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PARENT REPRESENTATION PROJECT

June was National Reunification Month, an initiative of the American Bar Association to recognize efforts to help families stay together. Judge F. Kay Behm agreed to write an article about the success of the Parent Representation Project.

In early 2012, the Supreme Court Administrative Office contacted Genesee County Family Division, requesting that it consider hosting a pilot project to provide additional social work services to respondent parents in child welfare proceedings.

Generally, the pilot project would address some of the barriers impacting parents' abilities to achieve reunification with their children. Specifically, the pilot project would seek to address the current child welfare system's failure to afford respondent parents a fair opportunity to succeed in rectifying the conditions that led to court intervention.

The failures include, in part, the child welfare system relying upon foster care workers to not only provide social work services to parents but also to monitor the parents' progress and report any failures to the court. This dual role for Department of Health and Human Services foster care workers can create distrust and conflicts between the parents and the assigned foster care worker.

Moreover, the foster care workers, who also provide services to the children in child welfare cases, are frequently overtaxed, which can result in delays in service provision to parents.

The Genesee County Parent Representation Project began in November 2012, with the intent of improving the outcomes in abuse and neglect cases by providing respondent parents with an independent social worker.



Under the project, the social worker and the parents' legal counsel work together to support the following goals: (1) engaging parents in the child welfare process and court proceedings; (2) increasing parent participation in services; (3) increasing involvement in parent-child visitations; (4) increasing the frequency of reunification; (5) accelerating the timeline to achieve permanency, specifically reunification; and (6) reducing out of home placements.

Statistically, the Parent Representation Project has had a number of significant successes in meeting these objectives.

For example, cases in which parents were assigned a social worker were about twenty percent (20%) more likely to result in reunification than cases where the parent was not assigned a social worker.

Further, parents with an independent social worker were more actively involved in their cases, including being nearly thirty percent (30%) more likely to attend court hearings.

The impact of the Parent Representation Project also extends to the children of parents assigned an independent social worker pursuant to the project. For example, parents involved with the Parent Representation Project were about twenty percent (20%) more likely to attend parenting time with their children.

In addition, the children of parents assigned an independent social worker were over thirty percent (30%) more likely to be placed with relatives than children whose parents were not involved in the project.

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THE CHIEF SPEAKS

INDIGENT CRIMINAL DEFENSE

On June 1, 2016, the Michigan Supreme Court announced its conditional approval of standards that would regulate the manner in which counsel would be appointed to represent indigent defendants in criminal cases. [MSC Administrative Order No. 2016-2](#) sets forth the conditional approval subject to legislative revisions of the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission (MIDC) Act to address issues raised by the Court.

The Court acknowledged that it shares the legislature's goal of providing effective assistance of counsel to indigent defendants, but raised foundational issues to be addressed.

The Act places the MIDC in the judicial branch but the Court is not granted the ability to supervise or direct the Commission's activities and em-

ployment. A separation of powers issue is raised. The Act also allows the MIDC to implement, enforce and as



sure compliance with minimum standards. This may present an unconstitutional usurpation of the Court's constitutional authority of superintending control over all courts.

The Act also arguably allows the MIDC to regulate the legal profession, although this is constitutionally assigned to the judiciary.

In the Order, the MSC urged the legislature to address the

concerns by December 31, 2016. If sufficiently addressed, the standards would take effect. If not sufficiently addressed, the conditional approval will automatically be withdrawn.

The first four (4) proposed standards, address the following subjects:

- *Education and Training of Defense Counsel*
- *Initial Interview*
- *Investigation and Experts*
- *Counsel at First Appearance and other Critical Stages*

LOCAL COURT INVOLVEMENT

The Genesee County Defender Program hosted an information session with the MIDC Executive Director, Jonathan Sachs. Court Administrator Barbara Menear and I have met with Attorney Sachs and other members of the MIDC staff, as we move toward submission of a

local compliance plan.

The Genesee County Defender Program agreed to participate in a data sharing pilot project to assist MIDC staff in evaluating what court data is available to assist the Commission in shaping their expectations as compliance plans are evaluated.

