

**Improving Quality of Life  
in 1801 Vine Street Family Court  
Dependency Waiting Room**

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM, SPECIFIC AIMS AND BACKGROUND**

### **I. INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The significance of this project lies in the unique opportunity it affords to develop a better understanding of the needs of the families and individuals using the services of the Philadelphia Family Court at 1801 Vine Street. Families who come to court for delinquency or dependency cases (child abuse or child neglect) generally find the court waiting room to be uncomfortable and dehumanizing. There is a lack of environmental and social resources available to these individuals while they are in the waiting room. In addition, clients are generally uninformed about the court process, their client rights, and services available to them outside the courtroom. The goal of this project is to improve the quality of life in the waiting room through dissemination of information and structural improvements to the environment. These improvements hold the potential to better serve an ethnically diverse, low income population and improve the court process.

In 2003, there were 11,717 delinquency cases brought to the Family Court on 1801 Vine Street. The most common offenses were aggravated assault (14%), sale and use of drugs (13%), and larceny (12%). In addition, 78% of these cases were non-white individuals, and 80% of the case involved boys (Common Pleas Court of Philadelphia, 2003). In 2004, there were 4,648 dependency cases brought to the Family Court on 1801 Vine Street. The parent's inability to care for the child accounted for 49% of the cases brought to the courthouse. Child abuse, child neglect, and child abandonment accounted

for 15%, 12%, and 12% of the cases respectively (Common Pleas Court of Philadelphia, 2004).

It is necessary to recognize that the courtroom environment is often stressful and emotional for families (McCoy, 2004). The waiting rooms are filled with families that are anxious, bored, confused, and occasionally violent. These families often are required to wait hours in the courtroom waiting room before they are called to see a judge.

According to the Australian Review of Criminal and Civil Justice System (1999) the aesthetics and design of court buildings have a powerful influence on the users' perception of services offered. In addition, research has shown that if the emotional and psychological needs are understood, users of the courts are more likely to feel respected, empowered, and confident in the justice system. The court environment should be a societal institute that takes advantage of volunteers and strategic partnerships with public community (Edwards, 1996). Interviews will provide rich quantitative and qualitative data, which will help understand the needs and concerns from the perspective of the families that spend time in this waiting room. In addition this data can be used to develop the necessary recommendations that should be implemented in this facility.

## **II. SPECIFIC AIMS:**

There are two main factors that influence the time spent in the waiting room: the social and informational resources available and the environmental and structural design of the building. Interviews will be conducted among families using the services of the family court to gain insight on their perspective of the shortcomings of the waiting room. Surveys will also be distributed to court-related personnel to gain insight on their perspective of the needs of the waiting room and improvements that will help them better

serve their clients. These data are necessary to fully understand the social and environmental influences in the Family Court dependency waiting room. The overall goal of this study is to determine the environmental and social elements that are needed to create a comfortable waiting room that is complete with the necessary resources, to ensure families are able to make informed decisions and make the best use of their time at this facility. Identifying the potential need for additional information resources and social service programs will further enable identification of areas for improvement.

**Specific Aims are to:**

- Describe the social and environmental needs of the users of the Philadelphia Family Court on 1801 Vine Street
- Develop two interview tools to assess the needs of the users of the court from the perspective of the families and individuals in the waiting room.
  - The first interview tool will be a formative research pilot survey.
  - The second interview tool will be a more refined survey using the data from the first set of pilot surveys.
- Develop an interview tool to assess the needs of the users of the court from the perspective of the court-related personnel (i.e. judges, lawyers, advocates).
- Develop and propose recommendations for social and environmental improvements of the Philadelphia Family Court Waiting Room, which The Field Center for Children’s Policy Practice and Research has secured foundation funding to begin working with the court to implement.

### **III. BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE:**

The role of the juvenile court is to “combine social and legal attributes to serve public interests relating to children and families.” (Schechter and Edleson, n.d.). Courts exist to serve the community and in order to do this effectively it is important to ask and listen to the families and children using the services of the court. When the first Juvenile Court was established in Cook County, Chicago, Illinois, the clients were identified as children for whom parenting had failed, children without a family structure, and children who have committed a crime. Today, although each court is slightly different, the majority of cases fall into three categories: 1) delinquent children, 2) truant or runaway children, and 3) abused or neglected children. Juvenile courts are influential in bringing together a variety of legal and social service providers including judges, lawyers, child-advocates and community based organizations that all focus on the well-being of children and their parents/guardians (Schechter and Edleson, n.d.).

It is the responsibility of the courts to provide culturally relevant and comprehensive services, which requires the collaboration of the various service providers to work on behalf of America’s most vulnerable children and families. Juvenile Courts around the country have been successful at expanding programs offered by creating community partnerships for children and families (Edwards, 1996). A juvenile court judge who was concerned that maltreated children were not getting much needed attention in the court system established the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program. The purpose of this program is to ensure that the rights and interests of children are upheld in the courtroom (1996). In addition the courts have begun to take an interdisciplinary approach to addressing the needs of children and families in the

courtroom. Teams, consisting of private, public and non-profit resources have been established to address all of the social and environmental needs of these individuals and families using the services of the court (Edwards, 1996). Provision of these services outside of the courtroom will create a comprehensive juvenile justice system that targets the needs of individuals from the moment they enter the courthouse.

In the future, courts should continuously be able to take advantage of community resources, through volunteers and partnerships with legal and social service agencies. The challenge is for the courts to identify the most needed partnerships and the most effective ways to organize the community to work with the court on behalf of children and families (Edwards, 1996).

### ***III. A. Importance of an Environmental Assessment of Court Environment:***

The Family Court of Australia conducted an Operation Environmental Assessment to evaluate the services and facilities of the courthouse. The first part of this assessment included interviews with senior managers and judges, focus groups of staff, and focus groups of family clients. The objectives of the assessment were to identify areas where services were needed, specific opportunities and barriers to improvement and ultimately create a better environment for users of the Australia Family Court (Glare, 2004). Results from the assessment were used in a three-day workshop for senior judges and staff to develop a revised Strategic Plan. This plan was discussed and commented on, then approved on during a two-day meeting with all the judges of the court. This report, "Putting Children and Families First" was published on May 7, 1999 (Glare, 2004). Since the publication of this report, each site is developing a Customer Service Improvement Plan for a practical application of the Strategic Plan (Glare, 2004).

The goal of this project is to approach the Philadelphia Family Court for the some of the same reasons and using some of the same techniques to develop an operation environmental assessment for the families and children using the court. However, it is necessary to discuss the developmental issues often facing children in the court system.

### ***III. B. Architectural Court Design Issues:***

The court environment should represent the importance of the legal system and ensure that legal proceedings take place in dignified surroundings for these families and children (New York State Unified Court System, 2001). In addition, the courthouse should promote confidence in the justice system and respect for the families and children using the services of the court (New York State Unified Court System, 2003). Recently courts have been implanting child friendly waiting rooms. For example, Alameda County Courthouse in Hayward, California has built a “Children’s Waiting Room” that offers a safe place for children to wait while their parents address their issues in court. This facility offers books, computers, a place for arts and crafts, and a private area for nursing mothers. Parents receive a pager while they are in court, in case there is an emergency they need to attend to. This is an important example of a “community coming together for the benefit of families and children” (Jordan, 2003).

Another facility, “Kid’s Place” was donated to the Los Angeles County Courthouse in August 2002. This facility is filled with toys and games, and can accommodate up to 20 children at a time at no cost to parents. This facility also provides referral services for families to anger management classes, legal aid, medical care and shelter (Edds, 2002).

Family court buildings need to meet the physical and emotional needs of families and children using the services. According to the Law Reform Commission of Western Australia (1999), court users will have more confidence in the judicial system if they are treated with respect and consideration. A court that is designed appropriately would communicate safety, privacy, and accessibility to justice. Court facilities should properly accommodate clients with special needs, as they deserve to wait in a comfortable and complete environment that addresses their specific needs (Law Reform, 1999). Architecturally, the Law Reform of Western Australia (1999) suggests creating an environment that clients do not feel intimidated, stressed or exposed. This type of environment can be created with the use of lighting, furniture arrangement, and clearly marked exits and entrances. In terms of information, the documents and pamphlets provided should be specific, culturally competent, simple and straightforward (Law Reform, 1999).

The needs assessment of the Philadelphia Family Court will be designed to address the environmental and social issues described in the previous paragraphs. Issues addressed to the families and individuals in the family court will be around comfort, service gaps, general needs or suggestions, and overall discussion of their family court experience. This assessment incorporates elements from the various research mentioned in the previous part of this section.

