

The Dependency Outlook



THE OFFICE OF COURT IMPROVEMENT

Fall 2013; Edition III

New Model Courts Initiatives Unveiled

Florida's Model Courts Project has shifted its focus from training to technical assistance with an emphasis on sustained implementation efforts at the local level. The primary goal of the project is statewide implementation of evidence-based parenting programs (EBP). Implementing EBP has become the model courts' priority due to the clear evidence of positive outcomes by people utilizing EBP interventions.

EBP programs are evaluated and tested to prove that, when implemented with fidelity, they will result in positive outcomes for participants. EBP programs also utilize pre and post tests of participants' parenting skills which clearly show how a parent has improved and why a child can be safely reunified with a parent. EBP programs are a far cry from ordering parents to services with an unknown practice model, an untested approach, and no evidence of actual improvement of parenting skills for participants.

The performance of community based care agencies (CBCs), the Department of Children and Families, and the courts are all being evaluated by various entities, and it makes sense for all involved to utilize services that are known to be effective. More importantly, effective services help families develop the skills they need to be successful and safe. Treatment services are contracted for and provided by the CBC lead agencies in each circuit, so collaboration among all the interested parties at the circuit level is critical to move forward with this project.

The model court liaisons, who are assigned to work directly with judges, magistrates, and court staff will work with their model court teams and assist with data collection, implementation planning, and other matters as needed. Liaisons can also assist model court teams by troubleshooting issues and linking jurisdictions with people from a variety of national resource centers who can provide technical assistance.

For more information on the new model courts initiatives, please contact your model court liaison. For your convenience, a list of the model court liaisons is on page 10.

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NOTICE: Though Florida's Dependency Court Improvement Program is primarily funded through federal grants, it is operating from previously allocated funds and is currently unaffected by the federal government shutdown. However, many of our federal partners are currently unable to provide resources and assistance. Updates will be provided as the situation warrants.

Child Protection Summit Growing with the Times

The Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) held the annual Child Protection Summit in Orlando on August 28-30. DCF Interim Secretary, Esther Jacobo, welcomed everyone and expressed a message of partnership, collaboration, commitment, and accountability to all participants.



Esther Jacobo, Interim Secretary

Over two thousand child welfare professionals were in attendance and were provided opportunities to learn about best practices related to child protection, safety, and well-being. More than 100 judges, magistrates, and court staff also participated in the summit. The summit offers a unique opportunity to attend numerous workshops, mega-sessions, and other professional development sessions.

This year's child protection summit was a big success. The incredible number of participants made it easy to take advantage of numerous networking opportunities and obtain professional connections while learning the latest trends in child welfare, human trafficking, the quality parenting initiative, legislative updates, and trauma informed care among a wide array of topics. (For an example of what professional collaboration can achieve, please see the articles on pages 6-7.)

For additional information on the summit, including Interim Secretary Jacobo's opening address, please view the following website:

www.myflfamilies.com. For workshop descriptions and details, please

view the following website: www.cvent.com/d/ccq5sf/6x. Specific workshop presentations are posted on the conference website as an underlined link in the workshop descriptions on the agenda page. If there is not an underlined link provided for a workshop, there are no online materials available for that particular workshop.

Model Courts All-Sites Meeting Brings State Together

Florida's statewide model courts project is focused on developing and improving court practices that will improve safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children involved in the dependency system. The latest all-sites meeting, which brings all the model court sites in Florida together around this common purpose, was held in conjunction with this year's Child Protection Summit. This all-sites meeting marked the first time that all twenty judicial circuits participated, and more than two hundred judges, magistrates, court staff, and stakeholders were in attendance.

Judge Katherine Essrig, chair of the dependency court improvement panel, kicked off the meeting by highlighting the new goal to implement evidence-based parenting programs into the services available to families statewide. Other topics of discussion included a review of statewide and circuit-specific dependency and permanency performance data, safe babies court teams, and transition planning for youth throughout the dependency process.

DCF Interim Secretary, Esther Jacobo, also made time to meet with model court judges and magistrates, and address their questions and concerns about child welfare, the availability of services, and the changes within the Department of Children and Families.

2013 William E. Gladstone Award Recipient

The William E. Gladstone Award recipient was announced at the 2013 Child Protection Summit on August 29th, in Orlando. Judge William E. Gladstone enthusiastically announced the Honorable David M. Gooding, 4th Judicial Circuit, as this year's award recipient.



