

Best Practice Court Matters

An update on the latest events of Best Practice Courts of Virginia

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Court Improvement Program
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The Hon. Anne Holton and Hon. Kimberly O'Donnell, Chief Judge, pose at the Adoption Saturday Event held at the Oliver Hill Courts Building. Judge Holton who is the lead judge for Richmond's Best Practice Court Team has resigned effective December 14, 2005 to become First Lady of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Although she is leaving the judiciary, she has expressed her continued commitment to working on behalf of the children and families of Virginia. ♦

BEST PRACTICE COURT MINI GRANTS

Support for the Best Practice Court Program by the Court Improvement Program in the Office of the Executive Secretary will focus upon local initiatives for the first half of 2006. This past fall each lead judge and associated Best Practice Court team members were notified that, in lieu of a state conference convened at a central site, each team is offered the opportunity to develop its own local event. These efforts will be supported with financial and staff assistance from CIP/OES. These local events may be planned and sponsored in conjunction with other Best Practice Courts in the region.

Financial Support in the amount of \$1,000 will be provided to each Best Practice Court team and is available through May 31, 2006. It is anticipated that events will be locally planned and conducted on an interdisciplinary basis. They must focus on improving the ability of the community to respond to child

Continued on page 3



“ANSWERING THE CALL”

On Saturday, November 19, 2005, courts coast-to-coast and across Virginia came together to celebrate National Adoption Day. Now in its sixth year, National Adoption Day was created to raise awareness of children in foster care and to celebrate finalized adoptions.

According to the most recent federal data, there are approximately 523,000 foster care children in the United States, and 118,000 of them are available for adoption. Since 1987, the number of children in foster care nationally has doubled, and the average time a child remains in foster care has lengthened to nearly three years. In Virginia, the statewide average length of time in care is 33.12 months or 2.76 years. Each year, approximately 20,000 children in foster care nationwide will age out of the system without ever being placed with a permanent family.

In Virginia, eight Best Practice Courts hosted National Adoption Day events:

Alexandria hosted a private reception and adoption ceremony to celebrate the adoption of 7 children. In Alexandria, 22 adoptions were finalized in 2005. This was the eighth such event for this court.

Campbell, now in its third year, finalized 2 adoptions and celebrated 7 more that were concluded during the last year. All of the children involved were part of the county's foster care program.

The City of Richmond finalized 54 adoptions and its event celebrated 33 adoptions among 22 families. Special guest, Oliver Hill, attended and shared remarks with the audience.

Roanoke County/Salem celebrated the finalization of 11 adoptions. The adoption day event was held at the Roanoke City Courthouse and was attended by 225 people.

Warren County celebrated adoptions for 7 families which were finalized over the last year. The event was held at the Warren County Courthouse and included the production of portraits for each participating family.

Continued on page 3



An adoptive family prepares to enter the Adoption Day Celebration held at the Roanoke City Courthouse.

On The Inside

Best Practice Court Mini-Grants	1
National Adoption Day Celebrations - “Answering the Call”	1
Local Best Practice Court Activities	2
2006 Local Initiatives	3
CIP Staff Resources Available for Local Initiatives	4
2006 Calendar of Events	4
New Best Practice Court Lead Judges	4
Child Abuse and Neglect Institute	4

LOCAL ACTIVITIES

The Fredericksburg Best Practices Team sponsored a daylong training on September 30 for guardians ad litem and other stakeholders. There were 69 attendees including Judge Peterson, Judge Ellis, Judge Beck, Judge Daltan, and Judge Johnson. DSS and CSU Representatives from Fredericksburg, Stafford, King George and Spotsylvania also attended. Kathleen McNaught, JD of the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues presented on "Meeting the Educational Needs of Children in the Child Welfare System". Victoria Youcha, Ed.D followed in the afternoon on "Foundations of Early Development—Zero to Three" with Sheryl Dicker, J.D. of the New York Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children. Fredericksburg's Best Practice Core Team continues to meet regularly and has instituted these best practices: Monthly meetings are held with parents at DSS to go over progress, impediments and additional needs. The local Child Development Center is conducting assessments on all children coming into foster care within 30 days. The Rappahannock Area Community Services Board has created a system for immediate intake and assessments within 48 hours.

Hampton's Best Practice Court Team is working to finalize the *Pathway to Permanency Planning System* for reunification cases and, on a new effort, to get out the message to the community about the need for an increased pool of foster parents. The team is already partnering with a number of city agencies and plans to reach out to the faith community as well. Hampton also hosted an Adoption Day event. (See page 3 for details.)

Louisa's Best Practice Court Judge Susan Whitlock worked with local attorneys to host a fourth grade class for a mock trial. The students had recently visited Colonial Williamsburg to observe a 17th Century trial, and their teachers felt that it would be beneficial for them to compare that experience with a modern day court proceeding. The Louisa Best Practice Courts Team was recognized in the local newspaper,

The Central Virginian, for its hard work in the community. The Team continues to meet regularly and is working to develop a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program in their area.