### ***III. C. Background On Why Families Come to the Family Court:***

The world children are growing up in is becoming increasingly more violent. For many children, home is no longer a safe place to escape from the violence. Scientists have begun to research the correlation between early environmental influences and the

potential long-term health effects on an individual. During the early years of development, children exposed to substance abuse, domestic violence, child abuse or suicide by a parent/guardian is more likely to engage in risky behaviors as they begin to mature. These children often find themselves in the family court because of their own or their parent/guardian's poor decisions (Smith, 2003). In addition, the child welfare system is faced with an increasing number of individuals without a home, or children needing to be or have been placed in the foster care system. According to research, infants are the largest growing number of cases of physical and medical neglect. Parents of these children have been found to be uneducated, substance abusers, and/or mentally ill. These children often find themselves in family court faced with custody issues or issues of violence and criminal activity. According to Zero to Three Policy Center, infants are the largest group in the foster care system. Infants in foster care often stay in the system longer and re-enter the system after being discharged. While in foster care, developmental and emotional delays are less likely to be identified and often sick children are not brought in for medical care (Dicker and Gordon, 2004).

### *Dependency Cases*

Research indicates that families in court for dependency cases are likely to be affected by drugs and alcohol (English, 1998). Low income and low socioeconomic status also increase the risk of involvement in dependency issues. According to a 1993 National Child Abuse and Child Neglect Incidence Study, family income is the strongest correlate of incidence across all forms of maltreatment. The study also found that poverty was strongly related to serious neglect and severe violence towards children.

Characteristics of caregivers for dependent children range from low-self esteem, anxiety and depression (English, 1998).

### *Delinquency Cases*

Risk factors for early onset of juvenile delinquency (children between 6 years old and 12 years old) falls into four categories: family, individual, school and peer groups. Individual risk factors associated with delinquency include low IQ, antisocial attitudes, beliefs and behavior, substance abuse, aggression (in males), medical or physical problems, and hyperactivity (Shader, 2001).

Family characteristics play an important role in predicted childhood delinquent behavior. Delinquent children often come from broken homes, with abusive parents. Children often live below or near the poverty line. Parents or caregivers of delinquent children are often antisocial (criminal or violent) and use drugs and alcohol (Loeber, 2003).

Delinquent children often perform poorly in school and have a poor attitude about education and school. In addition these children often have weak social ties and associate with antisocial peers. They usually live in neighborhoods that are very unorganized where drugs and street crime is very prevalent (Shader, 2001).

### ***III. D. Significance: Value to Community***

For many of these families, lack of resources and information is a significant factor for the lack of proper care for their children. The courtroom is a place where these families and children spend a significant amount of time. There is a large opportunity to reach these vulnerable families and offer them services they may not otherwise have had access to. In addition to the available resources and social services in the court, the

physical environment plays a big role in the judicial experience for many families and individuals.

This project is intended to improve the overall court experience for families and court personnel in the Philadelphia Family Court. The project will gain insight from the individuals of the Philadelphia region within the court system and determine their needs for services during their time spent in the waiting room at the family court. The result of assessing individual needs and making a commitment to implement recommendations for improvement will ultimately create a more tolerable experience for families and personnel in the family court. When the needs of families are met they will likely feel respected and have more confidence in the justice system. In addition the lawyers and judges will have additional insight as to what support they should provide these families during their time in the courthouse.

There are limited studies concerning the needs of the family court waiting rooms from the perspective of clients using the services within these waiting rooms. Through this project families will be given the opportunity to speak openly about their experience within the family court waiting room. Recommendations will be made as to the improvements needed to be made to create a complete and comfortable environment for these families. Lastly, The University of Pennsylvania Field Center for Children's Policy Practice and Research has secured initial foundation funding to begin to collaborate with the court on improvements.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODOLOGY, RESULTS, AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS:**

#### **I. RESEARCH DESIGN**

A formative research study assessing the needs of the dependency court waiting room in The Philadelphia Family Court, 1801 Vine Street, was conducted with a total of (40) forty individuals using the services of the court and (15) fifteen court-related personnel selected from throughout the Philadelphia community.

##### ***I. A. Multidisciplinary Research Team***

This project was initiated by The Honorable Myrna P. Field, Administrative Judge Philadelphia Family Court, who continues to take a strong and consistent interest in the project. This project has developed into a continuum of efforts between the Philadelphia Family Court, Drexel University School of Public Health, The University of Pennsylvania Field Center for Children’s Policy Practice and Research, and the Philadelphia Advocates Round Table in response to concerns of The Honorable Myrna P. Field. The Field Center for Children’s Policy Practice and Research is an interdisciplinary organization with four co-directors from the University Of Pennsylvania School Of Social Policy and Practice, School of Law, and the School of Medicine. The Advocates Round Table is comprised of volunteers from the community committed to protecting the needs of families and children in the justice system. Members include individuals from The Support Center for Child Advocates (representing children), Community Legal Services (representing parents), University of Pennsylvania School of

Law Child Advocacy Clinic (representing children), and the Public Defenders Office (representing children). It was developed as a follow-up to a court training project I implemented in October 2004 as a response to the courts initiative to address the judges' and families' needs. Judges were provided an interactive session focused on developmentally appropriate decision-making.

***I. B. Overview***

There were three related parts to this project: pilot interviews conducted in the dependency waiting room with ten individuals using the services of the family court, a survey distributed to fifteen court-related personnel, and a revised interview conducted in the dependency waiting room with thirty additional families using the services of the family court. The revised survey administered to families in the dependency court waiting room was based on preliminary results from the 10 pilot interviews.

Table A. Strategies to Meet the Goal of Improving Quality of Life

<b>STRATEGIES</b>		
<u>Pilot Study</u>	<u>Implementation and Evaluation</u>	<u>Sustainability &amp; Dissemination</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Recruit pilot sample of families from inside the dependency waiting room (N=10)</li> <li>■ Implement and evaluate survey with pilot sample</li> <li>■ Discuss findings with research team to make recommendations for revisions</li> <li>■ Revise methods as needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Recruit expanded sample of families from inside the waiting room (N=30)</li> <li>■ Implement and evaluate responses</li> <li>■ Recruit court personnel sample from community organizations (N=15)</li> <li>■ Implement and evaluate responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Discuss recommendations with research group to explore feasibility</li> <li>■ Disseminate findings through poster presentations to the community</li> <li>■ Deliver recommendations to the Honorable Myrna P. Field</li> </ul>

Table B. Presentation of Timeline for Project Activities

<b>Project Activity</b>	<b>(Month) September</b>	<b>October</b>	<b>Nov.</b>	<b>December</b>	<b>Jan.</b>	<b>Feb.</b>	<b>March</b>	<b>April</b>	<b>May</b>
Project Development	X	X	X						
IRB Submission		X	X	X		X			
Recruitment				X	X		X		
Data Collection				X	X		X		
Development of computer files/data entry					X	X			
Data Analysis					X	X	X		
Report Writing							X	X	
Dissemination Of Findings							X	X	X

## II. SUBJECTS

There were two distinct groups of participants recruited for this study; individuals using the services of the dependency waiting room and court-related personnel. Individuals in the dependency waiting room included in this study were comprised of males and females between the ages of 18-75. They were recruited from the dependency court waiting rooms at the Philadelphia Family Court on 1801 Vine Street to participate

in in-person interviews. The participants were healthy subjects. They were not asked their names, or to provide any identifying information. Participants were from communities in the metropolitan area of Philadelphia. This study was open to all minority groups. It was anticipated that a majority of the families participating in this study were mainly low-income Caucasians, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans.

Subjects not meeting the above criteria were not eligible for the study. In addition, people not able to speak English were excluded. After the initial request for participation the researchers determined if the participant spoke English. This was determined by asking if the participants were willing and comfortable to have a fifteen minute conversation in English. While the researchers recognize the importance of determining the needs of all people using the services of the family court, not just English speaking clients, the limited resources available does not allow for recruitment of translators.

Court-related personnel, the second distinct category of participants in this project, were selected from the metropolitan area of Philadelphia to participate in a survey delivered to them through the mail or in person. The working group from Drexel University and The Field Center for Children's Policy Practice and Research developed a list based on community leaders at various children and adult advocacy organizations including The Philadelphia Family Court, Department of Human Services (DHS), The Support Center for Child Advocates, Defenders Association of Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Law School, Community Legal Services and private attorneys from the community. Court-related personnel included social workers, DHS case workers, child

advocates and attorneys, family advocates and attorneys, and judges. Their responses to the survey were kept confidential and anonymous; they were not asked to provide personal information when they returned the survey to the Field Center.

## ***II. A Sample Size, Sample Size Justification:***

This study was separated into two target populations, both for the purpose of determining the needs of families using the services of the court.

### ***II. B. Target Population 1: Families Using the Services of the Court***

#### ***Sample Size, N=10***

The first target population was a sample of ten families in the dependency court waiting room. This was a formative pilot survey and therefore justifies the small number of subjects. Families were recruited from within one of the two dependency waiting rooms in the Philadelphia Family Court at 1801 Vine Street. The individuals recruited for the pilot surveys were parents/guardians located in one of these waiting rooms. During the formative pilot survey researchers attempted to recruit individuals at the court for dependency cases only, as opposed to delinquency cases which share the same waiting space. Individuals were asked if they were here for delinquency or dependency cases and the researchers proceeded with recruitment procedures for families involved in dependency cases. We did not recruit individuals from outside of the waiting room area because the purpose of this study is to determine the environmental and social needs that can be addressed within the space of the waiting room and in the time period that these individuals are waiting to see a judge.

