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Office of
OCI
Court Improvement

Office of the State Courts Administrator

The OCI Times...

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Florida's Family Court Conference a Success!

Florida's Family Court Conference, "A Vision Without Division: The Key to Serving Families and Children in the Court," which was held in Orlando from October 20 to 22 was a resounding success. With more than 500 invited participants including judges; magistrates; hearing officers; trial court administrators; clerks; attorneys; staff from the Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Revenue, Department of Education, and Department of Children and Families; and many others affiliated with family courts, the conference was bursting at the seams. If attendance at the conference is any indication, then interest in family court matters is incredibly high these days.



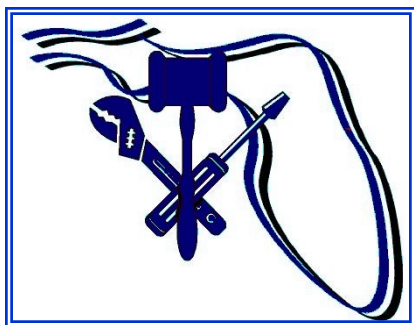
The conference got underway with an exciting opening plenary with a welcoming introduction by Chief Justice Barbara J. Pariente. Next was the premiere of a new instructional and entertaining video on unified family court entitled *A Crisis Carol*. Keynote speakers Judge Richard FitzGerald from Kentucky and Judge Michael Town from Hawaii gave an enthusiastically received presentation that really set an inspirational and aspirational tone for the entire conference.

Getting down to business, the workshops focused on many family court issues including: working with pro se litigants, ethical issues, grant writing, drug courts, case management, and court security among others. Individual institutes took a look at the issues posed by delinquency, dependency, domestic violence, child support, and dissolution of marriage. The circuit breakouts gave everyone the chance to discuss intra-circuit issues as well as an opportunity to look at what other circuits are doing to improve their family courts.

These sessions certainly gave judges, court staff, and stakeholders a more in depth view of what unified family court can accomplish in their circuits and in the lives of families in the court system. Participants left the conference with refreshed enthusiasm as well as a host of new tools to assist them as they work to further implement unified family court principles in their home circuits. One evaluation said that the conference as a whole was a "most informative and encouraging training conference."

While the conference was planned as a unique event, many participants were already asking about next year's conference. Due to the very strong turnout and positive feedback regarding the conference, the Office of Court Improvement will indeed explore the possibility of a future conference. We are always happy to ensure that people who want to know more about unified family court will always have a means to do so.

Florida's Family Court Tool Kit: Volume II has Arrived



Participants of Florida's Family Court Conference were among the first to get their very own copy of Florida's Family Court Tool Kit: Volume II. This volume of the Family Court Tool Kit deals with many of the issues courts, attorneys and stakeholders face when coordinating multiple cases involving the same family. While unified family court is not just about "cross over" cases, the issues related to managing a docket of mingled case types are new to the court system and deserve some special attention. That is what this edition of the Tool Kit is all about.

The Tool Kit would not exist without the sincere efforts of the members of the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Courts. Over their two year term, the Steering Committee was responsible for creating many products and publications aimed at improving the delivery of legal services to families in the court system—Florida's Family Court Tool Kits: Volumes I and II are just two examples of this committee's hard work and dedication.

Due to such strong demand, the Tool Kit is already in its second printing. Copies of the Tool Kit will be distributed to all of the chief judges in Florida. Both Tool Kits along with many other articles and information on unified family court will soon be available online at: <http://www.flcourts.org/osca/divisions/family/floridaunifiedfamilycourtfocenter.html>

Parenting Coordination Moving Forward

Though Governor Bush vetoed the Parenting Coordination Bill that passed both the House and the Senate last session, the issue of parenting coordination is far from over. In fact, the Governor's veto requested additional attention to certain issues raised by parenting coordination, and left open the possibility of his signing a revised bill after the next legislative session. To that end, a joint workgroup consisting of members of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Committee, the Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Courts, and representatives from the domestic violence community was formed to readdress the bill.

Apart from their legislative work, the workgroup has also been tasked with the creation of a sample administrative order on parenting coordination as well as a sample uniform order for the appointment of a parenting coordinator that could be used in judicial circuits throughout the state. The goal of this project is to create more uniformity in the use of parenting coordinators among the circuit courts and to give some direction to those circuits that are just now beginning to explore the use of parenting coordinators.

The Drug Court Task Force Begins a New Season

The Task Force on Treatment-Based Drug Courts has been reconstituted for a new two-year term and met for the first time on October 15, 2004. The new Task Force is chaired by Judge Terry D. Terrell, and the Supreme Court liaison is Justice Peggy A. Quince.