The Michigan Indigent Defense Commission will bring sweeping change to the delivery of legal services for citizens who are financially unable to retain counsel. The standards will apply to misdemeanor and felony cases.

Many of the existing standards of the Genesee County Defender Program are recognized as progressive and compliant with the goals of the MIDC. As we move forward to develop a local compliance plan, more information will be shared. -cjrby

ADMINISTRATOR CORNER

The Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) started its fourth year of existence in January of 2016. It appears that the word has gotten out because in the last six months the court has seen an increase in the number of referrals: the court now has 22 participants.

Entry into VTC requires that the veteran show a direct connection between the military service and the disability that contributed to the criminal behavior.

Simply being a veteran who has committed a crime is not enough for entry into the program. The benefits of the pro-

gram are numerous and include possible dismissal of all charges, return of limited driving privileges, and many different treatment options offered by the Veterans Administration.



The veteran participant must undergo a complete screening

that assesses treatment needs. As a result of the screening a treatment plan is developed that may include inpatient or outpatient substance abuse and/or mental health treatment.

Drug testing is completed regularly with frequent drug testing occurring upon entry into the program.

Participants are expected to remain busy seeking employment or volunteer activities, and they appear weekly before Judge Barkey and the VTC team.

Recently the VTC team has made several changes including establishment of a new participant handbook and participation by a probation officer.

The Court is also introducing a program where participants will be rewarded for continued compliance with the expectations of the VTC team as they move from one phase to another.

It seems that the court itself has progressed into its second phase after completing three years of service to veterans in our community. -jb

GENESEE COUNTY FOSTER CARE MULTI-DISCIPLINARY TEAM PROJECT



The findings showed considerable outcome differences between the treatment group and the control group.

The goal of this project was to create and evaluate a multi-disciplinary team (MDT) of attorneys and social workers who collaborate to provide legal representation for children and to determine whether children have different outcomes when represented by MDTs.

The social workers worked closely on case assignments with the Child Advocacy Team, the attorneys for youth in child protective proceedings. In addition, a control group was estab-

lished to mimic the treatment group. There was no collaboration between attorneys and social workers in the control group.

In March 2014, the court entered into a data sharing agreement with The University of Michigan, Child Advocacy Clinic. For 24 months, court data was shared with the lead researcher, Robbin Pott.

Ms. Pott is an attorney and also has a master's degree in public policy with a focus on statistical analysis.

The types of data provided included: placement duration, placement with relatives or non-relatives, the number of placement changes, services offered to the youth, adjournments, continuances and the length of time to permanency.

Cases with MDT support were more likely to be resolved or dismissed prior to adjudication.

Children represented with MDT interaction were more likely to be placed with relatives. In addition, there were fewer termination of parental rights petitions filed.

For children still in the home at the time the petition was authorized, fewer MDT children were subsequently removed.

The study will be presented at four national conferences, most notably the National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, Washington DC in August 2016.

The ABA Center for Children and the Law will also publish the study. —jep



- Congratulations to Judge Duncan Beagle for receiving the 2016 *Brian Barkey Community Service Award* from the Genesee County Bar Association. He also graced the cover of the May 2016 edition of the *My City* magazine, along with a fine article about his life and service.

- On June 2, a retirement party was held for Attorney Referee Carolyn Boegner. Carolyn served briefly as a

Probate Court Referee and joined the Circuit Court staff in 1998, when the Family Division was created. She was known for her strong work ethic and knowledge in the area of family and juvenile law.

Her fellow Attorney Referees and especially administrative secretary, Christine Vliet, gave her a fitting sendoff where colleagues could offer their congratulations.

- The Genesee County Parent Representation Project, presided over by Judge F. Kay Behm, was mentioned by Chief Justice Robert P. Young, Jr. during *National Reunification Month*, in a memo released on June 21, 2016 ([Click here for Memo](#))

Congratulations to Judge Behm and the rest of the team.

PARENT REPRESENTATION PROJECT CONT'D

Anecdotally, the Parent Representation Project has also improved the accessibility and quality of attorney representation for parents both outside and inside the courtroom.

By providing the parents' attorneys, as well as the parents, access to an independent social worker, the parents' attorneys are more able to focus on their role of providing legal advocacy. Meanwhile, the social worker is able to assist the parent with the non-legal barriers that impact a parent's ability to participate fully in the case and to achieve reunification.