#### ***II. B<sub>1</sub> Methods of Data Collection***

In the pilot study there were 10 participants chosen from the two dependency court waiting rooms within the Philadelphia Family Court. There were five participants chosen from each of the two dependency court waiting rooms. The subjects were not asked their name or to provide any identifying information. There were no identifying numbers associated with their interview responses. Two subjects were interviewed each interview day over the course of three weeks. Interviews were conducted two days a week for the first two weeks and one day for the last week. The first week, interviews were conducted on Monday and Wednesday. The second week, interviews were conducted on Tuesday and Thursday. The third and last week, interviews were conducted on Friday. Interviews were not conducted in the same waiting room more than once on the same day. Subjects were not interviewed more than once over the course of the study.

The subjects were chosen at random using a random numbers table method. The total number of people in each row and the number of rows in the waiting room were counted. Using the random numbers table, a number was identified within the range of the people present in the waiting room. If the participant chosen at random declined to participate in the interview, the interviewer left the waiting room, and returned upon completion of an interview in the other dependency court waiting room. The staff at the Field Center for Children's Policy Practice and Research, the primary location of the researchers, located at 1835 Walnut Street and affiliated with the University of Pennsylvania, trained the co-investigator, a master's student at Drexel University School of Public Health.

This portion of the study was a pilot study therefore the efficacy and efficiency of the recruitment process was assessed upon completion of the ten pilot surveys. Changes to this process were considered at the completion of the pilot phase of this project. It was anticipated that this procedure would prove to be effective because it allows the subjects to be completely random and allows for the incident that an individual does not wish to participate in the interview.

In the pilot phase of the study 10 family units in the dependency court waiting room were asked to complete the interview. A trained student researcher read the questions to the subject, and then hand recorded the answers. The participants were not asked to provide any identifying information. The research team developed the interview questions and the interviews were completed in approximately 15 minutes. More than one interview was not administered in the same waiting room on one particular day and the subjects were not interviewed more than once during this project. During the pilot phase of this study, the time period the interview was conducted alternated between the morning and the afternoon.

## ***II. B<sub>2</sub> Instrument Development and Use Preparation:***

The interviewing tool (Appendix A) for the pilot phase was developed according to a list of broad environmental and social issues of interest to Judge Myrna Field, Administrative Judge at the Philadelphia Family Court and the Dean Richard Gelles at University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work, and review of key reports on previous studies completed in New York and Australia. The topics of interest included: time spent in the waiting room, information and social services offered and taken advantage of while individuals are waiting to see a judge, problems or concerns individuals have while

they are waiting to see a judge, comfort of chairs, space available for seating, and suggestions for additions or changes to help make better use of their time in the waiting room.

These topics were grouped into a series of open-ended and multiple-choice questions. The justification for these types of questions was that it was a formative pilot and we did not want to limit the responses of the individuals during the pilot survey phase. The purpose of the project was to allow the individuals and families to openly describe their experiences in the dependency court waiting room.

## ***II. B<sub>3</sub> Institutional Review Board Considerations***

The necessary paperwork was submitted to the Institutional Review Boards at Drexel University and University of Pennsylvania in November 2004. The proposal was submitted for exempt review. However, upon review by both Universities it was approved under expedited review. Participants for the pilot phase of the project were identified and invited to participate after Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was achieved in December 2004. Interviews were conducted for the ten pilot surveys upon IRB approval of the original study and continued through January 2005. Data Analysis of the responses to these pilot surveys was completed by February 2005. Copies of the Drexel University approval notices can be found in Appendix B.

Individuals were asked to voluntarily participate in an interview about their experience and perceptions about the family court waiting room. A confidentiality statement was read to the potential participants and a verbal consent was received to voluntarily participate in the study. The participants in the study were asked to relocate to a more private setting to complete the interviews. A private room was made available

by the Philadelphia Family Court to conduct all of the interviews throughout the pilot phase of this project. Individuals in a highly stressful and emotional environment may have been irritated by the intrusion of an interviewer. The participants were informed that the responses had no relationship to the case for which they were at the courtroom. In addition they were informed that there was no identifying or personal information placed on the interview. The interview tools used with the participants were approved by the Institutional Review Board at Drexel University and University of Pennsylvania. In the event of unforeseen risks, the study would have been stopped immediately and the Institutional Review Board would have been contacted to determine the appropriate course of action for the future of the study.

The data for this study was collected off campus at the Philadelphia Family Court at 1801 Vine Street and is being stored at The University of Pennsylvania in the locked office of the principle investigator.

## ***II. B<sub>4</sub> Data Management:***

The responses to the pilot surveys were entered into an excel spreadsheet and a word document. Responses for the multiple choice questions were entered into the excel spreadsheet and responses for the open-ended questions were entered into the word document. Qualitative theme analysis was conducted on these responses to determine strengths and weaknesses in the survey. Researchers took notice if any questions were misunderstood or are unclear during the interview process. Questions were assessed upon completion of the pilot phase and were altered according to the analysis of the interview process and the interview responses. The analysis of the formative pilot

surveys was subsequently used to develop a refined survey to be administered to additional individuals in the family court waiting room.

### ***II. B<sub>5</sub> Results and Discussion of Pilot Interviews:***

Results of the pilot interviews revealed common themes among the needs of families in the dependency court waiting room. Common social service needs among the families are, informational brochures and handouts regarding housing, financial assistance, and general information about the court process. In addition, participants requested improvements in communication with social workers and attorneys involved in their case. The results revealed that 9 out of 10 of the participants had not spoken to their lawyer at the time they were interviewed. The physical space was looked at as unpleasant and unattractive. Results showed that 9 out of 10 respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that the waiting room was a pleasant place to be and 10 out of 10 respondents strongly disagreed that the waiting room was an attractive place to be. Individuals addressed the need for a television that they can see and hear and food available or a space available to eat and drink. Some additional needs addressed by the families included educational materials and books/magazines to keep them occupied while they waited to see a judge. Lastly the results of the pilot phase indicated that only two families had children present and they were both over 18 years old.

### ***II. B<sub>6</sub> Revisions to Pilot Interview:***

Analysis of responses to the pilot interview questions and analysis of the interview process revealed some recommended changes needed to revise the survey. It was recommended to the research group that the revised survey incorporate additional questions regarding contact with a lawyer involved in the case. The pilot interview

revealed that almost all of the respondents had not spoken to their lawyer at the time of the interview. However, according to the described methodology, interviews were conducted in the morning and the afternoon. Therefore the morning interviews were biased because individuals may have eventually spoken to their lawyer later in the morning. The primary purpose of the question was to determine if clients were being given the opportunity to speak to their lawyer about their case. More importantly, if they were speaking to their lawyer, were they speaking to them before they entered the courtroom, therefore having the opportunity to ask questions about their case before going in front of the judge. Lastly, if they were not speaking to their lawyer in the waiting room, we wanted to determine the reason (do not have lawyer, do not know if they have a lawyer, or not speaking to them until they were in the courtroom).

Another revision recommended for the pilot interview entailed rewording the questions addressing the issue of available social services versus social services used by the clients. Results of the pilot phase of this project revealed that clients often did not distinguish between social services offered and social services used. It became apparent that individuals only used the services they knew about and only knew about the services they used. Therefore it was suggested the question be reworded to address what social services they would like to see offered in the waiting room, regardless of what they use in the courthouse and regardless of what is already offered in the courthouse.

The University of Pennsylvania Design School requested the inclusion of a question addressing the noise level in the waiting room. The Penn Design School, along with the Advocates Round Table and the Philadelphia Family Court sponsored a project creating flow-charts to place in the waiting rooms that explain the delinquency and

dependency process in the Philadelphia Family Court. The Penn School of Design was considering designing these flow charts in video form, and therefore created concern regarding the noise level in the waiting room.

Lastly, as noted in the methodology section, during the pilot phase of this project researchers distinguished between individuals in the courthouse for delinquency cases and individuals in the courthouse for dependency cases. However, researchers found that although delinquency and dependency terms are used frequently in the legal and social work profession, they are terms that are not often understood by clients in the waiting room. Furthermore, as noted earlier, the waiting rooms are shared by both delinquency and dependency cases. Therefore, it became apparent that it was not necessarily important whether individuals were in the court for dependency or delinquency, but rather they were in the waiting room and therefore needed to be offered a comfortable and complete environment.

### ***II. C. Target Population 2: Families Using the Services of the Court***

#### ***Sample Size, N=30***

The second target population was an additional 30 individuals using the services of the family court. Families were recruited from one of the dependency waiting rooms in the Philadelphia Family Court on 1801 Vine Street. Individuals recruited for these interviews were parents/guardians waiting to see a judge in the one of the dependency waiting rooms. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, individuals recruited for this second phase of the project were at the court for either dependency or delinquency cases.

