

Office of the State Courts Administrator
Office of Court Improvement

**Compendium of
Family Court Practices
2007**

Compendium of Family Court Practices From the 2007 Family Court Reports

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Family Law Advisory Group (FLAG)

Topics discussed in 2007

- Information and recruitment of foster parents as well as the qualifications and need for screened babysitters for foster parents
- Therapeutic visitation center for supervised visits
- Best practices, barriers, and resources for mediation
- Document imaging
- Paternity establishment through administrative process and recommended best practices
- Issues related to the disposal of firearms in domestic violence cases
- Impact of human trafficking in Florida and its relationship to domestic violence
- Protocols on the non-return of a child from visitation when established under a domestic violence civil injunction case
- Delays in DNA testing
- Participation of Regional Counsel in dependency shelter hearings
- Implementation of an independent living court
- Courthouse security
- Exploration of alternate funding sources, such as federal and private grants
- Refinements for the continual implementation of unified family court procedures
- Licensing and retention of foster homes
- Child support in dependency cases
- Adoption home studies, at risk adoption placements pending appeal, and adoptions involving multiple siblings

- Electronic communications between parties in dissolution cases
- Psychotropic medications for children
- Diversion program for first time youthful domestic violence offenders
- Parental relocation with a child, FS 61.13001
- Multiple continuances in child support cases due to lack of service
- Parameters for information sharing among agencies and community stakeholders
- Medicaid mental health services for children and Statewide Inpatient Psychiatric Services (SIPP)
- Parental personality disorders and ability to parent
- Truancy
- Scope of authority and duties of parenting coordinators
- Dedicated UFC mediator
- Domestic violence fatalities and child deaths: are these families with related cases?
- Infant mental health court
- Enhancing collaboration with the local school board and the FLAG
- Residential facilities to address competency restoration for juveniles
- Front-end services for dependency cases
- Batterers' Intervention Programs (BIP)
- Role of mental health professionals in family law
- Florida's Children's Cabinet

Accomplishments in 2007

- The “Second Annual Families Day Out” was held on Saturday, October 27, 2007, for National Make a Difference Day. Over fifty agencies sponsored and participated in the event, which drew a crowd of more than 600 children and parents. Information, education, and training on health, safety, fire prevention, crime prevention, and child welfare were provided by the multitude of agencies and volunteers involved. Children were provided with dictionaries from the Rotary Club and build it yourself projects from Home Depot. Parents had an opportunity to receive free legal assistance related to housing, landlord/tenant, and family law issues from the local legal service provider.
- Child Protective Investigations in Santa Rosa County is piloting the *Electronic Client Index for Families with Multiple Service Needs*. This system will capture and display program participation data for individuals served by the Department and external systems including HomeSafenet, Substance Abuse Services, Mental Health Services, FLORIDA, People’s First Department of Children and Families Employment, Agency for Workforce Innovations, Department of Education, and Agencies for Persons with Disabilities Services. Early identification and coordination of services is expected to lead to the expedited provision and completion of services, less duplication among service providers, and greater success for families.
- Santa Rosa has raised the funds to build Santa Rosa Kids’ House, a Children’s Advocacy Center. The Kid’s House will co-locate law enforcement, prosecution, Department of Children and Families, and other children’s services agencies and programs to provide coordinated, less traumatic investigations; ready assessments and follow-up referrals for services; and proactive prosecution of victims of child abuse/neglect.
- Community service agency will be providing on-site TASC evaluations and UA’s for every Tuesday dependency docket.
- Big Bend Community Based Care (BBCBC) has hired a Utilization Management Specialist that will be providing on-site referrals for services for every Tuesday dependency docket.
- Formation of the Chief Judges’ Advisory Council to address issues in child welfare.
- Charity golf tournament for the Drug Treatment Courts hosted by the Friends of The Third Judicial Circuit Drug Courts, Inc.
- Funding was secured to retain one advocacy position through a Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grant.

- The FLAG Domestic Violence Mortality Review Subcommittee completed and distributed 200 copies of the 2006 Domestic Violence Mortality Report, an examination of domestic violence homicides in Duval County from January 1, 2006, through December 31, 2006. The subcommittee submitted its own report from data collected over the past seven years. The subcommittee reported that the Fourth Circuit is the only circuit that reviews all domestic violence homicides. The report included patterns since 1999. This year, a map noting zip codes and zones of homicide locations was included in the report.
- The Juveniles with Sexual Offenses Subcommittee arranged for speakers to discuss physical and forensic exams of victims of sexual violence and procedures for child sexual abuse examinations. This subcommittee also explored the impact of a sexual offender designation on a youth's future education and employment prospects. Three workgroups were formed to examine how the Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Children and Families and Safe Children's Coalition can work together to provide treatment services and avoid youths being designated as adjudicated sexual offenders.
- Adoption case management conferences established in 2006 have resulted in more adoptions and more frequent goal changes. The Guardian Ad Litem program continues to play an active role in moving the cases forward. Court administration has been and will continue to track the reasons for delays in finalizing adoptions.
- Court Administration and FLAG members are working on a handbook regarding Judicial Waiver of Parental Notice of Abortion.
- The FLAG established a page on the Family Court website. Minutes of meetings are posted as well as notices of future meetings.
- One dependency judge had identified a problem of DCF not filing birth certificates with the court. Because certain proceedings, such as terminations of parental rights, cannot go forward without the birth certificate, this was delaying some proceedings. As a result of FLAG discussions, our local community-based care organization, the Partnership for Strong Families, instituted a procedure whereby birth certificates are requested earlier in a case and the requests are being tracked to make sure the certificates are received.
- Jail Initiative – Probation and DOR instituted a joint project to identify incarcerated non custodial parents who owe child support. Once they are identified, paying child support becomes part of their probation.
- The FLAG team, with the collaboration of various community stakeholders, developed a Caregiver's Guide for Osceola County which is being printed by Family Services of Metro Orlando, and is distributed to caregivers by the case managers. This guide is designed to assist caregivers in accessing services for children within our community in order to stabilize placement and eliminate disruption in placements.

- An extremely noteworthy accomplishment arising from the Unified Family Court Advisory Board (FLAG) was the pursuit of funding by the Eleventh Judicial Circuit, together with the Advocate Program, Inc., through Miami-Dade's Children's Trust for key social services to benefit families and children in high conflict cases in the family, domestic violence, and complex litigation divisions. The Children's Trust approved funding in 2006 in the amount of \$285,755.00 for the Service Partnership to plan for implementation of a system of care in Miami-Dade County to address the unmet needs of children in high conflict families with domestic violence by developing a *system of care* that identifies children in need of services at the inception of their contact with the court system, law enforcement, and the battered women's shelters. The Service Partnership implemented a Pilot Project in 2007 with the goal to expand currently limited Supervised Visitation and Safe Exchange court ordered services that are provided by the Children's Home Society and American Therapeutic Corporation for families referred from family, domestic violence, and unified family court. Project staff and an evaluation team monitored the program and analyzed program outcomes, which will be used for planning.

- Simultaneous to pilot project implementation, the Partnership engaged in a planning effort (from February-August 2007) with the objective of developing a comprehensive plan for high-quality, evidence-based practices, programs, and services that are responsive to the needs of children in high conflict families or exposed to domestic violence, based on system of care principles. The planning identified the gaps, needs, and trends for children of high conflict families and those exposed to domestic violence. **A final operational plan (Implementation Proposal) was submitted to the Children's Trust on September 30, 2007, with a request for funding between \$1-2M. At their board meeting on November 13, 2007, implementation funding for the initiative was allocated in the amount of \$1.18 million.**

- The FLAG was internally reorganized and restructured from having standing committees based on participants' areas of expertise to forming its committees around projects.

- The FLAG now has a website that includes the mission, meeting agendas, a list of committees and their chairpersons, meeting minutes, and committee reports. Prior to each meeting, chairpersons submit a committee update that is posted on the web for members who are unable to attend the general FLAG meetings.

- The family programs committees of the FLAG and court administration began a series of informal trainings for professionals practicing in family litigation. It is now a requirement for all court appointed family program professionals to attend a free, four hour training on 12th Circuit standards and procedures prior to inclusion on the court appointed list. These trainings are open to anyone, including the judiciary, court staff, and attorneys. They are digitally recorded and made available to judges and court staff.

- The Custody and Visitation Guidelines Committee is developing a guide to creating custom parenting plans for family litigants. The committee is broken up into three sub-committees; the Basic Parenting Plan Committee, the Safety Focused Parenting Plan Committee, and the Long Distance Parenting Plan Committee. Each committee is addressing issues such as jurisdiction agreements, parental designations, religious needs, educational needs, general and special needs, medical and psychological needs, extracurricular activities, discipline styles, transportation, exchanges, parental work schedules, school and summer schedules, the age appropriate needs of children, alternate caregivers, and communication.
- The Judicial Education Committee drafted a script for a video that will lead pro se litigants through every stage of a contested divorce proceeding.
- Independent Living Court- the Courts' Independent Living case manager worked with the Advisory Council to create and implement an Independent Living Critical Checklist. The Critical Check List is a tool for the teen to use with their case manager to make sure they are receiving all needed services and life skills.
- The Department of Juvenile Justice, the State Attorney's office, Success for Kids and Families, Inc. and the courts have partnered to implement a pilot where first time juvenile dv offenders will receive a civil citation when the Tampa police are called to a home where a juvenile has acted out and the family has called the police. Rather than arresting the child, they are taken to the Juvenile Assessment Center then are referred to Haven Poe. At Haven Poe they will be housed for 5 days while they receive counseling and get set up with outpatient counseling/services.
- Mary Lee's house – This project has been in planning for four years. The Administrative Office of the Courts has led a community effort to develop a prototype facility that serves as the "nerve center" of multi disciplinary partners, so that children with allegations of abuse and neglect can receive comprehensive assessments under one roof. Co-location of specialists in the areas of mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence will strengthen initial assessments and the development of case plans; ultimately, the information garnered will have a direct bearing on judicial decisions related to permanency planning. The facility itself will be designed as a child-friendly environment that promotes effective communication and treatment planning for children and their families. Groundbreaking took place October 30th 2007, with a projected move in date in August 2008.
- In May, 2007, the FLAG hosted a local dependency summit with over 150 participants. In September, 2007, the FLAG hosted another summit at which 150 court staff and community partners gathered to discuss the interface between the court and the school board. The FLAG also sponsored a seminar on Marchman and Baker Act proceedings in the fall of 2007.

