We have learned a great deal about individual systems serving that population. As a result, we have come to appreciate even more the work being done in those counties.

We have also come to better understand the great variation in these systems from county to county. That's the reason we have written in this column about the different approaches that counties are taking.

In this column, we will focus on the court system and judges who hear juvenile cases. Some variations relate, of course, to the size of the county. We've encountered a number of models thus far:

## On the Road

is a monthly column. It will feature *Project Fresh Light* Strategic Consultants **Judy Adrian** and **Carol Lobes** as they make their travels through several Wisconsin counties that are partnering with *Project Fresh Light*. They are charged with identifying and defining a baseline of treatment services related to adolescent substance abuse and co-occurring mental health conditions in those counties.

- 1) There are no judges assigned specifically to juvenile cases. Each judge may have dockets with both adult and juvenile cases.
- 2) There are one, two or three judges assigned only to juvenile cases; they do not rotate to adult cases.
- 3) There is an assigned juvenile judge who rotates to adult court every two years and another judge rotates in who hears only juvenile cases for two years.
- 4) Judges rotate every four weeks.
- 5) There is one judge who hears only juvenile cases and does not rotate. The other two judges do one-year rotations opposite one another.
- 6) There are no assigned juvenile judges. The judges do one-week rotations on intake cases.
- 7) There are three judges: one does no juvenile cases, one does a two-year juvenile term, and one does a one-year term. Each judge will continue with a juvenile case that begins with her / him even after rotating out.

So there is quite a good deal of variation. In talking with the staff in a number of different counties, we have heard that systems in which judges are able to concentrate on juvenile cases for a significant period of time seem to allow for a broader and deeper understanding of adolescent issues. In many cases, those longer-serving judges have initiated specific programs (including a literacy initiative, the Report Card Project mentioned in the *Project Fresh Light* April Update issue and an educational program on adolescent development issues for court staff).

We also learned about a model in which one judge hears all cases related to a particular family. That could understandably result in a more complex understanding of the dynamics of the whole family system.

It is clear that the role of judges and district attorneys in the juvenile system is significantly related to outcomes in cases of adolescent substance abuse. Part of our attention to infrastructure needs to be in working to assure that persons in these positions are well-versed in the latest research on brain development, trauma and evidence-based practices.