

Unified Family Court Update – September 2000

September 2_ marks two full years of operations at the Family and Juvenile Court facility. We're proud of our facility and program and served birthday cake and celebrated Children's Day in the lobby throughout the day on October 9!

- **Juvenile Treatment Court.**

In November 1999, a narrowly focused juvenile drug court was implemented. Because no new resources were available for this project, the scope has been limited to those juveniles sentenced under the Chemical Dependency Disposition Alternative (CDDA) program. The project is titled Juvenile Treatment Court, focusing on rehabilitation. Those juveniles participating in CDDA sentencing have regular compliance review hearings weekly, bi-weekly or monthly, depending on the stage and progress of their treatment.

The court has now received funding to allow a ten-person team to attend three juvenile drug court planning conferences beginning in November. The Court is excited to see regular accountability motivating compliance and is contemporaneously discussing expanding the treatment court to other offenders, truants and youth-at-risk.

- **Family Treatment Court.**

In March 2000, Family Treatment Court began as a collaborative drug court project with DSHS Division of Children and Family Services for substance-abusing parents of Title 13 RCW dependent children. Once again, this program has been initiated on a small scale without new resources. Participating parents attend regular court review hearings (weekly, biweekly and monthly) as they progress through treatment and waive their rights to confidentiality of court proceedings so that all treatment court parents appear together as in criminal drug court models. This program is receiving rave reviews from parents, treatment providers, and others working in the Dependency arena. Early entry into treatment in the course of a Dependency is expected to allow earlier return of children to healthy, drug-free parents.

- **Truancy process changes.**

In July 2000, appellate court decisions restricted the court's use of detention as a sanction for truants and youth-at-risk who violate civil court orders. These decisions caused the court and stakeholders involved in truancy issues to examine new ways to address continuing issues of truancy after entry of the initial Truancy Order. Most significantly, the Juvenile Department Civil Probation Officer staff will conduct conferences with students, parents and the school district representatives to motivate compliance with court orders and create out-of-court consequences for noncompliance.

- **Juvenile offender probation focus.**

The numbers of court hearings and detention days attributable to probation violators were the impetus for the court and stakeholders to discuss policies and practices related to probation and violations. New focuses include helping parents assume greater responsibility for their children's successful probation and enhancing out-of-court work by probation staff in imposing consequences and motivating compliance with probation. One goal of new efforts is to better use resources, including detention.

In September, by way of a technical assistance grant from OJJDP and the Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee, consultant Tom English presented a one-day program for the Court, probation, prosecutors and public defenders. The training topics were restorative justice and strength based approaches to this work. The Court will follow-up with a continuing dialogue to improve ways of doing business within the juvenile justice system.

- **CASA Training.**

Eight new CASA volunteers completed 28 hours of training this spring and joined our roster of volunteer child advocates. Currently, CASA volunteers are assigned to 55 children. We welcome their work. Another training is planned for late fall.

- **Case Management of selected family law cases.**

A Case Coordinator was added to the Family and Juvenile Court staff in February 2000 from pilot project grant funds. This position tracks and coordinates concurrent cases (families with more than one case in Family and Juvenile Court). This position also manages family law cases in which parties (particularly those without attorneys) are ordered by the court to participate in services or treatment to see that the orders are followed. The Case Coordinator schedules hearings in cases of noncompliance to bring the issue to the attention of the judicial officer who made the order. This work is essential to a Unified Family Court and to providing better service for children.

- **Habeas corpus protocols.**

The number of habeas corpus requests has grown dramatically in the past year. Forms are now available at the Clerk's office for habeas corpus proceedings and protocols have been established within the court and with the Sheriff's office. Returns on writs are heard expeditiously and by a judicial officer experienced with this extraordinary relief.