- The Tribunal Committee is moving forward and the first court ordered case was completed this year. The Tribunal is another innovation of the Family Law Advisory Group. This is a process whereby a family law attorney, mental health professional, and a county judge, hear (as volunteers) an abbreviated presentation of a case and render an advisory opinion and give resolution pointers to the parties and attorneys.

Delinquency Dockets

Second Circuit

Alternative Sanctions/Diversion

In Leon County, the Juvenile Alternative Sanctions Coordinator (JASC) participates in and facilitates delivery of multi-disciplinary staffing recommendations to the State Attorney and the court. The Integrated Juvenile Services Team, which includes representatives from the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC), DISC Village, Department of Juvenile Justice, White Foundation, the JASC and other interagency partners, meet on a weekly basis to evaluate each youth designated as diversion eligible. During the staffing, participants review the youth's JAC assessment instrument (PACT), academic standing, school attendance, behavior issues, delinquency history and dependency issues. Customized recommendations regarding the most appropriate diversion program as well as any treatment recommendations, such as substance abuse or mental health, are compiled and forwarded to the State Attorney prior to arraignment. At the arraignment hearing, diversion program representatives are present so that when the SAO offers diversion, the youth and his/her family can meet with the program representative and have all aspects of the program explained to them. The Public Defender is also available for general legal questions. If the parties accept the non-judicial diversion, the non-judicial Waiver is signed by all parties and provided to the program representative along with the JAC assessment packet which includes all necessary documents to enroll youth in the diversion Program. The JASC is available to explain specific programs for those youth whose cases dispose during other hearings. This practice allows families to make informed decisions regarding their child's disposition and has been proven highly beneficial.

Juvenile Restitution

At the request of the delinquency judge, an experiment in juvenile restitution mediation is being conducted and is in its early stages. The concept is that juvenile offenders who have been adjudicated by the court will appear with the victims and their parents in an effort to resolve the issue of restitution for damages related to the crimes. The intent is to determine creative alternatives to money to redress the victims for their losses. If the project is successful, it may lead to the implementation of a program to conduct them on a routine bases. The small claims volunteers have expressed interest in conducting the mediations, so the program would not entail an expense to the unit.

In addition to mediating juvenile restitution, efforts are under way to initiate programs designed to aid youth in paying their court-ordered restitution. While mediation may reduce amounts sought by victims, youth must still be afforded a way to pay the agreed upon amount. In cooperation with local agencies, as well as the Department of Juvenile Justice, a review of best practices has begun, and resources are being sought to establish a program to match juvenile offenders with job sites. In addition to being able to pay their victims, juveniles will be given vocational skills that will aid them in future endeavors. Currently several agencies

conduct trainings with youth regarding resume writing and interviewing skills, and it is hoped that with proper funding these programs can be expanded.

Competency Restoration

In cooperation with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD), the Public Defender's Office and the Clerk of Courts, a procedure is being implemented to make certain that there is adequate tracking of youth with pending competency issues and those determined to be incompetent to proceed. This will aid in monitoring service delivery for both community and residential restoration. Both DCF and APD are providing the court with their respective procedures for incorporation into the tracking system. The Public Defender's Office will additionally monitor their families to ensure timely follow through with court-ordered services. The policies and procedures outlining the competency processes will be posted on the 2nd Circuit website, so that private attorneys as well as the public will have access to this information.

Sixth Circuit

Youth Treatment Court

The unified family court developed a Youth Treatment Court calendar scheduled to begin in February 2008. The Youth Treatment Court was developed by a large planning committee, which included two dozen stakeholders, over several months. The purpose of the program is to use treatment as an alternative to incarceration. The special calendar has three phases of treatment for the youthful offenders and includes performance based status reviews. Each case will be screened and referred through screenings by the Department of Juvenile Justice. The eligibility criteria include youth ages 14 to 17 who are charged with multiple offenses influenced or caused by substance abuse, have substance abuse evaluations that indicate addiction issues, have a parent or responsible adult support system, and voluntarily agree to enter the program. This program excludes juvenile offenders charged with violence or weapons offenses, mental illness or developmental delays.

Seventeenth Circuit

Stratified level system

Since the inception of Teen Court within the 17th Judicial Circuit in 1996, the program had consisted of case managers that carried out all functions of the job from intake to closure. In mid 2006, the program saw a huge increase in the number of referrals received and case types referred from the State Attorney's Office. The increased referrals made it more difficult for the staff to respond to the needs of the juveniles, families and the State Attorney's Office. In response to the growing need, the program manager submitted a proposal that suggested the case manager's responsibilities be assigned differently to provide more efficient and effective service delivery for Teen Court. The proposal also suggested a new stratified level system to

address the nature of the cases received into the program. In December 2006 the proposal was approved, and January, 2007 saw the creation and implementation of the following plan.

The new stratified level system separates all incoming charges into three categories. Level 3 misdemeanors, Level 2 misdemeanors, and Level 1 felonies. The level system allows the case manager to look up the charge and determine the program course for the juvenile. The course of the program will differ in the number of community service hours, length of stay, sanctions, and type of exit interview following program completion.

Prior to the implementation of the new plan, each case manager carried a caseload of clients and was responsible for all aspects of the program. The case manager's job consisted of generating all the documents for the case, conducting the juvenile's intake, monitoring the juvenile's progress and completion of sanctions, conducting the courtroom portion of the program, and closing the case upon completion. The courtroom portion of the program was held twice per week in the evenings, which required the staff flex their time during the day. When the total caseload averaged 65 to 70 cases, the assignment of all duties to several case managers was acceptable, and cases could be monitored. However, when the caseloads averaged 120 or 130, it was difficult to complete all tasks and serve the clients.

The new responsibility delineation provides for the case managers to have different responsibilities. The new positions include the Case Manager (CM), the Courtroom Case Manager (CCM), and the Exit / Court Case Manager (ECCM). The result of this separation of duties is a service delivery model that is more efficient and effective.

The Case Manager is responsible for generating all documents for a case, conducting the intake interview, and monitoring the juvenile's progress and completion of all sanctions. The Courtroom Case Manager is responsible for pre-court preparation, courtroom procedure, and follows up after court. Pre-court preparation consists of preparing files for court, writing scripts for the courtroom, and preparing the scoring documents. On the evening of court, the program hears 4 cases and the CCM conducts the exit interview after the hearing to review the sanction agreement with the juvenile and his/her family. The CCM is also responsible for the supervision and guidance of the student volunteer acting as advocate in the courtroom. The day after court, the outcome of the court hearing is documented and provided to the Case Manager. The Exit / Court Case Manager position includes all functions for closing the successful cases and assisting in the courtroom. The Exit Case Manager (ECM) receives all files from the Case Manager once the juvenile has completed all sanctions successfully. The ECM then reviews the file, completes the exit interview either by telephone or in person depending on the charge, completes the necessary paperwork, informs the State Attorney's Office and closes the case out of the data system. The second part of this position as stated previously is to assist the Court Case Manager. The ECCM has multiple jobs in the courtroom including contacting the volunteer judge the day before to confirm participation and then working with all the student volunteers. The ECCM is responsible for checking in the volunteer students, assigning courtroom duties, and reviewing the cases and the courtroom responsibilities prior to the hearing. During the hearings, the ECCM works with the jury in the deliberation room to

oversee the students and to guide them as needed. The ECCM will then complete the sanction agreement for the CCM to utilize during the defendant's exit interview from the hearing.

Prior to the reorganization, Teen Court was able to conduct an average of 32 hearings a month. After the reorganization, Teen Court is able to conduct an average of 48 hearings per month utilizing both the courtroom hearing and the panel hearing. A courtroom hearing is held in a courtroom, grand jury style. Panel hearings are held in an office and the defendant faces three to six members of the panel. In both cases the juvenile is questioned and allowed to present his or her testimony. Based on the presentation, the juvenile is given specific sanctions, or tasks, that must be completed and the sanctions are considered legal and binding by the State Attorney's Office.

The changes appear to be beneficial although we are still within our first year of reorganization. The successful closure rate for December 2007 compared to December 2006 has seen an increase of 13%. It appears that this is not only improving the quality of service but also provides an expanding program for the community

Dependency Dockets

First Circuit

Judicial Reviews of Dependency Long Term Placements

The unified family court (UFC) judge has institutionalized reviews of dependency long-term placement cases in Santa Rosa County. The reviews are scheduled for each child who was placed in long-term care with a relative or non-relative caregiver, and supervision by the Department of Children and Families was terminated. At the review hearings, the judge determines if the child is still in the original placement, if the placement continues to be an appropriate one for the child, if the family requires additional assistance or resources, and if there are any other issues that need to be addressed for the child and/or caregiver.

The judge is finding that many of the caregivers would like to adopt the child but are unable to afford an attorney to do so. To this end, the judge and case manager are working on developing a process for the guardians to meet with an adoptions specialist to determine if it is financially feasible for them to adopt the child. If so, the case manager assists them in filing a pro se adoption petition, and the adoption is coordinated with the Department of Children and Families and Families First Network.

The process for this is as follows:

- The clerk's office identifies the targeted dependency cases; determines that protective services supervision has been terminated; and that the child was placed in long-term care and custody with a relative or non-relative caregiver.
- The UFC case manager prepares a summary of each case for the court, providing a detailed history of the child's circumstances and previous court proceedings.
- A notice of hearing is sent to the guardians along with letter explaining the reason for the hearing and giving contact information for the case manager in case there are questions or additional information needed.
- At the hearing the judge addresses pertinent issues related to the overall custody and care of children, resources needed, possibility of adoption, etc.
- Following the hearing the case manager follows up on issues determined at the hearing including child support, social security, temporary assistance to needy families (TANF), and other financial matters.

Second Circuit

Proactive Case Management

In Leon County, case management is provided for all dependency cases. The case manager attends the shelter hearings and screens the cases for any related cases. A dependency mediation program has been implemented which affords mediation at the earliest stage possible. Attorneys are appointed for the parents at shelter hearings when parents are present and an order of referral to mediation is executed. In 2007, 51.06% of the cases scheduled for mediation at the time of the shelter hearing resulted in full agreements. Thus, the parents are provided services and a case plan and are well on the way to reunification within ten days of removal of the Children.