## ***II. C<sub>1</sub> Methods of Data Collection***

The second phase of this court improvement project involved 30 participants chosen from the two dependency court waiting rooms within the Philadelphia Family Court. There were fifteen participants chosen from each of the two dependency court waiting rooms. The subjects were not asked their name or to provide any identifying information. There were no identifying numbers associated with their interview responses. Six subjects were interviewed each interview day over the course of three weeks. Interviews were conducted two days a week for the first two weeks and one day for the last week. The first week, interviews were conducted on Monday and Wednesday. The second week, interviews were conducted on Tuesday and Thursday. The third and last week, interviews were conducted on Friday. Interviews were not conducted in the same waiting room more than once on the same day. Subjects were not interviewed more than once over the course of the study.

The subjects were chosen at random using a random numbers table method. The total number of people in each row and the number of rows in the waiting room were counted. Using the random numbers table, a number was identified within the range of people present in the waiting room. If the participant chosen at random declined to participate in the interview, the interviewer left the waiting room, and returned upon completion of an interview in the other dependency court waiting room.

In this phase of the study researchers read the questions to the individuals recruited from the waiting room and then hand recorded the answers. The participants were not asked to provide any identifying information. The research team improved the pilot interview to create a revised interview tool that was completed by the individuals in

approximately 10-15 minutes. Subjects were not interviewed more than once during the course of this project. In the second phase of this project the interview time was not altered between morning and afternoon. During the pilot phase researchers found that the waiting rooms had a lot less people in the late afternoons. It is assumed that there is no difference in the sample between the morning and the afternoon. Therefore, interviews during the second phase of the project were conducted between the hours of 9:00AM and 1:00PM.

## ***II. C<sub>2</sub> Instrument Development and Use Preparation***

Revisions were made to the pilot survey based on the responses of the ten individuals interviewed, to create an interviewing tool for the 30 additional families (Appendix C). The interviewing tool was a combination of multiple-choice and short answer questions. The multiple choice questions offered the respondents five different choices. In order to allow for the possibility of normal distribution (that being that each of the five choices is selected an equal amount) the minimum number of participants had to be 25 individuals (5 choices x 5 responses = 25 people). In order to take into account the possibility of a “non-response,” an additional five individuals were recruited for the interview.

The interview tool administered to the thirty families in phase two of this project was a revised version of the pilot survey. Additional questions were developed to address the concern of communication with attorneys and court-related personnel before entering the courtroom. Questions were added to determine when clients were speaking to their lawyers, social workers, and other individuals involved in their cases (in the waiting room or in the courtroom). In addition, individuals were asked about social

services they would like to see offered and information they would like to see provided while they are in the waiting room. The research group came to a consensus to delete the questions regarding what social services were used and what social services were available as it was apparent that individuals in the waiting room do not distinguish between these two questions. Lastly, the interview continued to address the physical space of the waiting room as it did in the pilot survey, however with an additional question addressing the noise level in the room. In regard to the interview process, the researchers no longer distinguished between individuals at the courthouse for delinquency or dependency cases. As discussed earlier, the purpose of this project was to address the needs within the space of the waiting room, regardless of the nature of the individual cases. Therefore for purposes of reference this space will be regarded as the dependency court waiting room.

These questions were grouped into a series of open-ended and scaled multiple choice questions. This format allowed the respondents to answer freely and openly about some issues while at the same time given the opportunity to agree or disagree with statements made about the waiting room. This survey was intended to be a short, but a thorough investigation into the needs and concerns of families in the waiting room, and therefore it was determined that a combination of scaled multiple choice questions and open-ended questions would achieve this purpose.

## ***II. C<sub>3</sub> Institutional Review Board Considerations***

Paperwork was submitted to the IRB at Drexel University and University of Pennsylvania in February 2005 as an amendment to the original proposal approved in December 2004. The paperwork was submitted under expedited review. Subjects were

recruited upon IRB approval in March 2005 and continued through March 2005. Data analysis of these interview responses was completed by April 2005. Copies of the Drexel University approval notices can be found in Appendix D.

Individuals were asked to voluntarily participate in an interview about their experience and perceptions about the family court waiting room. The participants in the study were asked to relocate to a more private setting to complete the interviews. A private room was made available by the Philadelphia Family Court to conduct all of the interviews in the second phase of the project. The interview tools used with the participants were approved by the Institutional Review Board at Drexel University and University of Pennsylvania.

The data for this phase of the study was collected off campus at the Philadelphia Family Court at 1801 Vine Street and is being stored at the University of Pennsylvania in the locked office of the principle investigator.

## ***II. C<sub>4</sub> Data Management***

The responses to the family interviews in the second phase of this project were entered into an excel spreadsheet and a word document (Appendix E). The open-ended questions were transcribed into a word document for the purpose of conducting qualitative theme analysis. Multiple choice questions were entered into an excel spreadsheet for the purpose of quantitative analysis. The analysis of individual responses was subsequently used to develop recommendations for the forgoing recommendations including but not limited to environmental and social resources for improvements to the dependency court waiting room.

## ***II. C<sub>5</sub> Results and Discussion of Expanded Sample of Families***

A qualitative interview (Appendix C) was administered to families in the dependency court waiting room. The results of the response analysis were divided among the major topics addressed in the survey. The following tables and figures summarize the results of the multiple choice questions in the survey.

### ***Communication in the Waiting Room***

The first section of the survey addressed communication issues within the waiting room. The majority of respondents, 19 out of 30 (63%), did not expect to speak to their lawyer while they were at court. Furthermore, 9 out of 30 individuals have never spoken to a lawyer in the waiting room. In reviewing the results in detail, the question was raised as to why 9 out of 30 individuals had never spoken to a lawyer in the waiting room. As discussed in the methodology, individuals were recruited from waiting rooms shared by dependency and delinquency cases. In delinquency cases there is one attorney assigned to the case and they are there to represent the best interest of the child. Communication usually occurs between the child and the attorney, while there is limited or no communication between the attorney and the parent. Dependency cases, however are appointed two attorneys. There is always a potential for conflicting interests in dependency cases therefore there is an attorney appointed to represent the parents, and an attorney to represent the children. Therefore, in dependency cases, individuals should have spoken to the lawyer at some time during the course of their case. Having not explicitly distinguished between delinquency and dependency cases in the second phase of this project, it was necessary to use text analysis to determine whether the individuals had not spoken to a lawyer because they are not “technically” assigned one, but rather

their child is assigned an attorney or other reasons that may have accounted for this lack of communication in the waiting room.

Further text analysis revealed that it could be determined for 5 out of the 9 individuals that had responded they had never spoken to a lawyer in the waiting room, should have been or were appointed a lawyer for their case. The following table summarizes this additional analysis.

Table C. Communication with a Lawyer in the Waiting Room

Amount of times individual has been in the courtroom	Have a lawyer or are entitled to a lawyer	Spoken to a lawyer in the waiting room	Explanations
1	?	N	
4	?	N	
2	?	N	
1	?	N	
4	Y	N	Does not have a lawyer but is entitled because it is a dependency case
1	Y	N	Does not have a lawyer but is entitled because it is a dependency case
3	Y	N	Does not have a lawyer but is entitled because it is a dependency case
5	Y	N	Do not speak to my lawyer until I get in the courtroom
>7	Y	N	Only speak to lawyer when you get into the courtroom, does not go over anything until you get in the courtroom