Judges David M. Gooding and William E. Gladstone

Judge Gooding was awarded the William E. Gladstone Award for his outstanding judicial leadership, for streamlining the adoption process in Duval County, developing Family First Fridays to support timely adoptions, and his continuous commitment to improving the welfare of children in the dependency system.

Judge Gooding cheerfully accepted the award as he was commended for his excellent work, commitment, and contributions to the children and families of Florida.

Parents with no Allegations

The Child Welfare Summit featured a variety of workshops to educate and assist judicial officers, lawyers, guardians ad litem, case managers, and other professionals who work in the child welfare system. Several of these workshops were of particular interest to judges and magistrates. One such workshop was entitled, "The 'Other' Parent in a Dependency Case: Parents With No Allegations." Presented by Circuit Judge Sue Robbins and OSCA attorney Avron Bernstein, this workshop covered several legal issues relating to parents with no allegations of abuse, neglect, or abandonment, also known as "PWNA."

The term PWNA includes more than simply so-called "non-offending" parents. The phrase also comprises those parents from whom the child was not removed, and in a non-shelter dependency case, it includes those parents with whom the child was not residing at the time the dependency arose. PWNA also consists of parents who have been dismissed from a petition; parents about whom the petition has been denied by the court; and parents whom the department concedes have no allegations of abuse, neglect, or abandonment. PWNA is therefore a more all-encompassing and complete term than "non-offending parent." Several complex legal issues were discussed at the workshop, including: the PWNA's right to placement of the child, home studies of PWNA, the right to counsel, the proper legal standard to be used when determining custody, visitation, and jurisdiction.

For more information on this topic or to obtain copies of the materials presented, contact Avron Bernstein at bernsteina@flcourts.org.

Dependency Drug Courts, by Circuit Judge Jeri Beth Cohen

The problems associated with child maltreatment and maternal substance abuse constitute a public health concern of the utmost importance. It is estimated that as many as 80% of children involved in the child welfare system have a drug-dependent parent. Although there are interventions for adult substance use, interventions for infants and toddlers exposed to traumatic circumstances, and interventions designed to improve parenting practices of mothers involved in the child welfare system, these services are often not coordinated, integrative, or holistic. By offering intensive and integrated multidisciplinary services aimed at addressing the dual problems of child maltreatment and maternal addiction, Dependency Drug Courts (DDC) offer a unique and distinct approach to handling child abuse and neglect cases involving addicted, frequently dual-diagnosis parents. DDCs, adapted from the adult drug court model were established to serve “the best interests of the child” by helping parents become emotionally, financially, and personally self-sufficient and to develop parenting and coping skills adequate for serving as an effective parent on a day-to-day basis. DDCs address parental addiction, mental health and trauma, as well as child safety and permanency, and, as such, offer a unique opportunity to change the lives of children—to break the intergenerational cycle of substance abuse, poor mental health, and violence—and to prevent future trauma exposure for mother and child.

Most DDCs share key elements, including a nonadversarial relationship among the participating partners, comprehensive assessment of service needs, frequent court hearings and drug testing, intensive judicial supervision, enrollment in substance abuse treatment programs designed to improve parenting practices and other necessary services, and the administration of judicial rewards and sanctions. In order to graduate from DDCs, participants must have successfully completed substance abuse treatment, remain compliant with mental health services, have a specified period of continuous abstinence, show evidence of a safe and stable living situation, spend a substantial period of time adequately performing the parental role, and have a life plan initiated and in place (e.g., employment, education, vocational training). DDCs frequently include drug court counselors, who refer clients to substance abuse treatment and other court-ordered services, develop a recovery service plan, and monitor and report clients’ ongoing progress to the court. Although there are numerous components to DDCs, the contributions of the drug court judge and counselors to the effectiveness of drug court are undeniable.



Judge Jeri Beth Cohen

The 11th Judicial Circuit Juvenile Dependency Court in Miami-Dade County, Florida, was established a DDC in 1999. The DDC is a 12- to 15-month program organized into four phases. Progression through the phases is related to the parent’s level of substance abuse treatment and compliance with court orders. An assessment of the parent (using the Addiction Severity Index, as well as other structured instruments), is conducted immediately upon acceptance into drug court, and placement in appropriate substance abuse treatment is commenced, in many instances, even before the arraignment of the case. Whenever possible, children are kept with their parents in maternal or family addiction programs. When this is not possible, visitations occur frequently in order to maintain parent-child bonding. Parents are drug-tested (urine screens) at each court hearing and in their substance abuse treatment programs.