Big Bend Community Based Care has provided a Utilization Management Specialist through Children's Home Society that is on-site for mass dependency docket hearings. The Utilization Management Specialist submits Purchase of Service requests for approval and also schedules appointments with the service providers for the families prior to the parents leaving the courthouse. Disc Village has also provided staff positions that are on-site for mass dependency docket hearings. These staff positions provide substance abuse evaluations and urinalysis testing prior to the parents leaving the courthouse. Both of these services have reduced delays in parents completing their case plan tasks and eliminate excuses for non-compliance.

The case manager is also present during mass dependency docket hearings and provides case summary information to the judge. Often, the case manager provides additional community resource referral information to the families.

Third Circuit

Dependency Drug Treatment Court Trauma Intervention Class

Our previous Chief Judge, Julian E. Collins, who implemented the Family Drug Treatment Court (hereinafter referred to as the "FDTC") in Columbia County in 2004, sought ways to enhance the court's performance and increase the parents' adherence to their treatment plans. The vast majority of the parents in the FDTC are females who were victims of past child abuse and/or victims of past or present domestic violence. Following the recommendations of the PEW Commission, the staff researched medical and substance abuse treatment literature to find examples of programs that were conducive to women overcoming both substance abuse and domestic violence. At the annual team review, the FDTC treatment team composed of the Judge, the drug court coordinator, a representative from the Guardian ad Litem Program, a substance abuse counselor from Meridian Behavioral Healthcare, Inc, defense counsel, legal counsel for the Department of Children and Families and the designated case worker for the Partnership for Strong Families determined that our approach needed to focus on Post Traumatic Stress recovery and incorporate the recommendations of the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study performed nationwide by the Kaiser Permanente Group. However, no funding was available to hire an expert in this field for the project. The Family Court Manager

contacted Dr. Ellen H. Taliaferro, MD, who graciously agreed to be our consultant without compensation on the basis that we co-present our findings at a future National Domestic Violence Conference and/or the National Drug Court Conference after a sufficient time lapse and compilation of data. The trauma class was incorporated into the FDTC program and offered at Meridian Behavioral Healthcare, Inc. The class utilized Dr. Taliaferro's book, *Well Writing for Health after Trauma and Abuse*. This book incorporates guided journaling in a group therapy setting. Court Administration purchased the books for each participant. The team noticed a change in participants' attitude almost immediately after the class started. Personal appearance and dress improved. Several of the mothers wanted to mentor others in their groups. Seven mothers took the class and have successfully graduated and been reunified with their children.

Fourth Circuit

Surrogate parents

The Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires the school district to establish a surrogate parent program. Federal law requires that surrogate parents be appointed for all children placed in group homes who do not have parents to act on their behalf. There are approximately 120 children residing in group homes in Duval County at any point in time. An important new practice in Duval County for dependency cases is the appointment by the court of surrogate parents for foster children under this act.

In 2006, local literacy and special education advocates worked with local judges to monitor and improve the education of foster children in Duval County. Circuit Judge Karen K. Cole, who has a long history of advocating for the educational needs of children involved in the dependency and delinquency system, was instrumental in starting the surrogate parents program for foster children in Duval County. Judge Cole was joined in this effort by Juvenile Division Circuit Judges Waddell A. Wallace and David M. Gooding, who appoint surrogate parents for dependent children. Judges Cole, Wallace and Gooding have all participated as trainers for the surrogate parents program.

Judge Cole organized the first training session for surrogate parents in late 2006. The training brought together attorneys and special education experts with volunteers interested in advocating for a foster child's educational needs. In 2007, trained surrogate parents were available for appointment by the Court and the program was officially launched. The goal of the program is to assure that the educational needs of children in foster care are appropriately addressed, so that the students can succeed in school and, ultimately, in life.

Fifth Circuit

Dependency Mediation Study

Our dependency mediation program began in October, 2004, with the initiation of pre-arraignment (or from shelter) mediations. Today, the program still offers pre-arraignment mediation, but also offers mediation at every other stage of the dependency process. The goals of our program are:

- to take the delay out of the juvenile dependency process; and
- to promote an agreement/plan while simultaneously insuring the safety of the child (ren).

All mediation is helpful but we have found that pre-arraignment mediations have special advantages. This process:

- minimizes the negative effects of the adversarial process;
- encourages an agreement that is acceptable to all parties;
- promotes judicial economy and cost savings for the court and all parties;
- facilitates immediate parental visitation;
- allows, in some cases, for parents to agree to voluntary services;
- allows the parents to work on a case plan earlier which often results in an earlier reunification;
- increases case plan compliance and earlier completion by empowering parents;
- speeds up the process;
- keeps the best interests of the children in the forefront on any agreement reached.

Through a statistical analysis by DCF of dependency cases which were mediated through Marion County's pre-arraignment mediation process (control group) compared to Lake County (a county similar to Marion in population) cases (target group) in which mediation services were not regularly provided, some very impressive results were attained. The study of Marion County involved 1,961 children that were removed from their homes. Cases involving 1,541 of those children were not mediated. Cases involving the other 420 children were mediated.

- **The children in cases that were mediated early stayed out of home an average of 197.5 days less than those children who were involved in cases that were not mediated;**
- **The children involved in cases that were mediated early gained permanency an average of 182.4 days sooner than those children of cases that were not mediated.**

Circuit 5 Mediation Study
1/1/2005 - 12/31/2006
Projected Savings

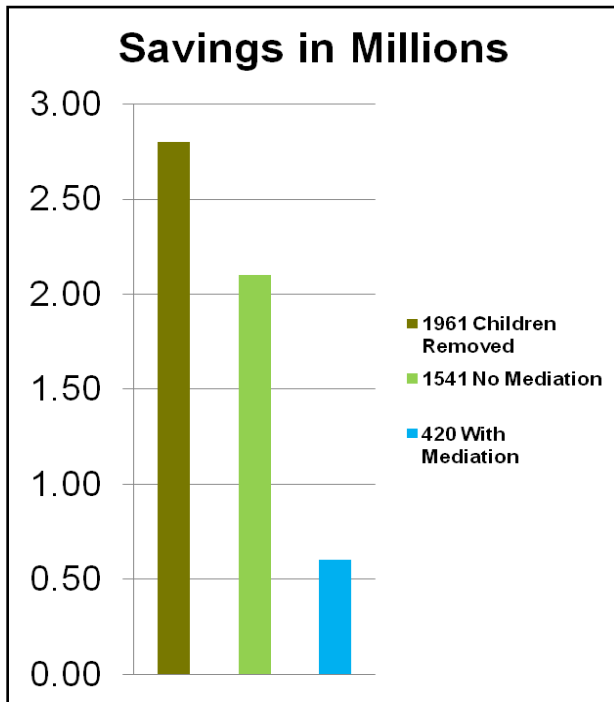


Figure 1- Over a million dollars was saved on room and board alone - This does not take into account court savings, agency savings, etc.

Assumptions

- Based on LOS reduction of 197.5 days
- 50% of children are in paid placements
- Savings based on minimum board payment of \$429
- Does not reflect case mgt savings
- Does not include administrative savings
- Does not represent Court savings

Sixth Circuit

Family Dependency Treatment Courts

FDTC were launched in January, 2007, in Pinellas County and March, 2007, in Pasco County. The treatment court relies on the active partnership of the Sixth Judicial Circuit, the Pinellas and Pasco County Commissions, the State Attorney’s Office, the Department of Children and Families, court-appointed attorneys for the parents, the Safe Children Coalition, the Clerks of Circuit Court, community substance abuse treatment providers and the Guardian ad Litem Program. The FDTC court is a voluntary program that involves recurrent appearances before a UFC judge assigned to FDTC, substance abuse treatment and frequent random drug testing. The mission of the Sixth Judicial Circuit’s FDTC is to achieve permanent, stable homes for children by creating healthy, drug-free families through treatment and enhanced judicial supervision.

Seventh Circuit

East-Volusia Dependency Case Management

July of 2007 saw the establishment of case management principles in the east-Volusia dependency division. Mirroring existing protocols from the county's west-Volusia dependency and unified family court case management concepts, assistance was given to the dependency judge in east-Volusia County to provide comprehensive support in a division where court is in session five days per week, in most instances. After consideration was given to the most appropriate areas of need for case management, the following is a description of assistance provided to the court:

At shelter: A case manager electronically searches/reviews all related cases to any dependency case and provides a specific snapshot of any such related case(s) to the court capturing: 1) case number, 2) style of case, 3) type of case, 4) judicial division and 5) last court action. This allows the court to quickly identify if any conflicting court orders exist or if any resources or findings in other related cases should be considered.

At Arraignment: The case manager provides the same assistance as noted above and also attends court to facilitate access to electronic records from any area of the county via the clerk's information system and other records from any area of the state via JIS. At the conclusion of each case, the case manager captures outcomes to monitor progress and any orders of the court that may need follow-up action. The case manager also assists parties with multiple forms that must be completed prior to their cases being heard.

At Docket Sounding: The case manager reviews the court docket and advises the court of case status (i.e. number of continuances, reason for delay, age of case, etc.). The case manager also attends court to capture outcomes for management of future dockets.

Other: Any orders of the court that require follow-through by any party are captured by the case manager and electronically calendared. Upon "due-date" of court ordered activity, the case manager identifies if follow-through has occurred and advises the court by e-mail.

Eighth Circuit

Collaboration

In dependency court, a collaborative relationship is being fostered with the Department of Children and Families, the Guardian Ad Litem office, our community-based care agency (Partnership for Strong Families) and other dependency court participants with the goal of dependency court improvement. Regular meetings are held to address areas of concern and to report on action plans.

At the courthouse, monthly brown bag luncheons are held which are open to all stakeholders in the dependency process. Every other month, there is a guest speaker with expertise in one of the many areas addressed by dependency proceedings. Topics have included: children who are sexual predators; psychotropic medications for young children; drug-endangered children; and forensic interviewing of children. On alternate months, the dependency stakeholders meet to discuss any issues of concern that impact the dependency process.