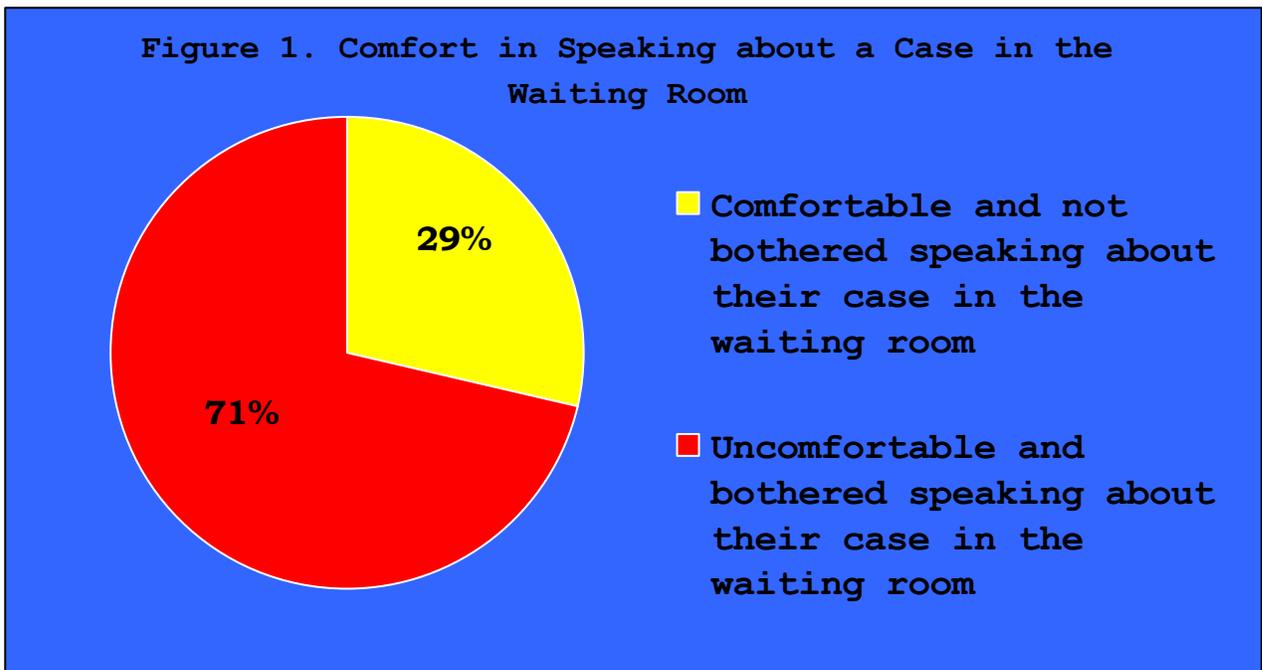
\* The yellow highlighted sections represent people that do not have a lawyer

\*\* The blue highlighted section represents people that have an attorney but do not speak to them in the waiting room

Two of the individuals that had never spoken to a lawyer in the waiting room had been to courthouse 5 times and more than 7 times. Furthermore 3 of the 5 individuals are entitled to an attorney because they are at the courthouse for dependency cases, however they

have either not been assigned one or have not met their attorney at the time of the interview. Lastly, it could be determined for only 5 of the individuals that the purpose for their appearance in the court was for a dependency case. Therefore, there are potentially more individuals unrepresented in dependency cases, but cannot be determined by the remainder of information from their individual survey responses.

In addition, results showed that 11 out of 21 (52%) individuals interviewed during the second phase of this project were *somewhat bothered or very bothered* by the presence of the other people while discussing their case in the waiting room and 9 out of 21 (43%) individuals were *uncomfortable or very uncomfortable speaking* to their lawyer in the waiting room.

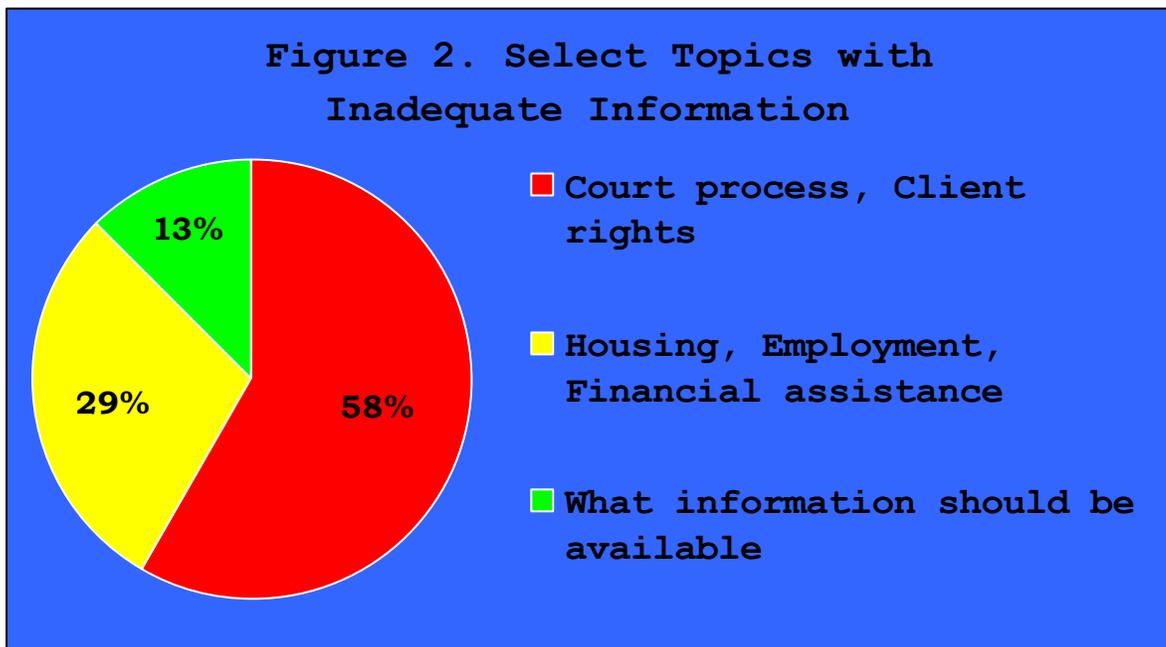


The above figure represents all of the individuals that are in some capacity uncomfortable with talking about their case. The results showed that of the 15 individuals that have spoken to a lawyer in the waiting room, 9 (71%) of these individuals were either bothered

by the presence of other people in the waiting room or uncomfortable speaking to their lawyer in the waiting room.

***Consequences of Lack of Communication: Inadequate Information***

According to the results demonstrated above there is a severe lack of communication between clients and the individuals involved in their case. Many people do not have the opportunity to ask questions about general court proceedings or about their specific case. In addition people are uncomfortable speaking to their lawyer or are uncomfortable speaking about their case in the waiting room. The consequence of this lack of communication is a lack of information provided to the clients. Without opportunities to speak to their lawyer and without the comfort of speaking openly about their case they are being denied the right to make informed decisions about their life and their family. Many of the families are unaware of the details of their case, services offered by the court system to help with life’s challenges, and their basic rights as a client of the court.



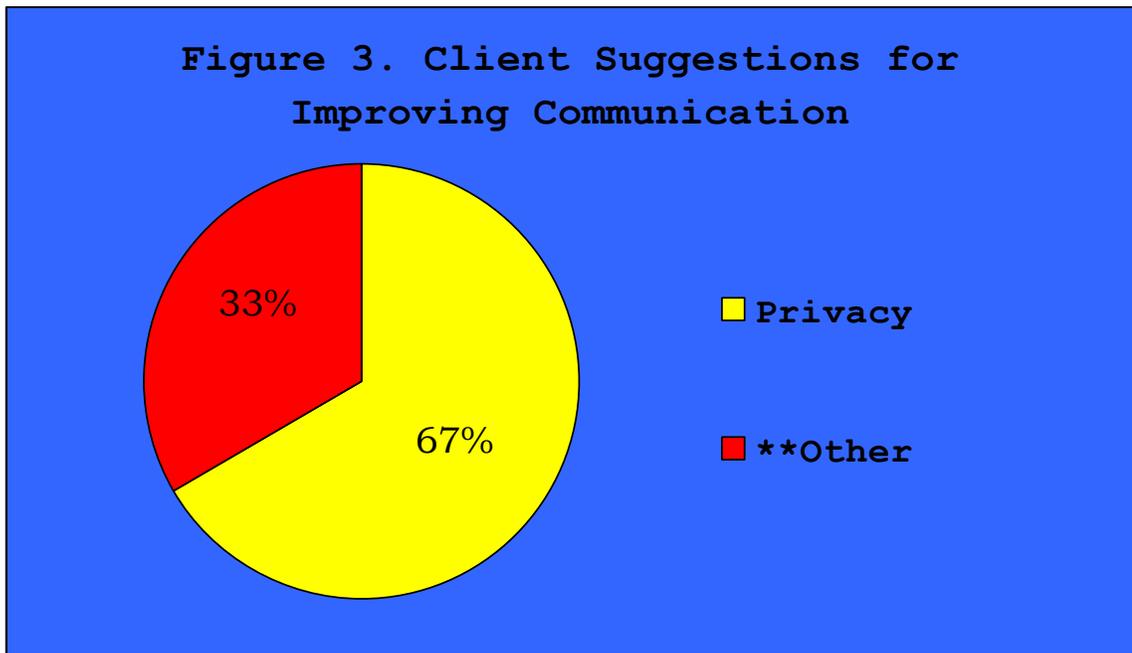
Results indicate the majority of clients (58%) are uniformed about the court process and their rights within the judicial system. Other common areas where there is lack of information include housing and employment. More importantly, many individuals are not aware of what information is available, should be available, or could be made available if it was requested. Often individuals rely on lawyers or social workers to provide information to them. However, as noted in previous results, clients are not always given the opportunity to request information from lawyers or social workers.

The following table reveals some of the text that indicates the need for additional information in these particular areas.

