

Best Practice Court Matters

An update on the latest events of Best Practice Courts of Virginia
Court Improvement Program
Office of the Executive Secretary
Supreme Court of Virginia

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5th Statewide Best Practice Courts Conference November 17-18, 2009 Roanoke, Virginia

The Fifth Statewide Best Practice Courts Conference was held November 17-18, 2009, at the Hotel Roanoke. Nearly 215 participants, representing 31 local teams were in attendance. The format for this conference closely resembled past conferences but the content of the sessions offered much new information and exciting plans for the future.

As in past years, the conference focused on local programs related to statewide initiatives, which provided all attendees with an opportunity to receive training that was specifically geared towards their interests.



Judge Croxton Gordon, Northampton Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, talks with fellow Best Practice Court team member.

Lelia Hopper, Director of the Court Improvement Program, opened the conference with an introduction of seven new Best Practice Court teams and two new lead judges. She also discussed the support available to teams from the Court Improvement Program, including a new

CIP initiative that will make courts aware of performance



Judge Susan Whitlock, Judge Ashley Tunner, Judge Frank Somerville, First Lady Anne Holton and Ray Ratke presented an Update on the Children's Services Transformation.

measures through an analysis of their abuse, neglect and foster care reports.

The second plenary session was an update for the "Transformers" on the Children's Services Transformation. The Transformation arose out of the work that the First Lady of Virginia, Anne Holton, began as part of her *For Keeps* initiative. Raymond Ratke, Special Advisor on Children's Services for the Commonwealth of Virginia, traveled across the state this summer educating local stakeholders about the Transformation and providing statistical information about the improved outcomes being seen in Virginia. This plenary session was a follow-up on those train-

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Voices for Change - The Creative Vision of Virginia's Foster Youth

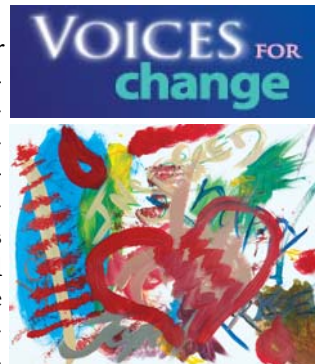
Beginning in 2008, Voices for Virginia's Children, in conjunction with the Virginia Poverty Law Center and Art 180, sponsored a program called "Voices for Change - The Creative Vision of Virginia's Foster Youth."

This program provided youth in foster care across Virginia the opportunity to express their emotions through art. Accepted mediums included photography, painting, poetry, and writing. The artwork submitted by these youth was evaluated and prizes were awarded.

An art show was developed to display work of these youth. The pieces of artwork traveled across the state during 2009, ending in Roanoke for the Best Practice Courts Conference.

Given the great success of this program, Voices for Change was offered again in 2009. A book, like the one provided to team members last year, was developed and will be shared with local teams in the near future. A reception was recently held at the Executive

Mansion to honor the foster youth involved in the program and to award prizes to the selected winners. ✧



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ing sessions. Mr. Ratke began the discussion by providing updated data and an analysis of the key achievements of the Transformation so far.

Anne Holton followed Mr. Ratke and discussed the successes she has seen and the challenges that have been overcome during her time as First Lady of Virginia. Judge Susan Whitlock, Louisa; Judge Ashley Tunner, Richmond; and Judge Frank Somerville, Culpeper; served on a panel moderated by the First Lady and shared their perspectives on the role of judicial leadership in the Transformation.

On the second day of the conference, the opening plenary session was "Focus on the Family." This session examined how we



Judge William W. Sharp, Warren County Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, chats with local team members.

can assure the active and meaningful participation of parents, children and key family supports in the service planning and decision-making processes of child dependency cases.

Paul McWhinney from the Virginia Department of Social Services opened the session with a discussion of the work being done on the state level to involve families and to implement a



Nancie Gallegos Kie, Denise Gallop, Buta Biberaj, Paul McWhinney, Gwen Monroe, Judge Winship Tower and Trudy Ellis presented on Family Engagement.

Family Engagement Model. VDSS and the Court Improvement Program will be partnering in 2010 to offer training and funding for Family Engagement for 5 local pilot teams.

Judge Winship Tower from Virginia Beach moderated the panel and provided a judge's perspective on this process. Panelists included Gwen Monroe, Director of the Frederick County Department of Social Services; Trudy Ellis, a mother who has personally experienced the service delivery process through her efforts on behalf of her son who has special needs; Nancie Gallegos Kie, Esq., who grew up in foster care and now practices as a Guardian Ad Litem in Warren; Buta Biberaj, GAL/Parents' Attorney in Loudoun; and Denise Sterling Gallop, CSA Coordinator, Hampton.