Access to Dependency Drug Court

In Alachua County, we have implemented a process for on-site assessments for dependency drug court. Rather than referring parties to a service provider for drug court screening and hoping they call, make an appointment, and show up, the assessments can now be done in the courthouse immediately after the shelter hearing at which substance abuse issues have been identified. This allows the parties easier access to services and ensures that we do not lose them from drug court before they ever begin.

Ninth Circuit

Remote observation for dependency hearings

Two conference rooms at the JJC are currently equipped with AV connections to the six full-sized courtrooms. In addition to being conference rooms these rooms can serve as alternate locations for parties in a juvenile court proceeding to see and hear the proceeding without being present inside the courtroom. This type of accommodation is most often utilized when a child is giving testimony in a dependency adjudicatory hearing, and the court deems it is in the best interest of the child to remove specific parties from the courtroom during the child's testimony. The audio and visual is only in one direction during remote observation (viewing). In this scenario, those who move to the conference room will be able to view and hear the court proceeding, but the judge and parties inside the courtroom will not be able to see and hear the parties in the conference room.

Tenth Circuit

Law Day: Take Your Child to Work Day Plus One

This is an event sponsored by family law court case managers, judges, judicial assistants and other court staff. This event is unique in that foster children chosen by the Guardian ad Litem's office and Heartland for Children are invited to participate in the day's educational events. About 80 children from ages 6 to 17 participated in events such as a mock trial, civics lesson and the follow-up game show, "Are You Smarter Than a Circuit Judge."

Thirteenth Circuit

Guardian Advocate

The Thirteenth Judicial Circuit has received a grant from a private foundation that is being used to assist with the financial burden of getting a Guardian Advocate assigned to developmentally disabled youth who are aging out of the foster care system. These Guardian Advocates are called upon to decide the care, medical treatment, physical and mental health of these disabled youth. The Guardian Advocate is appointed under Florida Statute 744. There is currently no cap in Florida on the amount an attorney can charge to set up a guardian advocate. Paperwork is completed and filed yearly and can sometimes be too much of a financial burden on the volunteer. With this new grant, the Thirteenth Circuit hopes to ease this burden and allow more volunteers to come forward for this much needed program. Bay Area Legal Services is serving this group at a lower fee.

Fifteenth Circuit

Dependency Mediation Program

As part of the Community Alliance Child Welfare Review Subcommittee, a new dependency mediation process has been instituted in all qualifying dependency cases. The majority of cases are referred to mediation at the time of the shelter hearing (with the exception of cases regarding egregious abuse or cases going for an expedited termination of parental rights proceeding). Within twenty one days, the mediation will occur. The mediator will facilitate a meeting where a case plan will be developed based on the mistreatment of the child with all parties working together. Instituting mediation for all cases this early in the process will allow the case plan disposition and arraignment hearings to be combined into one, thus saving the family from having to come to an additional court appearance and maximizing judicial resources. The goal is to have services in place for families as soon as possible so that, if indicated, reunification of the family may be achieved in a timelier manner; reducing the length of time a child is in the care of the state.

Independent Living Court

The Fifteenth Circuit recognized a need to establish an Independent Living Court for foster care youth to have individualized attention during this critical turning point as they transition out of the dependency system. Monthly implementation meetings with stakeholders began March, 2007. A pilot project by one judge was begun. The first court consisted of a half dozen cases. The stakeholders and participants unanimously praised the judge for his ability to connect with the youth and the new program for creating an environment that allowed the youth to voice their concerns and become engaged in the process. By way of example, one case in particular was a child on “run-away” status since April, 2006. She appeared before the judge, and immediately he was able to engage her and gain her trust. Preceding her participation in the independent living court, several agencies had tried to assist this child without success. In fact, during a prior court hearing this same child had become so agitated by the process that she flipped over a table and absconded from court. During the independent living hearing, the

judge ascertained her interest in culinary arts and has gone the extra step of pursuing possible funding for her to attend culinary school.

Seventeenth Circuit

Benchmark Hearings

§39.701, Florida Statutes, mandates a hearing be held within 90 days after a foster child's 17th birthday to address permanency, life skills, educational planning, housing needs, and any other services related to transition to independent living. In an effort to provide the children aging out of foster care with the opportunity to participate in these proceedings, "benchmark hearings" are held about four times per year. The hearings are scheduled on the docket for at least 30 minutes for all those who have turned 17 by the time of the scheduled docket. The hearings are a collaborative effort by all those who are an integral part of the child's life, affording each child the opportunity to speak directly with the judge and articulate his/her future goals and wishes.

In addition to the child, other parties involved in the hearings may include a ChildNet child advocate, Assistant Attorney General, Guardian ad Litem (GAL), Attorney ad Litem (AAL), ChildNet Independent Living Specialist, Broward County School Board representative, child's mentor, a foster parent or representative from the child's placement, and the child's therapist.

At the hearing, the youth stand at a podium and are asked to present any thoughts or statements they have to the judge. In most instances, this statement was developed by the child with the support or assistance of his/her GAL or AAL. In the statements, the young adult addresses such issues as future plans, educational goals, career path, and residential choice at age 18. The child may also discuss areas of concern he/she believes will impede future success in attaining stated goals. (One example is a young woman who requested additional assistance with anger management issues.) In turn, the judge asks the child what the court and other involved parties can do to assist them in meeting their future goals. If there are issues which have yet to be resolved, the judge will order the appropriate services and, when necessary, schedule a follow-up status hearing. In addition, the judge determines who will be responsible for helping the child with each task outlined in his/her statement e.g., applying for early admission to college, being accepted into a program which will assist with anger issues, or obtaining specialized art supplies in the case of an extremely talented young man.

During the course of the hearing, the child advocate is asked whether the ten requirements of §39.701 were met. The requirements are: 1) a current medicaid card, 2) a certified copy of his or her birth certificate and a Florida identification card, 3) information relating to social security insurance benefits, 4) information and training related to budgeting skills, interviewing skills, and parenting skills, 5) information related to the Road-to-Independence Program, 6) an open bank account, 7) information on public assistance and how to apply, 8) a clear understanding of where he or she will be living on his or her 18th birthday (including payment of living expenses

and educational program), 9) notice of the right to petition for the court's continuing jurisdiction for one year after reaching 18 and how to petition the court, and 10) encouragement to attend all judicial review hearings occurring after his or her 17th birthday.

The others present are invited to update the court as to how the child is doing at school and in his/her placement. For example, the Broward County School Board representative will inform the court as to how the child is doing academically and what his/her attendance has been, a representative from the child's living facility may be present to give the court information on how the child is progressing in the placement, and the child's therapist may address the court as to the child's compliance with therapy and what progress is being made in counseling sessions. The Guardian ad Litem reports on the child's status, advocating for what is in the child's best interest, and the Attorney ad Litem addresses the court on the child's wishes.

A major goal of these specialized dockets is that at the conclusion of the benchmark hearings, the child will leave the courtroom feeling that his/her voice was heard by the person making major decisions about his/her life, and knowing that all those involved are invested in seeing that they become successful members of society and have been identified as having a role in their road to success.

It should be noted that during the first benchmark hearings held in June 2007, three children came in from runaway status in order to be present for their hearings. Clearly, the benchmark hearings help to empower the children in the foster care system by giving them the opportunity to speak for themselves before the Court to express their thoughts, feelings, wishes, and plans for the future. It is evident that many of these children know that these hearings are all about them.

Nineteenth Circuit

Dependency Case Management

Case managers are searching for related cases in dependency cases in order to better serve the families and the judges by coordinating hearings and court services and avoiding conflicting orders. The clerks in all four counties have given case managers access to their dependency clerk computer systems so case managers can identify dependency cases based on searches on the children's names. The clerks are also distributing the dependency dockets to the case managers so they can provide timely information to the judges and magistrates. DCF attorneys are emailing parent names and birth dates to case managers at the time they prepare the shelter petitions so related case searches can be done in time for shelter hearings. A spreadsheet is used to track the cases and databases are being created by the circuit's IT Department to better track and manage the UFC cases. Once UFC cases are identified, an Order Identifying UFC Case is signed by the judge and filed in each related case. A copy of the Order is sent to the family court administrative judge, as well as to the case managers in the appropriate county.

Kids Day in Court

Stemming from the 2007 Dependency Summit, our circuit has met on a monthly basis with members of Court Administration, Court Clerks, Judges, Magistrates and members of GAL, DCF, attorneys and other related agencies. Sub-committees were formed to address certain issues and support initiatives like getting kids to court and front-end services that might prevent removals.

On December 14, 2007, the first “Kids’ Day in Court” was held in St. Lucie County attended by 25 children, and was a great success. The children were able to meet the dependency judge and ask questions. A second Kids Day occurred on January 18, 2008, and 50 children attended. The committee is working on creating a Kids Day for Okeechobee, Indian River, and Martin Counties as well.

Child Support Dockets

Sixth Circuit

Circuit-wide Bowen Hearings

During the latter part of 2006, circuit-wide procedures were implemented for Bowen and subsequent review hearings in cases involving intra-circuit execution of writs of bodily attachment for civil contempt for failure to pay child support. In 2007, with continued collaboration from the Sheriff's Offices and Clerks of the Circuit Court of Pasco and Pinellas Counties, procedures were put into place for return hearings when a contemnor has been released following a Bowen hearing. Weekend or holiday advisory duty judges who order the release of a contemnor following a Bowen hearing may now direct the contemnor to appear at a specific date and time for a review hearing before a child support hearing officer to ensure the contemnor's compliance with the court ordered child support obligation. This may result in a review hearing being scheduled and conducted at a courthouse other than where the case is normally heard. To facilitate the setting of the return hearings, the Administrative Office of the Courts supplies the Sheriff's Offices and the Clerk's Offices with a list of child support hearing officers in Pasco and Pinellas counties along with their phone numbers and the days and times of their child support hearing dockets.

Seventh Circuit

East-Volusia Dependency Child Support Pilot Project

In November 2007, Judge Margaret Hudson was asked to participate in a pilot project to develop a "Best Practices Model of Child Support in Dependency Cases" protocol. A general outline of processes and procedures of establishing, modifying and enforcing child support through dependency cases was provided by the Office of Court Improvement for our dependency Judge and other stakeholders to review, implement, and make recommendations as a result of the pilot. The project's start date was January 1, 2008. After intense review and immediate attention given to the written recommendations for the pilot, the team came up with the following approach in detail:

Establish paternity from shelter or arraignment (whichever occurs first) if possible. If paternity is denied the court may order DNA testing.

