**Covid Court format:**

* We are still conducting all hearings virtually. On a regular dependency day, we schedule 7 hearings and give each case one hour. (This is fewer hearings per court day than pre-covid.) Finding additional time for hearings, particularly contested ones, is challenging. However, the quality of the hearings has improved, we have fewer continuances, and have reduced wait time to a rarity.
* Party participation has improved noticeably with virtual hearings. More parents attend, teen engagement is better, and incarcerated-parents are able to participate equally. (No long transports, losing time in their programs, no handcuffs, etc.) Our clerk has a relationship with DCOR and county jails for parents to participate and we no longer need production orders.
* We have no timeframe for resuming in-person hearings. Even when we do, we will continue to facilitate virtual participation – whether based on the type of the hearing, the role of the participant, specific court days for all-virtual hearings, etc. Specifics TBD.

**Successes:**

* Much more creativity in case work. Much more critical evaluation of barriers to reunification & permanency.
* Better rates of permanency in 2020 than 2019.
* 20 new CASA volunteers sworn in 2020 & a total of 209 children served by CASA.
* CASA able to serve on some Family Preservation cases.
* Hired Law Clerk in August 2020.
* Facilitated a Dependency Attorney training in December 2020.
* With the law clerk & SAAG office, we have done significant training, collaborating, and work to improve the quality of written orders.

**Challenges:**

* DFCS Staffing:  We enjoyed relatively stable DFCS staff levels in 2019-2020.  Currently – because of a combination of promotions, leaves, resignations, etc. – we have 7 affected positions in foster care and family preservation.
* Dependency Attorney turnover: new associate SAAG, new parent attorney, new GAL/child attorney. They are becoming familiar with the cases and court processes.
* Reductions in CASA funding and grants.

**Upcoming Events:**

* MD-CANI with Bartow County, April 15-16
* DFCS Training on Courtroom Testimony, April 23
* Reunification Celebration in June

**Ongoing Projects:**

* Applying for state grant funding for Family Treatment Court
* Strengthening our Family Preservation work. (We have 120 children court-ordered family preservation cases, compared to 153 children with foster care cases.)