



Jackson County Family Court  
625 E. 26 St., Kansas City, Missouri

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### **Jackson County Family Court implements new initiative to safely move babies out of foster care more quickly**

The Jackson County Family Court is excited to announce that 15 families are presently receiving services due to an innovative new pilot program called Cradles to Crayons that the Court recently launched.

The new initiative is designed to safely move babies and toddlers, whose parents have temporarily lost custody of their children due to allegations of abuse or neglect, faster through the court system to permanency.

The program is somewhat like drug court in that parents receive assistance by staff to move them more quickly to the services they need, and more oversight by the judge of their case so a decision regarding permanency can be made sooner.

Three staff members at the Family Court are working proactively with parents to break down the barriers to reunification with their children. Parents who struggle to make and keep appointments for court ordered services, or experience delays due to transportation issues, then delay the ability of the Court to make a decision on a permanent home for their children. The goal is to get to a solution quicker.

And to date, that has happened for two families who had their cases resolved with a dismissal as a result of this new docket and the services that come with it.

The dedicated docket, which began in January 2019, is for children aged zero to three who are the most vulnerable in the foster care population.

“The kids within that age group are the most at risk,” said Family Court Administrative Judge Dale Youngs. “With more intervention, we hope to move these kids to permanency faster.”

Permanency means that the Court makes a decision on whether the parents will regain custody of the child, whether the child will receive a guardian, or whether the parents will lose their parental rights and the child will be placed for adoption. The Court seeks to find a path to a safe, permanent placement for a child, whatever type of placement that may turn out to be.

In order to move things forward, Family Court staff will seek to have paternity testing done earlier in the process if necessary. The staff will also help parents understand the steps needed for reunification with their child. The Court will implement a mentoring program so parents can connect with other parents who lost custody of their children, and then did the hard work to get them back. In addition, the judge will bring parents in for additional court hearings to review how the case is progressing, and to make changes in custody and visitation as needed.

This initiative is born out of concern that infants and young children have dramatic development in their early years and need permanent homes as soon as possible.

The initiative is being accomplished in conjunction with the Children’s Division of the Missouri Department of Social Services.                   ###