Identify any existing related case addressing paternity and/or support (via assistance from the case manager providing related case information from shelter and/or arraignment).

Enter corrective orders to suspend ongoing support in any related cases where support has been previously ordered and a dependency case now changes custody of the child (ren) resulting in a change of the payee/recipient of support.

Provide information/application packets to custodians from court to pursue assistance through DOR, where appropriate.

Facilitate access to appropriate financial affidavits for subsequent support orders to be entered.

Enter support orders from disposition (in most instances) and set a future support review hearing along with the dependency judicial review to address payment of support or any need for modification.

Establish a new domestic relations case number based on entry of support order and assign to dependency division (upon termination of jurisdiction in dependency case, domestic relations case involving support will be transferred to domestic relations division for any further action).

Recommend administrative order addressing dependency child support pilot project including language to facilitate goals within pilot project and provide direction to stakeholders affected.

Eighth Circuit

Change of placement

So that DOR can initiate administrative or legal action to suspend or redirect support payments, we started providing change of placement memos to the local DOR office when a child who is the subject of a support order is removed from the custodial parent through a dependency order.

We also began issuing a separate child support order when support is ordered in a dependency case, assigning a new domestic relations case number to the support order, and providing a copy of the order to DOR for use in future enforcement actions.

Domestic Violence Dockets

First Circuit

Batterers' Intervention Database and Monitoring System in Santa Rosa County

The ACTS database system has allowed Santa Rosa County to automate tracking, monitoring, and follow-up on domestic violence respondents who are court ordered to attend batterers' intervention or other types of treatment. This case management system has a large capacity, performs numerous functions for categorizing and totaling information, and generates various reports and forms. The system has proven to be essential for tracking individual compliance, and for identifying enforcement strategies that will contribute to higher completion rates.

Each respondent is entered into the system with pertinent identification information, resident information, specific court requirements, court event history, etc. A progressive system of follow-up on batterers' intervention or other treatment participation is generated initially with letters to respondents followed by status review hearings, orders to show cause hearings, civil or criminal contempt proceedings, pick-up and commit orders, and/or other actions based upon directives from each division judge.

The domestic violence coordinator provides regular reports to each judge detailing cases being monitored in their division, programs being attended, length of time each has been tracked, status in treatment, participation, outstanding pick-up orders, and other history related to the case and/or progress in treatment. Nearly one-third of the cases on the weekly domestic violence court docket are for enforcement or status review hearings. In addition, court staff now have computer access to CCIS, JIS and other data base systems allowing more thorough searches for addresses, incarcerations, criminal records, and corresponding cases that provide useful information for monitoring purposes. In 2007 the completion rate for the Batterers' Intervention Program and other treatment programs for mental health or substance abuse was 59%. This is a good success rate considering the length of the program, and the many impediments to tracking and completion (e.g., changing addresses, repeated incarcerations, payment issues, strict criteria for termination, and the not uncommon need to start a program over again).

Community-wide coordination and integration of procedures for domestic violence cases in Okaloosa County

Until 2007, Okaloosa County lacked resources to assist the courts with civil injunction case processing and the development of a coordinated community response to domestic violence. With the hiring of a part-time court position and leadership of the administrative judge; however, great strides were made this year, especially in the areas of training, communication, and coordination with the local military bases, the Department of Children and Families, and other agencies involved with matters related to domestic violence.

The judge has presented seminars to local military base personnel on filing of civil injunctions, court processes, legal mandates, weapons, terms of the orders, violations, enforcements, and other related domestic violence issues. In addition, the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council is making a training video for new military personnel, as well as new personnel with the Department of Children and Families and other agencies. Additional interagency education and training was conducted for the Department of Corrections, the local shelter, the family visitation center, and other individuals and community stakeholders assisting children and families.

The domestic violence weekly dockets are provided to military base legal departments as well as the Department of Children and Families, and both send representatives to court for cases with mutual involvement. The local legal services agency is now attending court hearings to offer services to petitioners, and the courts and military have entered into an agreement that will ensure easier access to military bases for judicial and pretrial staff.

Ninth Circuit

Domestic Violence Division

In January 2007 the Domestic Violence Division was created in Orange County. The following innovative practices have been initiated in this Division:

Parties have separate and secure waiting rooms outside the courtroom. There is an office between these two waiting rooms where staff check parties in separately, obtain information from both parties to prepare child support guidelines and prepare the cases to be either heard, extended or dismissed.

Cases are heard individually.

A master calendar for the division is maintained for hearings on returns, motions, violations, compliances, and contempts.

Return hearings are scheduled according to case type. Examples:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ▪ Repeats | Monday mornings |
| ▪ Domestic Violence with Children | Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday mornings only |
| ▪ Interpreter cases | Thursday afternoons and Friday mornings. |
| ▪ Domestic Violence without Children, Sexual, and Dating | Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons |

When there is a high volume of returns, hearings are held concurrently in two courtrooms.

Tenth Circuit

Video Conference Hearings

The Tenth Circuit Domestic Violence Court was invited to present a workshop at the 2007 FCADV Rural Conference on procedures for videoconference hearings in domestic violence cases. A team consisting of the administrative family court judge, Clerk of Court's domestic violence department manager, sheriff's victim advocate and family court program manager traveled to Lake City, Florida, where they presented a workshop designed to familiarize victim advocates with proper protocol and procedures established in the Tenth Circuit Court for video conference hearings in domestic violence court proceedings. During 2007 the number of videoconference hearings rose to a level that required establishing a designated room set up specifically for domestic violence injunction court proceedings.

Dissolution of Marriage Dockets

Second Circuit

Case Management for Pro Se Cases

Currently, the Second Judicial Circuit has three full-time case managers that cover the six counties within the circuit. In three of the six counties, the case managers set pro se cases for case management conferences within 45 days of filing. In Leon County, magistrates preside at the case management conference. In Gadsden and Franklin Counties, the circuit judge presides at the case management conference.

Prior to the case management conference, case managers screen for any related cases and review the file. In the Notice of Final Hearing or in the Alternative Order Setting Case Management Conference, litigants are notified of what additional pleadings need to be filed or procedures completed before their cases can be set for final hearing. If all pleadings have been filed prior to or at the time of the case management conference, the final hearing for that case will take place at the time of the conference. If litigants have not reached a settlement agreement between themselves, they can participate in mediation at the time of the conference. If the parties are able to reach a full agreement the case is also finalized, eliminating the need for litigants to appear for yet another court hearing.

In 2007, 57.19% of cases set for case management conference were disposed of at the time of the conference.

In keeping with concept of unified family court, if related cases are identified, notification is sent to the family court manager, who provides case management for unified family court, for further review and recommendation for reassignment to unified family court.

Further, case managers review all pro se cases at the time of filing. In most cases, uncontested cases are set for final hearing within 30 days of filing and post judgment motions are sent to the appropriate judicial officer within two days of filing. In some cases, parties are mailed notification that their case requires additional pleadings. The contact information for the appropriate case manager is provided in the notification. Emergency motions are sent directly to the assigned circuit judge. When the circuit judge deems the motion to be a non-emergency, the file is sent to the case manager for complete review and processing.

Third Circuit

Cooperation for the Children

The phenomenal success and longevity of the Cooperation for the Children Program merits a reexamination of this project as a promising best practice. Cooperation for the Children originally began in late 2001 when the Office of the State Courts Administrator awarded a separate focus grant to the Third Judicial Circuit for a high conflict resolution track for disputed custody and visitation cases as a part of the Model Family Court Pilot Project. Funds were awarded for contractors to teach a high conflict parenting class and to act as parent and child coordinators. The initial intent was to have parents participate in the two program components consecutively; first attending the parenting class, and then meeting with a parent and child coordinator to reach an agreement with the parents to address all issues. Since 2001, the model for a parent and child coordinator has been modified and codified with certification being required for all coordinators. The two components of the program were separated and each remained in place as a separate part. The Parent and Child Coordinator program now falls under the Third Judicial Circuit Mediation Department while the Cooperation for the Children Program continues to be coordinated by the family court manager.

This program is monitored by the family court support unit staff. Class sign-in sheets are forwarded to the family court by the class instructor. Orders to Show Cause are issued to parents who fail to enroll and attend as ordered. Should a parent be dangerous or not appropriate for the program, the court is advised and alternate referrals are suggested by the instructor. If mental health is an issue they are referred back to the court for additional services. Satisfaction surveys are collected, reviewed and compared by court administration.

Now that the program has existed for five years, the court believes that our data would be helpful to other circuits; therefore, court administration is undertaking an evaluation to assess and document the effectiveness of the program and to compare statistical data analyzing the recidivism of class participants compared to parents who did not participate in the program. The data will examine whether the parents continued to dispute issues in the courts, the number of court appearances following their attendance at the class, any documented domestic violence altercations between the parties after attendance, and most importantly, will investigate whether the children in the case later came into the truancy court, delinquency court or criminal justice system. The program has also generated other benefits for the court and the litigants. Mr. Evans, the class instructor, has become a valued member of the Family Law Advisory Group and conducts workshops for family court staff on diffusing hostile situations. Additionally, he has designed numerous other parenting courses specifically dealing with special needs as indicated by the court and the Department of Children and Families. Classes are now offered for substance abusing parents, parents of substance abusing children, abusive parents, parents with special needs children, just to name a few.

The Third Circuit has limited resources and we hope that this model will assist other rural jurisdictions.

Fourth Circuit

New Procedures

Circuit Judge Karen K. Cole developed and implemented the following practices in her division:

1. A checklist for consent modifications to final judgments of dissolution of marriage or paternity. Too often, such consent modifications are signed without adequate knowledge of the underlying facts. This form requires counsel to confer and requires one attorney to then certify whether certain issues are involved in the case and/or in the proposed modification. These issues include supervised visitation, substance abuse, domestic violence, etc. The form also asks if the modification fee has been paid to the clerk (often the original of the proposed modification judgment is delivered directly to judge's chambers without payment of the fee, which the clerk requires and upon which the courts depend) and if the child support proposed is in a guidelines amount.
2. A checklist for Motion to Set Trial hearings. This form asks for information substantially similar to that outlined above. It helps the court determine how much time to schedule for a hearing. It also helps the court to ensure that the pretrial stipulation addresses all relevant issues, and helps the court identify key issues for trial.
3. A form order requiring each party to file his or her financial affidavit and UCCJEA affidavit within ten days and to complete the required parenting course within 30 days. At the time Judge Cole set a case for trial, she asks about these matters. If either party has not, or both have not, done all they need to do, then the order goes out the same day, addressing only those matters which have NOT been completed. In this manner, the parties, by the time of the pretrial conference, have either done what they need to do, or have not but, since an order has already issued, the court can commence contempt proceedings without delaying the trial date.