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Dependency Drug Courts, continued

These programs are required to report progress or lack thereof to the court. During the first month of drug court, mothers attend weekly drug court hearings. Thereafter, if reports to the court indicate that the mother is progressing well, court hearings are reduced to twice monthly. During Phase 2 of the program, which lasts approximately 3 months, clients continue to attend twice-monthly hearings. In Phase 3, which lasts another 3 months, the frequency of hearings is reduced to once per month. In the final Phase 4, which extends to graduation from drug court, clients attend hearings every 6–12 weeks. This multi-phase process includes a collaborative team approach that involves attorneys, drug court counselors, child welfare workers, treatment providers, parent educators, and other social and health care service providers. Drug court counselors have contact with their clients, either in-person or on the phone, on a weekly basis through Phase 2, reducing to biweekly in Phase 3, and monthly in Phase 4. Counselors are available more frequently on an as-needed basis. The caseload for drug court counselors is between 10 and 15 active cases. All cases have both dedicated child welfare workers and drug court counselors. Along with the attorneys, the drug court counselors, child welfare caseworkers, and treatment providers meet weekly to staff the case.

Drug court is a collaborative effort among the various professionals and stakeholders involved in child welfare; this includes not only the judge but also the attorneys (defense and state); child advocates, such as the guardian ad litem, child welfare caseworkers, substance abuse treatment providers, parenting intervention providers, other service providers (e.g., child psychologists and psychiatrists), day care agencies, and schools; physicians; and, of course, the DDC counselors. Sometimes the sheer number of professionals involved can be overwhelming and counterproductive (i.e., “Too many cooks spoil the brew”), but the needs of the parents and young children involved in DDC are vast, and it is frequently necessary to have a large number of professionals involved in the life of a single family. Without strong judicial leadership in DDC, however, there would be chaos, inefficiency, and ineffectiveness. Accordingly, the judge not only establishes the direction of the court, convenes the necessary stakeholders, monitors progress or the lack thereof, and demands respect for due process but also functions as an inspirational leader. Given the natural conflict between the long tradition of an adversarial legal system and the nonadversarial nature of drug court, a strong judicial leader is necessary to speak for the mission of drug court and to create an environment where mutual trust is nurtured. Notwithstanding the central role of the judge, each partner is essential to drug court, and the judge, of course, must rely on all the stakeholders.

Finally, given the complex nature of DDC, the judge’s training as an attorney is not sufficient. It is incumbent upon a judge in DDC to develop considerable competency in the fields of substance abuse and early child development, mental health and trauma, parenting practices, and family functioning. This seems like a tall order, but it is our experience that the more the judge knows about these disciplines, the better he or she is able to determine which services and types of care are necessary. The judge will also be better able to monitor the delivery of services and use his or her position to demand higher quality services for parents and young children, and to negotiate with the providers for enhanced services.

Recent data reveals that Family DDCs work. Treatment completion rates in DDC were 20 to 30 percent higher for the DDC participants than for comparison participants, while family reunification rates were, in some cases, 40 percent higher. The children of DDC parents spent significantly less time in out of home placements, while parents who completed substance abuse treatment were five times more likely to be reunified with their children. (Douglas M. Marlow, J.D. Ph.D. and Shannon M. Carey, Ph.D., Research update on Family Drug Courts, National Association of Drug Court Professionals, May 2012).

Implementing Innovative Practices and Meeting Needs

The Fifteenth Judicial Circuit in Palm Beach County works hard to provide the best services possible to the children and families they serve. Several initiatives have been implemented and expanded in the last several years to enhance the experience for children and families who appear in court. These include, child friendly waiting areas in all courthouses which handle juvenile proceedings, a therapy dog program, resource libraries and kiosks, a clothing closet, and child friendly policies. Many of these initiatives stemmed



Judge Kathleen Kroll and Cristy Altaro visit the Palm Beach County Courthouse clothing closet.

from a need or a simple idea and have become a much needed resource at different courthouses throughout the county. They also help improve the public perception of the courts, especially since some see the courts as a place where usually only bad things happen.

Several years ago, it became apparent that a number of youth were coming to court inappropriately dressed or expressing the need for clothing that was suitable for job seeking. Sometimes the parents of the children, in both delinquency and dependency court, also needed appropriate clothes for court and job seeking.