Fredericksburg's Lead Judge, the Hon. David Peterson with speakers, Dr. Victoria Youcha, ED, D, of Washington, DC and Sheryl Dicker, J.D., of White Plains, NY, at their training event at the University of Mary Washington.

Prince William County's Best Practice Court Team has been sending surveys to some of the court's clients, including foster care children, guardians ad litem, and social workers. The completed surveys are being evaluated to determine how the court can better manage its child dependency docket. The Team is studying the feasibility of a Visitation Center for use not only in child dependency cases, but in all cases where there is a need for a centralized place for visitation or where visitation needs to be monitored or supervised. Prince William also hosted an Adoption Day Celebration. (See page 3 for details.)

The Pulaski Best Practices Team continues to hold quarterly meetings. It has adopted an addendum order for foster care cases similar to the one used by Judge Sharp in Warren County. On May 5, 2005, the team hosted a seminar, "Focus on Substance Abuse." Speakers included representatives from Pulaski County High School and the New Life Recovery Program, and a methamphetamine expert from the Virginia Department of Emergency Management.

Richmond J&DR District Court's "Millennium Team" has been making changes to the court's dockets to support more informed court hearings. All

initial hearings on petitions for relief of custody are now scheduled on DSS dockets. This allows DSS counsel to be present to submit proposed orders and to review the Court's orders to ensure that necessary findings have been made. The OES case management system (CMS) court forms screen has been revised at the suggestion of this court to clarify the names of court orders and how to use these automated forms. Richmond also hosted an Adoption Day Celebration. (See page 3 for details.)

The Roanoke County/Salem Best Practice Court Team sponsored a daylong event focusing on Children's Mental Health Issues. Dr. Rick Claytor, a psychiatrist with Family Preservation Services spoke about medication and how to understand a psychological report. The Director of the Mental Health Association of Roanoke Valley, Diane Kelly, spoke about community resources. More than 40 people attended this program. Roanoke also hosted an Adoption Day Celebration. (See page 1 for details.)

The Staunton/Augusta/Waynesboro Court Improvement Team held its joint quarterly meeting on November 8, 2005. This team is developing a Parent Mentoring Program, which will have a dual focus: a) prevention of foster care – by providing support and mentoring for parents with problems in hopes of avoiding foster care; and b) intervention for parents who are working toward reunification with their children. The program will be staffed by volunteer parent mentors who are trained and committed to working with the parent for at least twelve months.

The Virginia Beach Best Practices Court Improvement Project Team continues to meet quarterly, with the Prevention, Communication and Resource Subcommittees meeting monthly. A seminar for GALs, attorneys, social workers, probation officers and school personnel, entitled "A Focus on Foster Care and Local Child and Family Resources" was held on May 16, 2005. In addition to planning this seminar, the team has been working to create a video for abuse and

Continued on page 3



Circuit Court Judge, Hon. Wilford Taylor and the Hon. Jay Dugger congratulate this adoptive mother and her two children.

Adoption—continued from page 1

Hampton celebrated 38 adoptions at its Adoption Day Celebration, attended by over 150 people. This is the third year Hampton has hosted such an event.

Prince William hosted its 2nd Adoption Day Event along with the 31st Judicial Circuit Court, City of Manassas, City of Manassas Park, and Prince William County Depts. of Social Services. The event included the finalization of 9 adoptions and recognition of recent adoptions. ♦

Mini Grants—continued from page 1

maltreatment and the placement of children in foster care and to the enhancement of a timely, effective litigation process. Staff support from CIP/OES is available to support the planning and conducting of local events.

CIP staff can support access to excellent speaker resources, to include the *National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges* and *National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues*. Judge Stephen W. Rideout (ret.) Alexandria J&DR District Court, now a national consultant, is an exceptional resource as one of Virginia’s own and is most interested in working with the Best Practice Courts. Each Best Practice Court team member and lead judge is also a potential resource to other teams for mentoring and training in the community.

The nature of these local initiatives is limited only by the imagination of the local teams. It can be a judicial district wide event, such as has been planned by Bedford/Campbell and Wise/Tazewell. (See 2006 Local

Initiatives) Or it can be a locally focused event as the **Pulaski** Team is developing. A team may choose to plan a retreat or other smaller event to conduct strategic planning about future local court improvement activities and to invigorate its

local team. Or there may be a special resource that the team wishes to develop collaboratively to support quality decision-making by the court in child dependency cases. CIP/OES looks forward to hearing about each team’s plans and to reporting this good work.

2006 LOCAL INITIATIVES

Babes in Law Land – “Meeting the Needs of Young Children in Our Courts” is the theme of an event set for February 20, 2006, sponsored by the **Bedford and Campbell** Best Practice Courts and the Family Law Section of the Lynchburg Bar Association. Among the speakers in the daylong program open to the courts, bar and agencies of the 24th Judicial District are

Victoria Youcha Ed.D., Zero to Three Foundation, Washington, DC; Dr. Robert Marvin and Dr. William Whelan of the Child Parent Attachment Clinic, Department of Psychiatric Medicine at UVA; and Philip Stahl, PhD., Child Clinical Psychologist from South Florida, who will address “Age Appropriate Visitation for Young Children.” Break out sessions are also planned on topics of interest to the invited 200 participants.



