

Challenges to Reunification in Small and Rural Counties: Strategies for Minor's Counsel, the Government, Parent's Counsel and CASA.

HYPOTHETICAL:

The County of Rose is a small rural county in California. The county has a privately contracted mental health department which is highly overburdened. There are only two psychiatrists and four licensed therapists for the county. Mental health assessments for removed minors may take 4 to 6 weeks, and therapeutic services for adults may take 12 months to commence. In addition, therapy is usually limited to eight weeks. The substance abuse recovery programs are also crowded, and have a higher rate of recidivism due to their collaborative use with criminal sentencing programs. Two of the three substance abuse programs are faith-based and opposed to any psychotropic medication during recovery. The County also abuts a tribal reservation and tribal members live both on and in close proximity to the reservation. The tribe is a federally recognized tribe by the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

The Potter family has been brought to the juvenile dependency system through a positive methamphetamine test for a newborn minor. The family also has a 3 year old and a 10 year old in the home. Both have tested positive for low levels of marijuana and methamphetamine. The children have not been to school in two weeks. The father was previously diagnosed with depression and has a 2001 conviction for domestic violence. The maternal grandmother has bipolar disorder. The mother is on SSI, and is eligible to be a tribal member, but has not yet applied. The father works odd jobs in construction. The 3 year old child has a significant speech delay. The 10 year old has also been suspended from school for carrying a pocketknife. There is a School Attendance Review Board hearing pending, and the recommendation is expulsion. The school is currently making him do all of his work in the office.

- What reunification challenges are presented due to the rural nature of the County? What services might the parent's need?
- How can I enforce service provider requirements in low income counties?
- How should the case manager\department structure those services given county limitations?
- What can be done about the children's education and disciplinary issues?