Concerns about the issue were shared with court administration employees and everyone was encouraged to clean out their closets and gather any new or gently used items that would help the cause. The staff contributions were overwhelming and the clothing closet was opened.

Currently, the closet consists of a variety of shirts, pants, skirts, suits, belts, and shoes for all different styles and sizes. All children and parents have an opportunity to look through the closet and take whatever they need.

For information regarding the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit's clothing closet for children and families, please contact Cristy Altaro, Juvenile Court Operations Manager, at caltaro@pbcgov.org.

...a much needed resource at courthouses throughout the county.



From shirts to shoes and everything in between.

The Closet: A Result of Shared Innovative Practices

After learning about the clothing closet established in the Fifteenth Judicial Circuit (Palm Beach County), the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit (Broward County), opened a clothing closet in May 2013. This endeavor was led by Kathleen Pugh, Trial Court Administrator, with the support of the Honorable Peter Weinstein, Chief Judge. Upon learning of the closet project, court administration staff and the judiciary generously answered the call for donations and filled the closet in a short amount of time.

The closet was established in the memory of the Honorable Susan Aramony who always had the best interests of the children in mind and worked tirelessly to protect and encourage children and families. Prior to her thirteen years on the bench, Judge Aramony was the assistant state attorney in charge of the juvenile division. She also served the community as chairwoman of Broward County's Juvenile Justice Board and sat on the Gang Activity Prevention Advisory Board. Judge Aramony used her knowledge and skills to help stem the harmful effects that crime can have on young people. She had a life-long passion to protect and encourage children and families and always strived to do so. Her contributions to the children of Broward County will be long remembered, and forever missed.



Judge Susan Aramony

The closet offers clothing and accessories for newborns through adults. Children and their families have been referred for “shopping” at the closet by many sources including, the public defender’s office, drug treatment programs, guardian ad litem, Legal Aid, CBC, and the Office of Regional Counsel. Items in the closet are available for all children and families who are involved in a court proceeding.

The closet has assisted numerous children and families who would not have had this opportunity if not for a conversation between two administrative staff from different circuits discussing ideas and initiatives. The sharing of information between Cristy Altaro, Juvenile Court Operations Manager, and Lynn Allen, Family Court Manager, helped make the closet a reality. This serves to underscore the importance of all circuits sharing information and ideas.

The closet opening was the first of two initiatives in the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit to assist children and families during 2013. The circuit also established a Therapy Dog Program Pilot Project in July, which has been met with positive feedback from the judge, court staff, agencies, and children. Currently one team is assigned to the judge’s weekly cross-over docket and another team comes as requested, at least once weekly. More teams are in the midst of completing the extensive training which will allow the program to expand.

For information regarding the Seventeenth Judicial Circuit’s new clothing closet or therapy dog program, please contact Lynn Allen, Family Court Manager, at lallen@17th.flcourts.org.



A sample of the clothing available for newborns through adults.

Extended Foster Care: Learning the New Rules

The new law on extended foster care goes into effect on January 1, 2014, and a variety of resources are being developed to train the many people who work with foster youth. DCF's Quality Parenting Initiative has created one of the first videos on Florida's new independent living and extended foster care legislation. It covers key elements of the new law and the perspectives of foster parents and former foster youth. The content is helpful for anyone interested in extended foster care, but the target audience is foster parents. The video can be viewed at: <http://centervideo.forest.usf.edu/qpi/iltraining/iltraining.html>.

Another video, conducted by Deborah Schroth, Children Legal Services (CLS), Appellate Counsel, covers the legal elements of the extended foster care law. It is intended for attorneys and those interested in the legal ramifications of the new law. The video and a PDF of the materials are available at: <http://centervideo.forest.usf.edu/sb1036/sb1036.html>. In addition, the Office of Court Improvement is working with DCF on a video training for the judiciary on the court-related aspects of the new law.

DCF is also working on rules necessary to implement the new legislation, working with CBCs on the practical aspects of serving a new population of young adults, and training for stakeholders affected by the new laws. There is sure to be much more information on extended foster care coming out in the coming months.

FDCIS Application Survey is Available

Judges, magistrates, court staff, and other users of the Florida Dependency Court Information System (FDCIS) should have recently received an email requesting their participation in a survey designed to further improve and enhance FDCIS. The survey is anonymous and responses will provide much needed feedback to the FDCIS team. There is an area at the end of the survey for additional comments, suggestions, or questions. The survey is approximately twenty questions and will only take a few minutes to complete. If you have any trouble accessing or completing the survey, please contact FDCIS Support at FDCIS_Support@flcourts.org.