The Hon. Richard B. Potter, Circuit Court Judge in Prince William County, shakes hands with a child at the 31st Judicial District’s Adoption Day Celebration.

“Teenagers in Foster Care and Best Practices for Out-of-State Placements and Courtroom Practice” will be the focus of the jointly-sponsored event of the **Wise and Tazewell** Best Practice Courts on April 11, 2006. Interdisciplinary participants from the 29th and 30th Judicial Districts will hear from Gerald Mallon, DSW, Executive Director of the National Resource Center for Foster Care and Permanency Planning in New York City on “Facilitating Permanency for Older Adolescents” in conjunction with a local panel presentation. Judge Stephen Rideout, Judicial Consultant with the ABA Center on Children and the Law, will serve as a resource for the day and address best practices for interstate placements of children in this area of the Commonwealth that shares borders with four other states. Other locally-developed topics will also be presented. ♦

Local Activities—continued from page 2

neglect cases which will include a mock foster care hearing; to develop a policy regarding maintaining foster children in their home schools; to establish a mediation program for foster care cases; and to create and publish a resource manual for DHS workers and GALs.

The Winchester/Frederick Best Practices Team continues to meet every other month focusing on the theme, “Better Outcomes for Kids,” with subcommittees meeting monthly.

The Delinquency/Truancy Subcommittee is working with local DSS to understand the reasons that children before the court for truancy and delinquency are being placed in foster care. Sixty-five people attended the “Community Based Services Forum for Juveniles” hosted by Judge Elizabeth Kellas and Judge William Sharp. Judge Bill

Continued on page 4

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BEST PRACTICE COURTS OF VIRGINIA

Alexandria	Henrico	Staunton/Augusta
Bedford	Louisa	Tazewell
Campbell	Newport News	Virginia Beach
Charlottesville/Albemarle	Prince William	Warren
Culpeper	Pulaski	Waynesboro
Fairfax	Richmond	Williamsburg/James City
Fredericksburg	Roanoke/Salem	Winchester/Frederick
Hampton	Stafford	Wise/Norton

Local Activities continued from page 3

Logan also attended. The forum was to educate the stakeholders on what services are currently being offered for children and families in the community and to open the discussion about what additional services are needed. As a result of the forum, a master list is being developed, which lists all persons in attendance and their contact information. The team is organizing a training for GALs in early 2006 and pursuing with its local bar association a supervised visitation program. ♦

NEW BEST PRACTICE COURT LEAD JUDGES

We want to welcome three new judges to the Best Practice Court Program. The Hon. Henry A. Barringer joins the Best Practice Court Program as the lead judge for **Tazewell J&DR District Court**. Judge Barringer replaces the Hon. Teresa Chafin who was elected to the Circuit Court bench. The Hon. J. Stephen Buis, **Richmond**, will re-



place Hon. Anne B. Holton who will become the First Lady of Virginia. The Hon. Gerald F. Dalton, Jr. takes over the role of lead judge for **Stafford J&DR**



District Court. He replaces Hon. J. Martin Bass who was elected to the Stafford Circuit Court Bench.

Photo Left: Judge Buis

2006 CALENDAR OF EVENTS:

- **February 1—Statewide meeting of Family Drug Treatment Court Teams—Richmond**
- **February 20—“Babes in Law Land”-Bedford and Campbell Best Practice Courts and the Family Law Section, Lynchburg Bar Association**
- **April 11—“Teenagers in Foster Care; Best Practices in Out-of-State Placements and Courtroom Practice” - Wise and Tazewell Best Practice Courts**
- **May 5—Local Training Event—Pulaski Best Practice Court**

Articles and photos of local activities are always welcome.

COURT IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM STAFF RESOURCES AVAILABLE FOR LOCAL INITIATIVES

- **Developing agendas and identifying initiative participants**
- **Developing program topics and contacting speakers**
- **Creating and/or mailing invitations**
- **Assembling notebooks**
- **Contacting speakers**
- **Copying materials for distribution**
- **Obtaining attendee “gifts”**

Please let CIP/OES know as soon as a local event is scheduled. Make sure to allow plenty of time for CIP to complete all tasks.

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT INSTITUTE

Judge Janice Brice of Prince William J&DR District Court was this year’s Best Practice Court representative at the 2005 Child Abuse and Neglect Institute in Reno, Nevada. This annual institute is sponsored by the National Council for Juvenile and Family Court Judges. Judge Brice said: “The weeklong course was a good opportunity to address the issues that judges confront in abuse and neglect cases, from initial filing to termination of parental rights”. She went on to say that “the use of real case studies from around the country and the resultant dialogue between judges from different states also provided invaluable insight on how to address common problems [faced by juvenile court judges]”. Best Practice Court lead judges interested in attending this Institute in June 2006 may call 804-786-5304 or email jlissenden@courts.state.va.us for more information.