Table D. Testimonials Indicating a Lack of Information

<p><b>Court Process</b>  <i>“...this is my second time here and I have no idea what is going on, I have not spoken to my lawyer yet so I have not had anyone to ask questions to”</i></p> <p><i>“A lot of information, basic information about the process, for many people this is a completely new thing.”</i></p>
<p><b>Individual Rights</b>  <i>“...Information about the rights as a parent”</i></p> <p><i>“...my rights”</i></p>
<p><b>Housing, Employment</b>  <i>“Information about housing, employment information”</i></p> <p><i>“Housing information, job/employment opportunities or assistance”</i></p>
<p><b>Getting your life back together</b>  <i>“I think information on how to keep yourself out of court would be nice, information about getting your life back together”</i></p>
<p><b>What Information?</b>  <i>“Not familiar with any information they have now and not really sure what they could offer in terms of information”</i></p> <p><i>“Someone to explain what services are offered”</i></p>

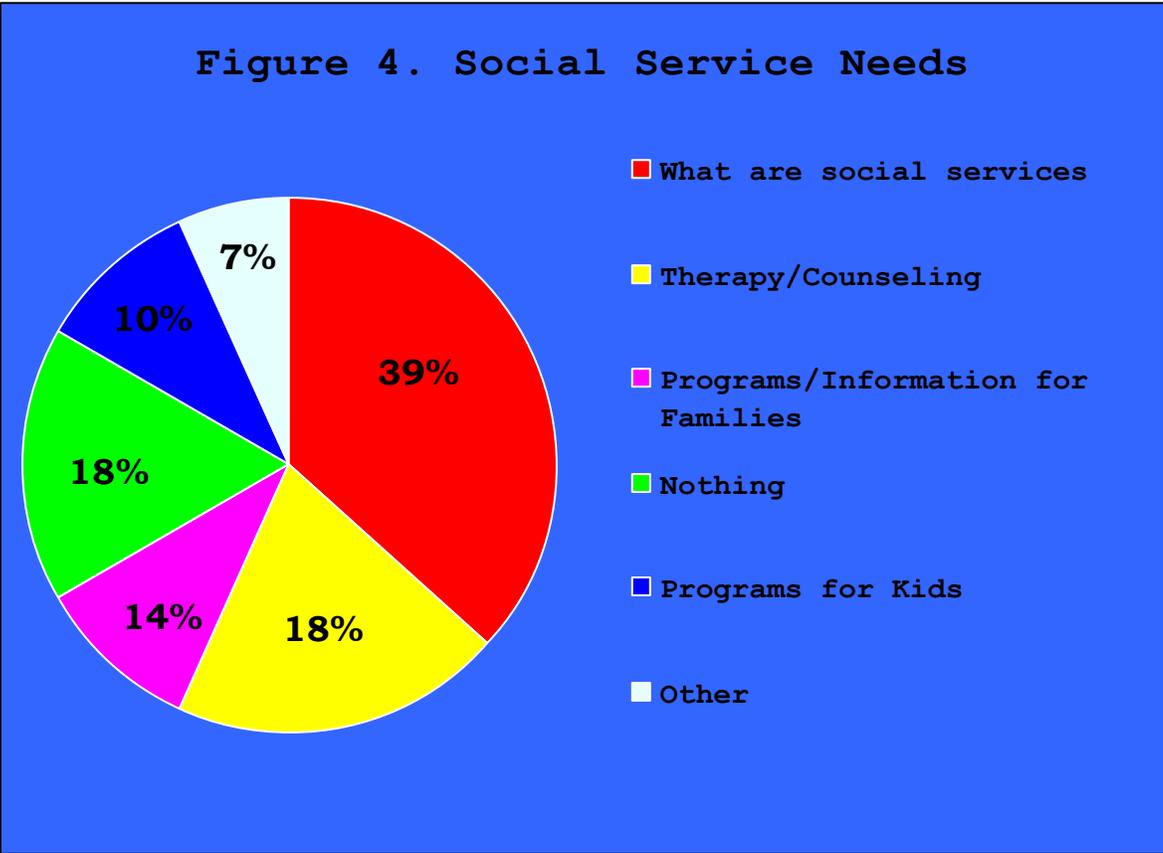
As part of the interview we asked individuals what could make the conversations with lawyers and court personnel easier and more useful to them while they are in the waiting room. The following figure describes the majority of responses received for this question.



*\*\*The most common responses for "Other" were "Nothing" and "Efficient Representation".*

### ***Social Service Needs***

The second section of the interview addressed social service needs of the families in the waiting room. There were four themes identified from the qualitative analysis of the individual responses: therapy/counseling, programs for families, programs for kids, and a lack of understanding of the definition of social services and/or what social services could be offered.



***Physical Space***

The third section of the survey addressed the environment and space in the waiting room. Almost all of the individuals interviewed believed the waiting room to be uncomfortable, unattractive, unpleasant, and noisy.

- 20 out of 30 *disagree or strongly disagree* that the chairs are comfortable
- 29 out of 30 *disagree or strongly disagree* that the waiting room is attractive
- 28 out of 30 *disagree or strongly disagree* that the waiting room is pleasant
- 22 out of 30 *disagree or strongly disagree* that the noise level is okay

In addition, the results indicated that families often wait for very long periods of time in the waiting room. The majority of individuals (63%) wait for at least 2 hours in the waiting room before going into the courtroom to see the judge.

Table E. Estimated Waiting Time

	One Hour or Less	2-4 Hours	More Than 4 Hours
Very Often	2	2	2
Often	3	8	7
Sometimes	3	10	5

\*The highlighted yellow region indicates the 63% (19 out of 30) people that often wait at least 2 hour.

The final section of the survey attempted to determine what improvements families believed would make this a more comfortable and productive environment while they waited to see a judge. The following are suggestions from clients to make this a more comfortable environment:

- More comfortable chairs
- Private meeting rooms
- Smaller spaces to create more intimacy
- More activities for children
- Shorter waits.
- Places to eat or drink and vending machines

Researchers found that individuals in the waiting room did not distinguish between services, information, comfort and better use of their time. For many of the individuals, if it was a comfortable place with available information, and services, then it was a

productive environment for them. However, if any of those elements were missing then it became an unproductive area. Therefore, results showed that the responses to the question addressing productivity fall into the same categories as responses for comfort, information, and services. The following are the suggestions from clients to make it a more productive environment:

- Magazines/Books/Newspapers
- Shorter Waits
- Therapy/Counseling Services
- Private meeting areas
- A place to eat and drink and vending machines
- Information: court process, client rights, employment, housing

The following table addresses concerns of the families through testimonials about the inability to leave the waiting room and the idea of not being allowed to eat or drink the entire time they are waiting to go before the judge.

Table F. Family Testimonials about Lack of Food, Drinks and Free Movement

“ A snack area...I had to go all the way outside to take a pill and then had to stand back in the security line to reenter”
“I once saw a women who said her blood sugar was getting low and she was feeling sick and they still would not let her eat”
“It is horrible to have to sit here and not be able to leave to have a smoke or get something to eat”

## ***II. D. Target Population 3: Court Related Personnel***

### ***Sample Size, N=15***

The third target population of this project was 15 court-related personnel recruited from the surrounding Philadelphia legal and social service community to complete a voluntary and anonymous survey. The purpose of this phase was to determine the environmental and social service needs from the perspective of individuals that serve the families in the courthouse. This survey was also intended to obtain information on the needs of the court-related personnel that would enable them to better serve their clients or families in the waiting room.

### ***II. D<sub>1</sub> Methods of Data Collection***

The third phase of this court improvement project involved 15 individuals that work with families in the Philadelphia Family Court on 1801 Vine Street. The research team, with the assistance of the Advocates Round Table, identified six organizations from which the court personnel should be recruited: Community Legal Services, Defenders Association, The Support Center for Child Advocates, The Child Advocacy Clinic at the University Of Pennsylvania School Of Law, Private Attorneys, and the Department of Human Services (DHS) and Judges from the Philadelphia Family Court. Community Legal Services is an organization that represents parents/guardians 100% of the time, while the Defenders Association represents children 100% of the time. These two organizations have a contract with the city of Philadelphia to take the majority of child advocacy cases (dependency cases), however they are unable to handle the enormous caseload so they seek out support organizations. These organizations include the Support Center and the Advocacy Clinic to represent children and private attorneys to represent

children or parents/guardians. In addition to the legal representation, the Department of Human Services appoints social workers and case workers as representative on their behalf. The research team came to a decision to recruit at least two individuals from each area of representation: children, parent/guardian, social service agency, and the court. Therefore there were a total of two judges, a social worker and a case worker, four individuals that specifically represent children (support center and child advocacy clinic, defenders association), two individuals that specifically represent parents/guardians (community legal services) and five individuals that represent either families or children (private attorneys from the community).

The court-related personnel were recruited through the mail or through personal communication. All of the court-related personnel recruited for this survey work directly with families within the courthouse facility. An introductory letter and a copy of the survey were mailed or hand-delivered to each selected participant to request their voluntary participation in a survey to help assess the needs within the family court waiting room. Follow-up emails and phone calls were made to the selected participants to ensure each person had received the materials. The court-related personnel were given approximately three weeks to complete and return the survey to the Field Center for Children's Policy Practice and Research in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided to them. The court-related personnel recruited for this study have the majority of contact with the families and individuals using the services within the waiting rooms at the Family Court.