The meeting highlighted the accomplishments of the previous Task Force before delving into a discussion of the new tasks the Task Force has been charged with. Their charges are to: 1) Develop strategies to assist judges with integrating drug court principles in family court proceedings; 2) Review national and state evaluations on drug courts and develop recommended standards of practice for the management of drug courts; 3) Develop standards for dependency and delinquency drug courts.

OCI will continue to provide staff support to the Task Force in their ongoing efforts to improve and fully utilize drug courts. Currently, OCI staff is assisting with the development of a drug court brochure to give participants a clearer understanding of the program.

The next Task Force meeting is scheduled for December 2, 2004 in conjunction with the Drug Court Conference in St. Augustine.



Developing Strategies on Unified Family Court

The Steering Committee on Families and Children in the Courts has started a new term with new leadership. Circuit Judge Robert Morris from Pinellas County has been selected as chairman for the committee's next two-year term. Judge Morris has been working in a unified family court for several years now and he knows first-hand the benefits and challenges that UFC presents. It was exactly this kind of experience that led to his selection as chairman by the committee's outgoing chair, Chief Justice Barbara J. Pariente.

The Supreme Court presence on the committee is being taken up by Justice Peggy A. Quince who will serve as Supreme Court Liaison to the committee.

Several long-standing members of the committee have come back for one-year terms to share their insights and experiences to a host of new committee members.

The committee is charged with numerous tasks including: developing methods to make family court clearer, drawing in stakeholders, furthering the implementation of UFC, and describing personnel necessary to family courts and the knowledge and skills they will need. It is an ambitious set of charges which have the potential to fan out into a myriad of different projects.

The new committee has met twice already to establish an organizational structure, examine the charges, and outline the types of projects best suited to addressing the charges. Needless to say, this committee has a busy two years ahead of it.

With the interest and energy in family court issues created by the Family Court Conference, the steering committee has a wealth of momentum to begin its new term and carry its tasks to completion.

OCI Comings & Goings

The OCI team has undergone a number of changes recently. Senior Attorney Deborah Lacombe has left OCI and will be working part time with the Statewide Guardian ad Litem's Office. Coincidentally, the GAL's office is just downstairs from OCI's current location in the Holland Building.

Filling the senior attorney vacancy created by Lacombe's departure is Nathan Moon, who has been working with OCI on Florida's Family Court Tool Kit, Volume II. Also adding to the legal staff is Senior Attorney Dana Dowling who is dedicated to OCI's domestic violence initiatives.

Roderick Harris, formerly of DCF, has joined OCI as a Court Analyst and is focusing on dependency issues. Mike McElroy has recently returned to U.S. soil after serving with the National Guard in Afghanistan. He comes to OCI through a National Guard program that assists states in the area of drug prevention, so naturally he is working on drug court initiatives. Danielle Sweat who currently attends FAMU has joined OCI as an intern and is working primarily on unified family court projects.

Last but not least, Zayida Baker comes to OCI with experience working at the Office of Drug Control and is therefore working on drug court initiatives.

8th Annual Dependency Court Improvement Summit Weathers Storm

Your Time...Their Future: Prevention is a Shared Responsibility



Though a hurricane swept away the August Dependency Court Improvement Summit, the summit nonetheless weathered that storm and is now scheduled for November 18 and 19, 2004 at the Caribe Royale Hotel and Convention Center in Orlando. More than 1500 child protection professionals are expected to attend the 8th Annual Dependency Court Improvement Summit at its new time and location. Dozens of workshops will help to give participants a fuller picture of dependency issues. For more information about this event, including registration, hotel information, and workshop descriptions, visit the Department of Children and Families website at: <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/dcis/>

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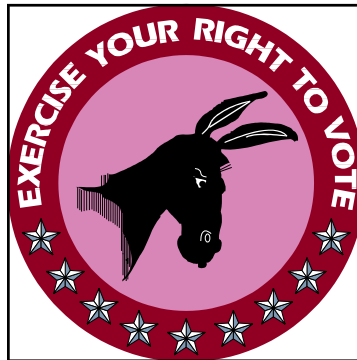
Did You Know?



The College of Advanced Judicial Studies is already making preparations for the May 2005 college. This year unified family court will be a topic of discussion for two days of the week-long college.

The National CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children) website is a rich resource for anyone interested in children's legal issues. CASA also has a special "Judge's Page" with a wealth of information, publications, and input from judges who work in family courts throughout the country. You can find the website at: <http://www.nationalcasa.org/judgespage/>.

It's Your Vote



Once again voters rally to the polls to make an important decision.



Voter turnout is at an all time high.



The results are in.

It's a unanimous decision...



Everyone's in favor of Unified Family Court!