During the course of the Parent Representation Project, attorneys have made referrals to the social worker for assistance with the following issues: housing, employment, benefits, mental health and substance abuse, transportation, and general support. In turn, the social worker assigned to the project has engaged the parents and found creative solutions to the issues impacting reunification, in-

cluding finding resources that the child welfare workers often do not have the time to explore.

By allowing the parents' attorneys to focus their time on legal advocacy while also providing the parent with an independent social worker to assist in meeting the parents' needs, the Parent Representation Project enhances the extent to which parents are afforded a fair opportunity to succeed.

As a result, parents are more engaged in their cases, more likely to secure services in a timely manner, and better equipped to participate fully in those services, which benefits both the parents and the children involved in child welfare cases.

The services of the independent social worker through the Parent Representation Project have provided practical, hands on assistance to some of the most in need parents in our community. As a result of the successes of the Parent Representation Project, the Court

has had the opportunity to partner with the University of Michigan-Flint School of Social Work which provided two interns for the 2015-2016 school year. Those interns worked directly with the court's independent social worker and her clients.

In May, the court's social worker was awarded "The Shooting Star Community Partner Award" by the University of Michigan-Flint for providing the interns with valuable learning and work experiences in the field of social work.

The project expects to host two additional internship positions for the coming school year in order to continue expanding the social work services available to respondent parents through the Parent Representation Project and to better train social work students for the future. -jfkfb

350 CHILDREN ATTEND TIGERS GAME

With the ongoing water crisis within the City of Flint, Judge Duncan Beagle reached out to the Detroit Tigers to do something special for the children of the City.

Judge Beagle, working with the Chief Financial Officer of the Tigers, Steve Quin, was able to convince Tigers officials to invite approximately 350 inner-city children, ages 7-14, to the Tigers baseball game against the Toronto Blue Jays on Wednesday, June 8th. Children from the Boys & Girls

Club, Police Activities League and eight different elementary and middle schools were able to attend the game. For most of these children, it was their first time visiting Comerica Park to see the Tigers play.



Additionally, to make the day even more special, Judge Beagle reached out to Lynn Williams, Senior

Program Officer for the Community Foundation of Greater Flint, requesting and receiving a mini-grant to purchase a Tigers t-shirt for each child. The Detroit Tigers also provided a coupon for a free hot dog and soda for each child.

A huge thanks goes out to Judge Beagle, the Detroit Tigers and the Community Foundation of Greater Flint -mk

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT



Left to Right: Andrea Cobb, Fran Cannell and Barbara Hardaker

Andrea Cobb is our newest deputy register working in juvenile records. She is from the Flint area and graduated from Flint Northern High

School. Before accepting her current position, she worked for the 68th District Court where she spent 10 years as a clerk, teller, file clerk and cashier.

Fran Cannell is a new Probate Court deputy register. Her prior work experience includes working as an administrative assistant in a local law firm. In addition, she worked as a paraprofes

sional in the Davison Community School system for a decade. She enjoys the challenges of working a legal environment

Barbara Hardaker works in the reimbursement office as a senior account clerk. She came to the Court from the Friend of the Court, where she worked for 10 years. She brings experience and considerable knowledge with her that compliment her current duties. This includes her understanding of how child support orders are impacted when a youth is in out of home placement as a result of a court order.



4TH OF JULY FUN FACTS

- Fireworks were first used in Ancient China during the 12th Century. Their purpose was to ward off evil spirits.
- The first fireworks display in the United States occurred on July 4, 1777 in Philadelphia and Boston.

According to Smithsonian.com, the Philadelphia event was spectacular. A cannon was fired for each of

the original 13 states. There were bells, music, a parade, the dressing of ships in the harbor, a dinner and a closing round of 13 shots from the cannons to signal the end. The tradition continued and the rest is history.

- Calvin Coolidge was the only U.S. President born on the 4th of July (1872).

- Three U.S. Presidents died on the 4th of July, Thomas Jefferson (1826), John Adams (1826) and James Monroe (1831).



Read All About It



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