Fifth Circuit

“Front-End” Case Management in Marion County

In an effort to address the needs of the pro se litigant and at the same time uphold the vision of the Florida Judicial Branch by making the court accessible, fair, effective, responsive, and accountable to the people, Marion County has implemented a “front-end” case management program. “Front-end” case management, which can be defined as the monitoring and tracking of a family law case from the filing of the petition, has been a goal until 2006. A pilot program was implemented on one family law docket in May, 2006, with much success. In 2007, this program was expanded to incorporate all family law dockets for Marion County.

Because every case is entitled to be managed by the court, all family cases that are filed without a written agreement or consent to entry of final judgment are set for periodic case management conferences before the magistrate. Cases are placed on two separate tracks.

New pro se cases are reviewed within 60 days from the filing of the petition. New cases with legal representation are reviewed within 120 days from the filing of the petition.

Front-end tracking and review of family law cases has allowed the court to identify many potential problems at a much earlier date. It has increased pro se litigants' access to the courts and has helped improve judicial efficiency and economy. Cases are identified and referred to mediation much earlier, reducing conflicts and delays for families and for the court itself. Our case managers have noticed a decline in the number of phone requests from pro se litigants regarding the status of their cases. Cases are proceeding to final hearing at a faster rate. Front-end case management has been beneficial to the pro se litigant and the Court.

Seventh Circuit

East and Southeast Volusia Family Law Case Management

In early 2007, all three family law (domestic relations) judges implemented versions of case management within their divisions. Although some areas of case management differ due to the individual division's needs, most domestic relations cases filed in East and Southeast Volusia County are screened and set on case management dockets for review and in many instances, final hearings. The following is a description of family case management used in these three areas:

Case types of dissolution of marriage, paternity, adoption/TPR, temporary custody by extended family member and child support unconnected with dissolution are set appropriately before each judge for an initial case management conference (number of days from filing to case management conference differs between judicial divisions, but does not exceed 180 days).

Both self-represented cases and cases with attorney representation are case managed.

The magistrate is utilized to hear pro se (self-represented) cases where appropriate.

The case manager generates a notice of case management conference and mails to the petitioner or petitioner's counsel as well as the respondent if an address has been provided.

In self-represented cases, an information notice will also be sent to inform the petitioner of the necessary documents to bring to their case management conference in the event it is ready for final hearing. A copy of the order for referral to the magistrate is also mailed to both parties along with the notice.

Prior to court, where appropriate, the case manager reviews the case files to determine if each file contains the following information 1) Parent education course certificates of completion, 2) Financial affidavits, 3) Return of service information, 4) Presence of UCCJEA, and 5) Proof of residency documents. Case summary sheets are then prepared consisting of the

aforementioned information as well as any related case information to reduce conflicting court orders and information regarding time standards and status/age of case.

During a case management conference, expedited issues such as Motions to Allow Testimony and Attendance of Child (ren), Motions for Protective Order, Motions for Referral to Family Mediation Program, Motions to Compel Discovery, Motions to Appraise Marital Home, and any other issues consistent with Rule 12.200, Family Law Rules of Procedure may be addressed at the case management conference.

The case manager attends all case management conferences before a judge, generates the case management orders (and other orders where appropriate) and schedules mediations using the family court mediator's electronic calendar.

In the event a case is ready for trial, the case manager will notify the judge's judicial assistant via email after the case management conference so an order for trial can be prepared.

Upon conclusion of the case management conference, any direction and/or findings of the court are captured along with any future court event date to be included in the case management conference order. The case management conference order is electronically generated with copies provided to all parties prior to leaving the courtroom.

Case management conferences heard by the magistrate are heard on the same day as the judge's, allowing the magistrate's findings and recommendations to be reviewed by the judge at that time for appropriate action. The magistrate prepares case management conference orders for those cases heard by the magistrate.

Eleventh Circuit

Integration of parenting coordination with complex litigation cases

While mediation services are utilized in high conflict (non-domestic violence) cases to address issues such as custody and visitation arrangements, parenting coordinators have also emerged as valuable resource to assist with implementing a parenting plan by facilitating the resolution of disputes, providing educational information regarding the developmental needs of children and the effects of parental separation, and resolution of child-related issues peacefully to reduce the potential for future conflict. In 2006, AOC's family court services (FCS) continued to develop the circuit's model parenting coordination program, and an administrative order for parenting coordination was signed by Chief Judge Farina in January. A mandatory training was provided to all parenting coordinators who met the circuit's requirements, and the FCS parenting coordinators resource list was updated to include the training participants.

Judge Sandy Karlan has found that in appropriate UFC cases, high conflict families can benefit tremendously by the designation of a parenting coordinator and has experienced some

significant successes in the resolution of complex matters before her, attributable largely to the parenting coordinator's role. This practice is a trendsetting intervention approach which is capturing attention statewide and nationally. As we have found, the typical UFC case has a myriad of complexities, more orders for services to monitor, and more parents/caretakers to learn to collaborate together. In these cases, parenting coordinators have been able to work with all of the parties involved to ensure that: 1) parenting plans provide ample joint time for brothers and sisters, 2) services are not duplicative and compliance is monitored for the court and 3) parents are educated as to the effects of their conflict upon the children as motivation for them to work together more appropriately. FCS attends pertinent court hearings in order to provide continuity for the parties and consistency with regard to information provided to the court.

Twelfth Circuit

Custody Monitor Qualifications Committee and Custody Evaluator Report and Applicant Standards Committee

At the beginning of 2007, the family programs were lacking written standards, organization, and uniformity. These committees originally formed to establish minimum standards and qualifications for inclusion on the circuit's court appointed list. Both committees went beyond their charge and established written procedures, proposed forms and orders, and training materials resulting in more efficient family programs. The mental health professionals included on both court appointed lists attended a training on these family programs, which included information about 12th Circuit standards and procedures, case manager responsibilities, revised and newly created forms and orders, funding issues, professional ethics, standards and guidelines from professional associations, liability considerations, sample work products, record keeping and data collection tools.

Parenting Plan Guidelines

The Basic Guidelines, Safety Guidelines, and Long Distance Guidelines sub-committees of the Custody and Visitation Guidelines Committee have been meeting independently and creating parenting plans custom to the parties' particular circumstances. The final guidelines will be provided as an easy to navigate and easily understood booklet. In order to help parties determine the best parenting plan for their families, the guidelines contain a self assessment, an assessment of the other parent, an assessment of the child, information about developmental milestones, sample visitation schedules, and many other important considerations.

Fourteenth Circuit

Differentiated Case Management

In order to expedite cases involving child custody, visitation and child support, the family court staff agreed one case manager should be assigned these particular cases while the other case manager handled all other cases. The differentiated case management process was established only in Bay County. By having one case manager review all the cases involving children, she is more attuned to the special needs involved in these cases and can be of better service to the families involved in the judicial system. This process has proven successful because the customers are provided a better standard of customer service with this new process. Community partners such as the Clerk of Courts and the Department of Revenue know which case manager handles a particular case; therefore communication regarding particular cases between the courts and other agencies has improved. Both case managers are pleased with the differentiated case management system, and plans are to continue this practice.

Family Mediation Program

On April 2, 2007, an administrative order was signed creating the Fourteenth Judicial Circuit's family mediation program. Although the actual program became effective in April 2007, preparation and planning for this much anticipated and much needed program began in 2006. The 14th Circuit family mediation program consists of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Director, a Program Assistant and 12 contract mediators. Since the establishment in April 2007 and until December 2007, there have been a total of 373 mediation referrals from all counties in the circuit. The outer counties which consist of Calhoun, Gulf, Holmes, Jackson and Washington have a combined total of 173 referrals for this same period. Bay County, which is the largest county in the circuit, had 200 referrals. The family mediation program has proven to be an asset to the family court division in particular to pro se cases that were many times "stuck" in the system because litigants could not afford private mediation. Local family law attorneys utilize the program quite often and appear to be pleased with the results.

Staff Initiative

Case managers have always been encouraged to make suggestions they think would benefit the program, pro se litigants, and community partners. One of the case managers in Bay County created a flyer, entitled "**About Your Case Manager.**" In the flyer she lists things the case manager can and cannot do for litigants. Also included in the flyer are the names, telephone numbers and email addresses of the case managers. It was presented to the administrative family law judge and approved for use. The flyer is printed on brightly colored paper so that it stands out in the family law packets provided by the Clerk's Office.

Sixteenth Circuit

Standing Temporary Domestic Relations Order

In late 2006, we began to use a Standing Temporary Domestic Relations Order with attached rules and regulations. In 2007, all family court judges implemented the use of this form, and the rules and regulations as a standard practice in the 16th Circuit. Based upon updates from our family court judges, this practice has substantially reduced the number of emergency hearings associated with the subjects addressed by the temporary order. The order is intended to apprise the parties of their duties and responsibilities in respect to issues that arise during dissolution proceedings. It is also a valuable tool to help preserve the assets of the parties, and keep the children's interests protected while the action is pending.

Request to Continue Case Management Conference

In 2007, we implemented the use of a standard Request to Continue Case Management Conference. When this form is filed, the case manager assigned to the case reviews the file. If the case is moving forward in a timely manner, and there is no objection to the continuance, the case is removed from the case management docket and reset to the next docket date. The use of this standard practice has helped reduce the paperwork and handling time involved in the filing of a motion to continue. For example, if a case has been set for case management conference, and mediation is scheduled a day later, there is no need to have the attorneys and their clients come to court and advise that they are set for mediation. Using the standard request procedure, the case manager reviews the file, confirms that the mediation has been scheduled, and the case is reset for the next weekly docket. This practice reduces the number of unnecessary hearings and trips to court for the parties and their attorneys. Court dockets run more efficiently, and costs to the parties are minimized.