## ***II. D<sub>2</sub> Instrument Development and Use Preparation***

A separate survey (Appendix F) was created to be administered to the Court-related personnel addressing both the needs of the clients in the waiting room and the needs of the personnel to ensure the clients are adequately represented. The survey was developed according to a list of broad environmental and social issues of interest for Judge Myrna Field, Administrative Judge at the Philadelphia Family Court and Dean Richard Gelles at University of Pennsylvania School of Social Work and review of key reports on previous studies completed in New York and Australia. The topics of interest included: social services and assistance needed for families, changes to create a comfortable environment for families, barriers to adequately serving families in the waiting room and changes needed to overcome these barriers.

These topics were grouped into a series of open-ended questions. The justification for these types of questions is that it was a formative research study and we did not want to limit the responses of the court-related personnel participating in this phase of the project. The purpose of the project was to allow stakeholders the opportunity to openly describe their experiences in the dependency court waiting room.

## ***II. D<sub>3</sub> Institutional Review Board (IRB) Considerations***

Paperwork was submitted to the IRB at Drexel University and University of Pennsylvania in February 2005 as an amendment to the original proposal approved in December 2004. The paperwork was submitted under expedited review. Subjects were recruited upon IRB approval in March 2005 and continued through March 2005. Data analysis of these interview responses was completed by April 2005. Copies of the Drexel University approval notices can be found in Appendix D.

The survey administered to the court-related personnel was approved by the IRB at Drexel University and the University of Pennsylvania. The data for this phase of the study was collected off campus around the Philadelphia Community and is being stored at the University of Pennsylvania in the locked office of the principle investigator.

## ***II. D<sub>4</sub> Data Management***

The responses to the court-related personnel in the third phase of the project were transcribed into a word document for qualitative theme analysis (Appendix G). Each question was coded for common themes including information about housing, information about the court process, privacy, and activities and materials for children. The analysis of individual responses was subsequently used to develop recommendations for environmental and social resources improvements to the dependency court waiting room.

## ***II. D<sub>5</sub> Results and Discussion of Court-Related Personnel Surveys***

A qualitative survey was administered to 15 court-related personnel in the Philadelphia legal and social service community. There were thirteen responses returned to the Field Center for analysis. Because of the varying nature of the services provided to families in the waiting room the results of court-related personnel differed according to their role in the court. However, there were common themes addressed by all of the stakeholders to make general improvements to the services provided and the environment in which these families wait for long hours at a time. These themes included availability of information, private spaces, activities for children, and educational resources. The following table outlines more specifically some of the most prevalent responses among

stakeholders. The highlighted yellow responses are those that are aligned with the responses of the families in both the pilot survey and the expanded sample.

Table G. Needs of Families from the Perspective of Court-Related Personnel (N=13)

<p><b>More Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Housing</li> <li>▪ Program Enrollment</li> <li>▪ Court Procedures</li> </ul>	<p><b>Educational Videos</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Parenting videos</li> <li>▪ Videos about the court proceedings</li> <li>▪ Use the television for educational purposes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Periodic Trainings</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Trainings held for lawyers, judges, social workers and any other individuals involved in dependency cases</li> </ul>	<p><b>Activities for Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Area for children to play</li> <li>▪ Books and toys to keep children occupied</li> </ul>
<p><b>Privacy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A private area to talk to clients about their case</li> <li>▪ A private space or work space to meet with other individuals involved in the case</li> </ul>	<p><b>Drug and Alcohol Treatment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Programs to help families deal with addictions and the consequences of these addictions</li> </ul>

\* The highlighted yellow region indicates responses aligned with the responses of families

The nature of the open-ended survey allowed the court-related personnel to openly describe their perceptions of the waiting room. Below are some testimonials that describe the environment from the perspective of the people that work in the court to protect the rights of families and children. They are grouped into three categories according to the questions asked in the survey: 1) advice you would give to someone coming for the first time, 2) anything else you would like to say about the waiting room, 3) what barriers prevent you from adequately serving your clients

Table H. Court-Related Personnel Testimonials

<p><b>Advice</b></p> <p><i>“Be prepared to wait forever without being able to leave your seat for any period of time and not have anyone tell you where your lawyer is, how long it will be before your case will be heard, and that after the case before yours, the judge is going to break for lunch”</i></p> <p><i>“Be prepared to spend the entire day—but do not bring lunch for you or your children because food is not allowed in the courthouse and cannot be checked at the door.”</i></p>
<p><b>Barriers</b></p> <p><i>“It takes very frank conversations in order to explain the system to people and they are less likely to be forthcoming with other people around”</i></p>
<p><b>Anything Else You Would Like to Say</b></p> <p><i>“It is depressing, dirty, uncomfortable...the bathrooms are always filthy, court personnel don’t use them but the public has to”</i></p>

It is apparent that the court-related personnel have common concerns about the facilities the courthouse both in the context of the environment and the provision of services to the families. Results revealed that court-related personnel commonly referred to the unacceptable conditions of the facilities and the unfairness of not providing food and drinks or not allowing families to bring food for themselves and their children. Results showed that 6 out of 13 of the court-related personnel addressed the issue of the unacceptable nature of the bathrooms. The testimonial in the previous table is just one example of a long list of complaints about the bathroom facilities. In addition, 8 out of 13 court-related personnel addressed the issue of space available for eating and/or the provision of food and beverage services to the families. It seems unjust that families are forced to wait in the same place for long hours, sometimes with young children, but are not allowed to eat, feed their children, or use a bathroom facility held to a standard that meets basic human needs.

The follow chapter outlines proposed recommendations to the court that will begin to address the concerns of the families and the court-related personnel; therefore creating a comfortable and complete environment for the families and the ensuring the personnel can adequately represent and protect them.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **I. PROBLEM, PROPOSED SOLUTIONS, JUSTIFICATION**

The results from all three of the phases of this project were compiled to determine the appropriate recommendations to the court for improving the physical environment, and the social service environment. The recommendations are laid out in the following tables according to the problem they address and the justification for a specific solution offered. They are grouped into two categories: programmatic recommendations and policy recommendations.

*Programmatic and Policy Recommendations*

<b>PROBLEM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of Privacy</li> <li>▪ No space for people involved in cases to conference</li> </ul>
<b>SOLUTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Divide the room into smaller areas by rearranging the chairs and adding partitions</li> <li>▪ Divide the waiting room into different stations according, offering different information</li> <li>▪ Use vacant or available rooms for private conference areas</li> </ul>
<b>JUSTIFICATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ According to regulations set forth for federal buildings by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, courthouses must provide for “speech intelligibility and privacy” (Thacker, 2005) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Speech intelligibility is “a measure of the ability of a listener in the room to understand what is being said”</li> <li>○ Privacy is “the measure of limiting speech intelligibility to the intended listener</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ According to these regulation guidelines courthouses are intended to provide spaces for four different levels of privacy: inaudible, confidential, normal, and minimal</li> <li>▪ The family court should be held to these same standards, providing spaces for all four levels of privacy.</li> <li>▪ Currently there are no confidential spaces for lawyers or social workers to speak to their clients about their case.</li> </ul> <p>Families Want This:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 67% of the families suggest privacy for improving communication with the people about their case</li> </ul> <p>Court-Related Personnel Want This</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All of the court-related personnel mention, at some point during their survey, the lack of privacy as a barrier to adequate representation of their clients</li> </ul> <p>Conclusion: The right to privacy is highly regarded in other professions (e.g. Protection of privacy for medical records) and there is not reason why the court should not be held to the same standard of protecting an individual’s right to privacy.</p>

<b>PROBLEM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of information about available social service programs</li> <li>▪ Need for therapy and counseling services</li> </ul>
<b>SOLUTION</b>	<p><b>In-house social work student program</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Offer eligibility and enrollment information for services (housing, drug and alcohol treatment programs, employment, summer programs, financial assistance)</li> <li>▪ Offer referrals for counseling and therapy for getting life back together, making appropriate decisions</li> </ul>
<b>JUSTIFICATION</b>	<p>A social worker can have three roles (Wikipedia, 2005):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clinical: addressing issues of child abuse, family crisis intervention, and short-term counseling or referrals to workers through employment assistance programs</li> <li>▪ Social Services: administering government welfare programs</li> <li>▪ Policy and Advocacy: Helping the poor organize for better conditions, advocacy and community support</li> </ul> <p>Penn School of Social Work Philosophy (Penn Social Work: The Penn Approach, 2005)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Empower the client with information</li> <li>▪ Link social resources to areas of greatest need</li> <li>▪ Address issues that adversely effect larger population represented by the client</li> </ul> <p>Penn School of Social Work Placement Program (Penn Social Work: Penn Masters Program in Social Work, 2005)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Masters students spend three full days per week in an approved agency integrating practice with classroom works</li> </ul> <p>The Families Want This Help</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 29% of the families are lacking information about housing, employment and financial assistance programs</li> <li>▪ 39% of the families do not know what social services are available to them</li> <li>▪ 14% would like information about programs for families, 18% would like information about counseling and 10% would like information about programs for children</li> </ul>