November is National Adoption Month

The Child Welfare Information Gateway is reminding everyone that November is National Adoption Month. The Information Gateway is a part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families. This year's theme is "Partnering for Permanency," and there is a unified goal to create permanent connections for children and youth in foster care. The Child Welfare Information Gateway website has several resources to help raise awareness, prevent child maltreatment, and promote well-being. Currently, the site is featuring:

- The National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids,
- A national photo listing of children waiting in foster care for adoptive families, and
- Information about effective family support models.

Please visit <http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/nam/#twtr=pro> for additional information. Other helpful web links include, [Explore Adoption](#) and the [Office of the Chief Child Advocate](#).

Events on the Horizon

OCTOBER

October 9-13, 2013—New Orleans, LA
National Association of Women Judges (NAWJ) Annual Conference

October 14-15, 2013—Tallahassee, FL
Steering Committee on Families & Children in the Courts meeting

October 17-18, 2013—Tampa, FL
Task Force on Substance Abuse & Mental Health Issues in the Courts meeting

October 18-19, 2013—Ft. Walton Beach, FL
Florida Dependency Court Information System (FDCIS) training

October 22-23, 2013—Dade City, FL
Project ONE stakeholder meeting

October TBD, 2013—Crestview, FL
Project ONE stakeholder meeting

JANUARY

January 7, 2014—Bushnell, FL
Florida Dependency Court Information System (FDCIS) training

January 13-14, 2014—Orlando, FL
Steering Committee on Families & Children in the Courts meeting

January 23-24, 2013—Orlando, FL
Task Force on Substance Abuse & Mental Health Issues in the Courts meeting

Mandatory Reporting of Abuse Checklist

The domestic violence team that works on the STOP Violence Against Women federal grant in the Office of Court Improvement recently completed a mandatory reporting of abuse checklist. This checklist covers who needs to report abuse, what needs to be reported, and lists where to send the report. It includes statutory references and also outlines the ramifications of failing to report abuse and details what happens after the report is made. Originally requested by a court clerk, this checklist is helpful for court staff and dependency stakeholders who may encounter child abuse or vulnerable adult abuse.

The checklist is posted on the domestic violence page of the OSCA website and can be accessed under the “Quick Reference Guides” at the following link: www.flcourts.org/gen_public/family/dv_publications.shtml.

For additional information, please contact Kathleen Tailer at tailerk@flcourts.org.

Model Court Liaisons

The Office of Court Improvement designates a model court liaison to each model court circuit. The model court liaisons work closely with individual model court judges and magistrates to develop, prioritize, and achieve court improvement goals. The following is a list of the model court liaisons and the circuits to which they are assigned.

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|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|--|
| Avron Bernstein | Circuit: 11 | 850-414-8661 | bernsteina@flcourts.org |
| John Couch | Circuit: 13 | 850-410-1527 | couchj@flcourts.org |
| Jovasha Lang | Circuits: 1, 16, 17, and 20 | 850-617-4003 | langj@flcourts.org |
| Leigh Merritt | Circuits: 6, 10, 12, and 14 | 850-414-8868 | merrittl@flcourts.org |
| Nathan Moon | Circuits: 5, 7, and 15 | 850-487-0843 | moonn@flcourts.org |
| Dacia Roberts | Circuits: 3 and 8 | 850-922-9337 | robertsd@flcourts.org |
| Kathleen Tailer | Circuits: 2, 4, and 19 | 850-617-4007 | tailerk@flcourts.org |
| Tamarrah Tarver-Small | Circuits: 9 and 18 | 850-921-6095 | tarvert@flcourts.org |

Florida's Dependency Court Improvement Team

Request for Articles

Do you have an idea for an article, a best practice to share, or an event to promote? If so, please consider submitting it for a future issue of this newsletter. Your contributions will make *The Dependency Outlook* a more effective and useful tool for judges, magistrates, and court staff throughout Florida. For more information and/or to submit an article, please contact Dacia Roberts at robertsd@flcourts.org.

Requests for Submissions

- Submit articles by the first of March, June, September, and December to be considered for the next newsletter.
- Articles should be related to dependency.
- Photos may be included with submissions.
- Submit articles and photos via email as Microsoft Word attachments.