Mandatory Disclosure Checklist

In 2007, we noticed that many pro se cases were being delayed because of the mandatory disclosure required by Family Law Rule of Procedure 12.285. Most pro se litigants did not understand what the requirements were and the details of what to produce, and they would not file anything, or make incomplete disclosure. The case would be delayed while the court addressed these issues. To respond to this problem, and to help minimize delay, the 12.285 disclosure information was reduced to a check list with identification of each form. This checklist allows each party to read all of the requirements and provides an easy reference for them. Thus far, it appears that this checklist is helpful to the pro se litigants fulfilling the mandatory discovery obligation, and they are able to comply in a timely manner.

Nineteenth Circuit

Immediate Mediation

Staff family mediators are on site to conduct mediation during pro se court when unexpected issues arise during a final hearing or at other times the judge determines immediate mediation is appropriate. The mediation occurs in an empty courtroom where the mediation can be done privately, and the outstanding issues are addressed. The parties are sent back to court after their mediation where the judge can issue the final judgment.

Immediate mediation is a benefit to the residents in the circuit because many of them must take a day off of work to attend their court hearing, and the prospect of having to take another day off and go to mediation and then another hearing is not possible; allowing these parties to mediate onsite and on the same day provides them an invaluable service.

Twentieth Circuit

Implementation of differentiated case management techniques in family law cases

In 2005, Court Administration retained a management consultant, Dr. Darlene Andert, to initiate a Total Quality Management project chartered to define and improve case management in the Twentieth Judicial Circuit. Final recommendations were made in 2006 from multi-disciplinary and multi-county committees regarding improvements to the court's existing practices and the use of differentiated case management using four case tracks: Expedited, Standard, Complex, and Anomaly or Crossover. In 2007, family court implemented the recommendations of the committee regarding differentiated case management techniques and began categorizing cases within the four case tracks to better manage cases according to the complexity of the issues presented. Case management conferences were scheduled within 60 days of filing for contested matters to establish initial case plans with expected court deadlines and the scheduling of meaningful case events in accordance with case track time frames for disposition. Enhancements were made to the existing database and family court teams were created to support each family law division and the court's new management practice. The teams were structured with one case manager, one magistrate and one family law judge to improve the lines of communication within the courts and to provide consistency with the court's structure to support these cases.

Use of a Judicial Automated Calendaring System (JACS) in Family Law Cases

A judicial automated calendaring system (JACS) was implemented to streamline the calendaring of case events for family court. The calendaring system provides for immediate email notification to family law attorneys on cases scheduled or cancelled for mediation, case management conferences, hearings and trials. Additionally, JACS provides online access to court dockets and has improved our communication with the legal community, public and service providers. The JACS program also provides a database feed to the Clerk's database (Odyssey) and the court's internal database (UFC) so that all programs "talk" to each other and

as a result saves on employee time that would otherwise be dedicated to data entry. This calendaring system has proven to be a promising practice in family court for 2007 to help streamline scheduling and provide case managers with the tools to meet differentiated case management time standards that were implemented this year.

Crossover Dockets

Fourth Circuit

Unified Family Court for delinquency and dependency

In January 2008, the Fourth Circuit completed the final phase in the full implementation of the unified family court (UFC) by incorporating juvenile delinquency cases into the division. Many challenges were faced in completing this phase of the process, including: developing a comprehensive administrative order; expanding the UFC division to include four judges and two magistrates; developing a complex calendaring system in order to accommodate the busy schedules of the judges, magistrates, clerks, case managers, and various court staff; coordinating activities with several agencies, including Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Revenue, Child Welfare Legal Services, State Attorney, Public Defender, Regional Conflict Counsel, Private Attorneys, Family Support Services of Northeast Florida, Children's Home Society, Daniel Memorials, Inc., Mental Health Resource Center, Jewish Family and Community Services, PSI Family Services of Florida, Child Guidance Center, Guardian ad Litem, Dispute Resolution Center, Juvenile Delinquency and Dependency Drug Courts, and Jacksonville Sheriff's Office; and developing a time sharing plan for the three courtrooms and one conference room that are available for the four judges to hold hearings. Challenges we continue to face include, inadequate courtroom space and the need for more case managers.

Eleventh Circuit

UFC Case Management

The role and job responsibilities of the UFC case manager were further developed. In conjunction with the evolution of the UFC case manager's role, case management forms, worksheets, tracking logs and other tools were created and refined to meet the demands of managing a growing caseload, which include:

- UFC Case Status Worksheet,
- UFC Statutory Timeframe Worksheet,
- UFC Hearing Notes Worksheet,
- UFC Liaison Directory,
- UFC Crossover Cases Research Checklist, and
- UFC Caseload Tracking Log.

OSCA selected Miami-Dade as the venue to host and convene the *first-ever* statewide meeting of UFC case managers on October 4th and 5th, 2007. The learning objectives for the meeting were to discuss issues related to managing crossover cases; share information on process,

protocols, forms; and to network and create a base of contacts from other circuits. All of the Eleventh Circuit's UFC forms and tracking instruments were disseminated as part of the agenda package. The level of commitment to the UFC concept throughout the state was particularly noted by the amount of attendees. Sixteen out of the twenty circuits participated, comprising thirty-six attendees, all of whom were front-line workers, actually performing case management functions of crossover dockets.

As Administrative Judge of our UFC Division, Chief Judge Farina's opening remarks set the stage as to the importance of this work, and served as a motivating call to action and impetus for an engaging and open dialogue which transpired throughout the day and a half meeting. The participants were able to utilize our circuit's protocols and forms as a model for replication in their jurisdictions, and we were able to benefit from the shared experiences of differing approaches as well.

Delinquency/Dependency Crossover Cases Pilot Project

In October 2006, the Chief Judge convened operational meetings, together with Judge Jeri Cohen, Judge Sandy Karlan, Magistrate Margaret Rosenbaum, and all involved system partners, to work together collaboratively to develop a plan to merge delinquency crossover cases within the context of our UFC model.

Crossover case data was carefully analyzed, and consensus was reached to accomplish this massive operational advancement in two phases, with delinquency/dependency crossover cases being phased-in first, followed by delinquency/domestic relations crossover cases (constituting the largest percentage of crossovers). A subcommittee, led by Judge Jeri Cohen, worked to develop specific protocol for the pilot project, which commenced in March 2007.

The data analyzed indicated that approximately one-third of delinquency/dependency crossover cases are both open simultaneously in our circuit. From March through December 2007, a total of 114 families, comprising 224 children, 159 dependency cases, and 529 delinquency cases (open and closed) were transferred into the pilot project. This initiative has garnered the support of our juvenile justice partners, who have assigned dedicated staff to participate in case staffings and serve as court liaisons.

Fifteenth Circuit

Social Service Coordination

As a social service component to Unified Family Court, the social service coordination program assists children and families involved in complex cases (more than one court case, with multiple agency involvement) to achieve self sufficiency and encourage resolution of problems outside the formal court system by convening regular group meetings with all agencies/individuals involved with the family so that effective delivery of services is facilitated.

The Community Alliance of Palm Beach County partnered with court administration to develop a program to improve the coordination of social services. An assessment was done to determine the social service needs of Palm Beach County families and a consultant was hired to map out the various points at which social services were being offered to families in three specific areas: domestic violence, dependency and delinquency cases. Concurrently, the court's social services coordinator met with family and juvenile judges and various community partners to gain their input and insight into the community's social service needs. Information was compiled about community resources and other circuits were surveyed about their UFC social service components to determine best practices.

After the assessment, workgroups consisting of stakeholders collaboratively designed the social service coordination program's policies and procedures. Implementation of the program began on April 2, 2007. Over forty court and community agencies have signed memoranda of understanding with the court agreeing to participate in the program. There has been a very positive response and cooperation from serviced providers and families in working with the program to help the families succeed.

Seventeenth Circuit

Formalized Cross Training for All UFC Case Managers

As stated in the 17th Judicial Circuit's UFC brochure and video (which may be viewed at www.17th.flcourts.org), "An intricate part of UFC is case flow management. The case management role is to maximize judicial resources, avoid inconsistent court orders, prevent multiple court appearances by the parties on the same issues, and monitor compliance with court ordered services. Case management and coordination is a defining characteristic of a model family court. Case managers also refer families to community resources, monitor families ordered to mandatory court programs, and coordinate all cases involving the family."

In order to be effective in these areas, a case manager must have a working knowledge of all case types within UFC. Cross training for all UFC case managers will be conducted to educate case managers in all case types for the 5 UFC departments. This training serves not only as a promising practice, but a best practice due to the number of case types each division hears within unified family court, as one judge, one family.

Over the course of two months, domestic relations case managers were trained in dependency regarding case types, mandatory statutory time frames, case flow, court room procedures and dependency case management. Specifically, the minimum requirements were as follows:

Shelter	3 hours
Arraignments	3 hours
Disposition hearings/case plans	3 hours
Status/perm reviews/judicial reviews (must attend all hearing types)	3 hours

Manifest best interest	1 hour
Termination of parental rights trial	3 hours
Dependency trial	3 hours
Advisory	1 hour
Crossover cases	4 hours
(domestic relations/domestic violence/ delinquency)	
Docket Preparation	2 hours
Hearings before a Magistrate	4 hours
Total required training hours is 30	

Domestic relations case managers partnered with dependency case managers for this training. They were partnered with a dependency case manager at different times and attended hearings before all of the dependency court judges and magistrates. The case managers had to accurately document their time, hearing type, and judge or magistrate with whom they trained that day and summarize the topics utilizing forms previously prepared for them.

Dependency case managers are scheduled to begin their cross training with domestic relations case managers in early February 2008. Utilizing the same forms or documentation and the partner system, areas which will be addressed include: dissolution of marriage, paternity, child support, child custody, domestic relations case management, adoptions, final judgment modifications, motion calendar, trials/final hearings, visitation and timesharing, contempt/motion to enforce, pick-up orders, domestic violence, pretrial conference, and temporary custody.

Domestic violence, delinquency, and unified family court case managers will be included in this training schedule. Upon the completion of the training, all five divisions will have trained with their counterparts.