The Court-Related Personnel Want This

- All of the court-related personnel discuss the need for information about social services at some point during their survey

Conclusion: The social worker role can greatly contribute to the lack of information and services available to clients. This can be achieved by placing M.S.W students from Penn School of Social Work into the court for their placement requirement

<b>PROBLEM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of information about the court process and individual rights</li> </ul>
<b>SOLUTION</b>	<p>Information Office</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hotline available in many languages for people to call when they are home</li> <li>▪ People available to answer questions on-site</li> <li>▪ Pamphlets and brochures for people to take with them</li> <li>▪ Personnel available to assist individuals that cannot read or have trouble understanding the written material</li> </ul>
<b>JUSTIFICATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Statistics provided by the court revealed that a large proportion of the clients in the family court are African American (Common Pleas Court of Philadelphia, 2003).</li> <li>▪ According to the Educational Testing Service, African American adults in Pennsylvania are more likely to score on the two lowest literacy levels than Caucasians (Jenkins and Kirsch, 1994)</li> <li>▪ Statistics provided by the court also revealed that a large majority of the clients are of low economic status</li> <li>▪ The Educational Testing Service also revealed that the literacy scores of poor or near poor individuals is considerably lower than the scores of individuals with a higher economic status (Jenkins and Kirsch, 1994)</li> </ul> <p>The Families Want This:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 58% of the families interviewed are unfamiliar with the court process and their rights as a client of the court</li> </ul> <p>The Court-Related Personnel Want This:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 77% court-related personnel express the concern for more information about the court process for their clients</li> </ul> <p>Conclusion: individuals are already at a disadvantage for understanding the court process and therefore more appropriate forms of information need to be provided to families in the system.</p>

<b>PROBLEM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inability to leave the waiting room without possible missing the case</li> </ul>
<b>SOLUTION</b>	<p>A system where families can be notified of their case if they have to leave the waiting room</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Beeper system that works only in a certain area of the building</li> <li>▪ Intercom system (families assigned a number to protect confidentiality)</li> </ul>
<b>JUSTIFICATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Guidelines set forth for federal buildings by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, there are three separate zones of entry: public, restricted, and secure movement. (Thacker, 2005) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Public entrance requires that there is a single entry controlled by security by allows “free movement” within all the public areas of the building</li> <li>○ Restricted entrance for judges, court personnel and official visitors</li> <li>○ Secure entrance is for prisoners</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ The Family Court needs to be held to the same standards of access and movement</li> <li>▪ In the 1801 Vine Street Courthouse, the public entrance is controlled by metal detectors. However, this paper argues that there is not free movement once beyond the controlled entrance. Families are forced to wait within the waiting room and if they choose to move through other public areas of the building they risk missing their case.</li> </ul> <p>Families Want This:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Testimonials detailed earlier in this paper reveal the concern of families about not being able to leave the waiting room at any point during their long wait to go before the judge</li> </ul> <p>Court-Related Personnel Want This:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Court-related personnel were asked what advice they would give to someone coming to court for the first time...</li> <li>▪ 10 out 13 of the court-related personnel told them to be prepared to wait for a very long period of time, and bring things to do because they cannot leave the waiting area</li> </ul> <p>Conclusion: It is unrealistic and inhumane to force individuals to sit in one place without being able to leave the designated waiting space.</p>

<b>PROBLEM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No vending machines</li> <li>▪ No place to eat or drink</li> </ul>
<b>SOLUTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Create a space with vending machines, and tables and chairs to eat or drink</li> <li>▪ Use a beeper system/intercom system (mentioned in previous table) for notifying families if their case is called</li> </ul>
<b>JUSTIFICATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Families are being denied basic human needs while they wait for long hours to see a judge.</li> <li>▪ It is inhumane to not allow children to eat while they are waiting in the waiting room</li> </ul> <p>Families Want This:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 17 out of 30 families indicated they wanted to be allowed to eat and drink and that there should be a vending machine available for families while they are in the courthouse</li> </ul> <p>Court-Related Personnel Want This:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 8 out of 15 court-related personnel address the issue of clients not being allowed to eat while they wait for hours in the waiting room</li> </ul> <p>Conclusion: The court should look into partnering with a local food vendor and begin to afford these families and their basic human rights while they wait to go in front of a judge.</p>

<b>PROBLEM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dehumanizing Environment</li> </ul>
<b>SOLUTION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Replace the chairs</li> <li>▪ Add paint to the wall</li> <li>▪ Repair the bathrooms: make sure that all bathroom stalls have doors, locks and toilet paper</li> <li>▪ Keep the bathrooms clean</li> <li>▪ Create a “children’s” room to eliminate some of the noise</li> <li>▪ Partner with the library or book stores to offer magazines, books, and newspapers</li> </ul>
<b>JUSTIFICATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ According to regulations set forth for federal buildings by the Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts, “Interior architecture of public spaces should exhibit dignity and seriousness” (Thacker, 2005).</li> <li>▪ In addition “a courthouse must express integrity, stability, and fairness of the American judicial process” (Thacker, 2005).</li> <li>▪ The Family Court, regulated by the State Supreme Court needs to be held accountable for these same standards of design.</li> <li>▪ If these regulations are already outlined, then the regulating body needs to enforce these guidelines more readily.</li> <li>▪ Children in the court for dependency cases are not in court for what they did, but rather the adults responsible for their protection failed them. The system should not contribute to their despair through lack of attention in the justice system</li> </ul> <p>Families Want This:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 20 out of 30 families believe the waiting room is uncomfortable</li> <li>▪ 29 out of 30 families believe the waiting room is unattractive</li> <li>▪ 28 out of 30 families believe the waiting room is unpleasant</li> <li>▪ 22 out of 30 families believe the waiting room is noisy</li> </ul>

	<p>Court-Related Personnel Want This:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All of the court-related personnel address the issue of uncomfortable conditions in the waiting room</li> <li>▪ 6 out of 13 court-related personnel address concern for the unacceptable state of the bathroom facilities in the waiting room</li> </ul> <p>Conclusion: The courthouse should be held responsible for creating an environment that represents human dignity and respect for the justice system.</p>
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## II. ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are additional recommendations based on suggestions by the court-related personnel and the families interviewed that would improve the overall social environment of the waiting room. They do not necessarily address a specific problem mentioned in this paper, but rather address the overall problem of representation, inadequate information, and lack of a comfortable, complete environment.

- Yearly group training programs should be held for all related parties in dependency cases (lawyers, judges, caseworkers and social workers)
  - A report by the Juvenile Law Center of Philadelphia found that many Family Court Judges have not been trained in dependency cases and have limited communication with social workers and case workers involved in the case (Snyder, 2001)
  - The report concluded that 9 out of 10 panel and contracted attorneys have never had official training to represent dependent children (Snyder, 2001)
  - According to the Pew Commission on Foster Care Report, multidisciplinary training across all parties is suggested ensures that each

staff member has a clear understanding of where they fit into the system and what are the right questions to ask and solutions to suggest for securing the safety of these children (Children's Defense Fund, 2004).

- Relocate the television to a place where it can be seen or heard by the families while they are waiting to see a judge

- Television could then be used for educational purposes: public service announcements, parenting videos, anger/stress management, and court process videos.

- Lawyers should be held accountable to this guideline and be at the court to represent their clients at all times

- Social workers, case workers, and any other individual involved in the case should also be held accountable to these same guidelines

- According to Best Practice Guidelines published by the American Bar Association, a lawyer should actively participate in all hearings and conferences with the court.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

A three-pronged needs assessment was implemented in the 1801 Vine Street Family Court Dependency waiting room to determine the social and environmental needs of families using the services of the court. As a result of interviews administered to two separate groups of families and a survey delivered to court-related personnel from the Philadelphia community; it became apparent of the overwhelming need to make improvements to this space. Background research conducted before implementation of this project indicated the court environment to be filled with anxious, bored and confused

individuals. Results of this project, supporting this background research, indicated that families often sit in the waiting room for long periods of time, are bored and hungry, and are often uninformed about their case and the court process in general. It is necessary to begin treating these families with respect and dignity and protecting the innocent children forced into this system. The first step in improving the dependency system is to create an environment that is intended to protect, provide and serve families that are in desperate need of assistance.

The waiting room is filled with a captive audience for long periods of time, and therefore it is the responsibility of the legal community and social work community, to take advantage of this situation by providing these individuals much needed services and comfort. The proposed recommendations, including an in-house social work program, and information office, smaller spaces and special improvements can be the first step to achieving a dignified place that represents the seriousness and fairness of the justice system.