

# RESEARCH SNAPSHOT: CANI

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES

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## 2014 CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT INSTITUTE

A recurring training offered by NCJFCJ is the Child Abuse and Neglect Institute (CANI) which provides instruction in dependency court best practices for judicial officers who have either been newly assigned to child abuse and neglect cases or for experienced juvenile dependency judges who would like to learn about emerging and promising practices in this field. During the 2014 training held in Reno, NV, NCJFCJ assessed changes in participants' decision-making before and after CANI. The purpose of evaluating changes in decision-making was to determine if judicial officers make different decisions or think about cases differently after attending the training.

Researchers employed a pre/post-test design in order to assess decision-making. At the beginning (before any sessions were held) of the CANI conference (pre-CANI), participants were given a description of a hypothetical juvenile dependency shelter care hearing and the accompanying case facts. After reading the scenario, participants responded to a series of closed-ended questions (i.e., those that offer a pre-defined response) as if they were the presiding judge over this case.

On the last day of the CANI conference (post-CANI), participants were given the same hypothetical juvenile dependency shelter care hearing and case facts and responded to the same set of questions from the pre-CANI questionnaire. They were told that their responses may be the same or different from the ones they had provided earlier.

*“There was a substantial increase in Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) inquiries.”*

### *Key Findings*

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- More likely to appoint a CASA for the child.
- More likely to order services for the mother.
- More likely to recommend that the child be placed with the father.
- Increase in Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) inquiries.
- More likely to cite the child's risk of harm as an important piece of information to be considered in their orders and findings.
- More likely to request additional information regarding the child's well-being, specifically relating to the child's physical and emotional well-being.

# RESULTS

## Likelihood of Order Change

Participants were more likely to indicate that the agency made reasonable efforts to prevent removal at pre-CANI (25.8%) than at post-CANI (6.5%). Moreover, there was a statistically significant difference in likelihood from pre- to post-CANI for two orders: (1) appointment of a CASA for the child and (2) service referrals for the mother. There was a marginally significant difference from pre- to post-CANI for placing the child with the father once he is released from jail.

## List of Findings

Pre- and post-CANI responses differed on this question. For instance, one participant listed that he or she needed to find that “paternal grandmother is appropriate caregiver, past history of mother, father unable to take custody”; post-CANI, however, the same participant listed “ICWA, paternity established, prior contacts with CPS in other states, condition of child.” At pre-CANI, 8.3% of participants cited ICWA-related findings. At post-CANI, 20.6% of participants cited ICWA related findings.

## Important Information

Pre- and post-CANI responses differed with regard to two pieces of information. First, at post-CANI participants were less likely to implicate the father’s girlfriends’ substance abuse as a key piece of information (24.1%) than at pre-CANI (40.0%). Second, post-CANI, participants cited current evidence of risk of harm to the child as one of the most important pieces of information in their decision-making (48.2%) than at pre-CANI (31.4%).

## Additional Information

There was a difference in the frequency with which participants requested information related to ICWA from pre- to post-CANI. Pre-CANI, 8.3% of participants indicated that they would like more ICWA-related information; post-CANI 24.2% of participants requested this information. Moreover, 27.8% of pre-CANI participants requested information related to the child, typically regarding the child’s physical and emotional well-being. Post-CANI, 86.2% of participants requested this type of information.

## Discussion

Overall, findings suggest that CANI is helping to change some of the decision-making behaviors of its attendees. Specifically, CANI appears to bring attention to the importance of making ICWA inquiries and findings and focusing on the child’s well-being. Whether these changes are long lasting and carry over across cases remains to be seen. Future studies can be done to assess these aspects, as well as others, in order to continually improve upon and tailor future CANI trainings.

*Research Snapshots highlight key elements of reports and projects that address the need for empirically-based research on systems change in the juvenile and family court system. For more information, please visit our website: [www.ncjfcj.org](http://www.ncjfcj.org)*

*The mission of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges is to provide all judges, courts, and related agencies involved with juvenile, family, and domestic violence cases with the knowledge and skills to improve the lives of families and children who seek justice.*

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