“Slow but sure” is the motto for this training. Slow, so as to not interfere with day to day production; sure, due to the validity of the nature of the training and the determination of the staff.

Eighteenth Circuit

Cross Training of Magistrates – Brevard County

Family court and dependency court magistrates were cross-trained in each other’s divisions to hear matters not regularly assigned to them.

Purpose: To have three magistrates trained to hear each other’s assignments, such as Baker Acts, dependency, and family court matters.

Benefit: Training provides more flexibility and coverage of dockets when needed in any aspect of family court.

Miscellaneous

Third Circuit

Mental Health Court (MHC)

From 2004 through 2007, the Third Circuit as a whole experienced rapid growth in our drug court programs in particular the family drug treatment class (FDTC). As we gained insight into substance abuse treatment, it became apparent that many of the participants in all drug courts including FDTC and Adult Drug Treatment Court had (co-occurring) mental health disorders. Mental health issues were also consuming inordinate amounts of time and effort in misdemeanor court, felony court and violation of probation cases. After reviewing all of the caseload statistics, Judge Collins determined a fresh approach was needed. Judge Collins consulted with the new incoming Chief Judge, the Honorable E. Vernon Douglas, and the Family Court Administrative Judge, the Honorable Leandra G. Johnson. Together they determined that Judge Douglas would assume the lead role in MHC and FDTC. It was decided that the family court manager would coordinate the MHC. The three Judges formed a strategic planning committee for MHC and after a series of meetings launched the Columbia County mental health court in August, 2007. Initially we chose to begin with criminal misdemeanor MHC as legislation and model best practices were in place. As the laws evolve in the State of Florida the circuit intends to expand the MHC program in the future to accept developmentally delayed individuals in misdemeanor court, create a forensic felony docket, accept violation of probation cases in both misdemeanor and felony cases, and develop a component to treat litigants in family court, juvenile dependency court and other areas.

Fourth Circuit

Family Court Services Technology

In 2007, the family court services (FCS) computer training project was started. The training was designed to increase the use of the case management software, not only by case management staff, but also by judges, magistrates, child support hearing officers, judicial assistants, magistrates' administrative secretaries, child support hearing officers' administrative secretaries, and the family mediation department. Staff training, access to data sources, and teaching the functionality of the software were the goals of the training project. Initial training focused on what data and actions are required by the user to achieve the case management goals of scheduling hearings, sharing information and communicating with other users, and identifying related cases. The Family Court Case Management System (FCCMS) and the web-based Judicial Inquiry System (JIS) were selected for the initial training sessions.

The FCS Technical Liaison, Tammye Michau-Brown, drafted and finalized a syllabus and other documents to be used for the training of Basic FCCMS and JIS. Every person who worked in the

Duval County courthouse was eligible to receive the training during a designated two week period. Preparations for the training included securing an adequate training space, equipping the training space with laptop computers (8), and setting up a video player and a large screen. Training was mandatory for all of the FCS case managers in Duval County (13), all of the magistrate and child support hearing officer assistant secretaries (9), the family court manager and the program coordinators for family and domestic violence. In December 2007, the FCS technical liaison initiated the long-term software training program by conducting two classes per day during a two-week period.

Additional training sessions were conducted in Clay County and at the offices of the family mediation department. Further training on other programs is planned in the future.

The year began with the FCS technical liaison meeting with the Information Technical Department (ITD), City of Jacksonville, to implement extra security in preparation for the increased use of the FCCMS by the entire unified family court. The increased security was implemented and put into production but it developed significant problems that had to be resolved before continued use.

In March 2007, the FCS case managers gained access to certain agency data sources. Clay County was successfully integrated onto the FCCMS. The Clay County case managers have been adding their cases, ordering their case files, scheduling cases for hearings, and uploading their documents to the FCCMS. The FCCMS orders all of Clay County's files, thus freeing up valuable time for the case managers to provide direct services to the public, answer telephones, and complete other essential tasks.

In June 2007, the juvenile dependency/unified family court (DP/UFC) began adding their cases to and utilizing the FCCMS. Their use is somewhat limited at this time as the FCCMS requires additional data fields for the juvenile dependency cases.

In November 2007, the domestic violence (DV) case management unit began to add all of their cases and utilize the FCCMS. Currently, all requests from FCS for DV files are sent to the DV Unit by way of FCCMS.

In mid November 2007, ITD rolled out valuable report functions within the FCCMS. These reports show a statistical break down, by case manager and case status (open, closed, hearings scheduled), among other reports, which saves the program coordinators and family court manager (FCM) valuable time. Also, these reports allowed the family court manager to go to various judges to show how many cases came through FCS for the 2007 year.

Ninth Circuit

In-house remote testimony

Two conference rooms at the JJC are currently equipped with AV connections to the six full-sized courtrooms. There is two-way audio/visual communications between the courtroom and the two conference rooms. FTR Gold is utilized for court reporting purposes. This is particularly advantageous because it gives the judge more control over the courtroom by separating parties for security or other reasons without infringing upon the rights of the individuals in the case. All parties can see, hear and testify at the proceeding from separate locations at the courthouse.

Free internet access

Free wireless internet access was made available throughout all courtrooms, hearing rooms, the court resource center, the jury assembly room and most conference rooms within the Orange County Courthouse, the Osceola County Courthouse and the Juvenile Justice Center. This service is free and available to the public through a non-secure connection. Judges and court administration employees also have been provided with secure wireless internet access at all court locations.

Truancy Court

The Ninth Circuit Court recognizes that truancy is powerful predictor of juvenile delinquency and that truancy is a community problem. Therefore, the Ninth Circuit has taken a comprehensive approach to solving truancy by establishing an additional truancy program designed to focus on schools in our community which have the highest truancy rates. On September 20, 2007 the Ninth Circuit initiated community based truancy court. Three schools were targeted for this truancy court in 2007. There are currently 101 students actively participating in the program. Approximately 15 have successfully completed the program by meeting all of the court's requirements which include maintaining perfect attendance records with no unexcused absences or tardies, among the other requirements. This is particularly noteworthy since the average number of school days missed for a student entering the program is approximately 23 days. Community based truancy court is held on Thursday evenings beginning at 4:30 p.m. and is presided over by a special magistrate. The case management for community based truancy court is provided by two case managers who are supervised by the juvenile justice coordinator, under court administration. Both the daytime and evening truancy courts provide students and their families with information and directions for services, as well as timely intervention. Sanctions can be imposed for noncompliance and, under certain circumstances, cases can be referred to a judge.

Tenth Circuit

Family Law Trainings

Conducting quality family law training is one of the Tenth Circuit Family Court's priorities. In-service style training for newly assigned family court judges was held in May 2007. In addition to the in-service, a less formal welcoming event for newly assigned family judges was held in July 2007. The administrative family judge also presented workshops on professionalism and laws governing court interpreters. These workshops were well attended by court staff and local attorneys. In September 2007 the court partnered with the local community based care agency, Heartland for Children to present an outstanding local family court conference titled "Working in Partnership, A Child's Voice is Heard." The conference focused on relevant topics regarding children and families. Workshop topics included issues of domestic violence, infant and child mental health, child support, drug trends impacting children and many others. Over 400 professionals attended this 3 day training conference.

Thirteenth Circuit

The Truancy Court Program

Began in Hillsborough County in December of 2006 with Unified Family Court Administrative Judge Herbert Baumann presiding. The goal of truancy court is to ensure that students attend school and to intervene before they become involved in dependency or delinquency divisions of the court. The School Board Attorney files the truancy petition on behalf of the Superintendent of Schools. The petition includes the referral packet from the social worker that outlines the previous interventions the school has made with the student and family. The clerk then issues a summons to the parent and student to appear in court for a truancy hearing.

A truancy hearing is to be held within thirty days of the petition being filed. During the court hearing, Judge Baumann asks the student what they want to be when they grow up and explains the importance of obtaining an education in order for them to be successful and reach their goal. At the direction of Judge Baumann, all families sign a court order to abide by the following conditions:

1. Student must be on time and attend school daily with no unexcused absences;
2. Parent/Guardian must ensure their son/daughter's school attendance by calling the truancy officer for local pick-up and transport to the truancy center if student refuses to attend;
3. Daily school progress reports must be reviewed and signed by the parent each day as needed.

Additional conditions may also include: Involvement with Success 4 Kids and Families; Haven Poe Family counseling; services through CINS/FINS; mental health evaluations; daily curfews and/or bedtimes; substance abuse evaluations; and attendance at the USF Campus Tour.

The parent/guardians failure to abide by the truancy court contract may result in possible referrals for dependency consideration and/or criminal prosecution. As of February 2008, 65 students have been referred to truancy court. Of those who are participating in truancy court, three quarters have successfully increased their school attendance on a more consistent basis. Many parents welcome the idea of additional services in the household, as they want their child to graduate high school and attend college. In addition to the Judge's involvement, the contribution of Success 4 Kids and Families has played a big part in making this program a success.

UFC Database

The Thirteenth Circuit currently has a database in development that will tie together all the court programs. This one Unified Family Court Database will allow judges and staff to access other programs data on cases that are already open. This will end staff entering information on a family multiple times into separate databases. When a program has a new case, they will search the database to see if a case exists in another program or division. If there is data already entered, the staff or judge will be allowed to pull that information into their programs forms and orders. Staff and judges will also be allowed to view needed information while in court and reduce the number of conflicting orders. The long term goal is to connect this database with the Clerk's Office database. Currently the program is in use in Independent Living Court and is used by the Domestic Relations judges for form orders, etc.

Eighteenth Circuit

Online Scheduling Software – Seminole County

The Judicial Automated Calendaring System (JACS) was implemented for Family Court Judicial Assistants.

Purpose: For attorneys to coordinate and schedule date(s) for all types of family hearings on JACS.

Benefits: Both attorneys can discuss then coordinate a hearing date/time online. Once they have scheduled a mutually agreed upon date/time, there is only one confirming telephone call made to the judicial assistant. Telephone calls between the attorneys' office and the judicial assistant to coordinate hearing time is significantly reduced. The system allows an attorney to search/view the Judge's six-month calendar, or they can opt to search for the next available hearing time. The system automatically sends an email confirmation to the attorney setting the hearing which eliminates miscommunication regarding the day and time of the hearing. The judicial assistant can print an updated docket at any time.