As in years past, participants were given time on the second day for professional designation meetings. These meetings provide an opportunity for participants to share challenges and successes from their communities and to learn from others. Each group came up with three ideas or resources that were presented at the conference and were of particular interest to the group. Action steps were identified and each group designated a representative to share their

plans with all attendees.

At past conferences, court teams have been given an opportunity to meet at the end of the second day to make plans for the future and to begin work on implementing new practices. This year, in the spirit

of collaboration, teams were divided by region and were given an opportunity to meet in larger groups. Dividing the teams in this way allowed for the pairing of new teams with more established teams and also allowed for the discussion of joint training efforts. The feedback from attendees on this new format was very positive.

The closing session, "Celebrating our Work and Sustaining the Momentum" wrapped up the conference and provided an opportunity for select teams to share plans for moving forward. ✧

Child Abuse and Neglect Institute June 14-18, 2010

The Court Improvement Program is pleased to be able to send 6 Virginia Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court judges to the 2010 Child Abuse and Neglect Institute in Reno, Nevada. This sought after training is sponsored by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. To be added to the waitlist to attend next year's 2011 Child Abuse and Neglect Institute, please contact a member of the CIP Staff. ✧

Breakout Sessions at the 5th Statewide Best Practice Courts Conference

In 2009, the Court Improvement Program offered each Best Practice Court team a mini-grant that was to be used to develop a local training or new initiative. Thirty of the 32 Best Practice Court teams developed a total of 28 local programs or initiatives. These programs reached over 2,600 local stakeholders.

The work that is done on a local level deserves much credit for the success of the Best Practice Court program as a whole. In order to allow teams to learn from each other, the breakout sessions for the Statewide Conference were all developed by local teams. Many of the sessions were topics that were addressed at local training events.

Teams were asked to submit proposals for breakout sessions, and ten of the proposals were selected for the final agenda. Breakout topics included:

- **Educating Parents in Child Dependency Cases About the Court Process**

This session was developed by members of the Pulaski and Loudoun Best Practice Court teams. Both teams have recently developed films that help parents understand and engage intelligently in the court process involving their child.

- **Child Advocacy Center and Enhanced Cooperation Between Child Protective Services and Law Enforcement**

This breakout session was developed by members of the Fredericksburg Best Practice Court team. The team provided information about the development and protocols for a multi-

jurisdiction child advocacy center, and discussed the importance of cooperation and coordination among child protective services workers, the police, the victim-witness coordinator, and prosecutors to protect children's safety and accomplish an appropriate placement.

- **Successful Use of Intensive Care Coordination in Partnership with Community Services Boards**

In the last year, guidelines have been developed for Intensive Care Coordination (ICC) services for children who are at risk of entering or are placed in residential care through the Comprehensive Services Act Program. Community Policy and Management teams and Family Assessment and Planning teams have substantial responsibilities in the execution of these services. The Culpeper Best Practice Court team, along with staff members from the Executive Branch, presented on this topic.



Judge Janine Saxe, far right, Fairfax County J&DR District Court, and panelists from Bridging the Gap breakout session.

- **Bridging the Gap: Families Working Together—A Foster Care and Adoption Initiative**

During this session, members of the Fairfax Best Practice Court team and invited guests highlighted one of the core principles of family engagement: promoting meaningful partnerships between foster and birth families as partners in promoting safety, permanency and well-being for children.

- **Children's Services System Transformation**

This session was offered as a basic course for attendees who had not previously received training on the Children's Services System Transformation. It explored the ways that CSST impacts the work being done on behalf of children and families across Virginia.

- **Using CSA Funds More Effectively and Inventively to Prevent Foster Care Placements**

This session focused on the efforts of both the Richmond and Charlottesville Best Practice Court teams and their effective and inventive use of CSA tools and funding to access and develop programs designed to maintain children first and foremost in their homes and communities.

- **Youth in Fast Forward—Best Practice Tools for Working with Teens in Foster Care**

This binder-based program is the product of collaborative efforts between Hampton's Best Practice Court team, the Hampton Division of Social Services, and other local agencies working to assist foster children and their families in the City of Hampton. This initiative was established in order to increase positive outcomes for youth aging out of the foster care system.

- **Making Permanent Connections with Parents and Relatives in Child Dependency Cases**

During this session, Stafford and Roanoke County Best Practice Court teams described the work being done in their localities to engage families early and often in the court and service delivery process to assure posi-

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Court Improvement Program
Office of the Executive Secretary, Supreme Court of Virginia
100 North Ninth Street, Third Floor
Richmond, Virginia 23219
Director: Lelia Baum Hopper
Editor: Jane Lissenden Wiggins
Telephone: (804) 786-6455
Website: www.courts.state.va.us
E-mail: jwiggins@courts.state.va.us*

BEST PRACTICE COURTS OF VIRGINIA

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Fredericksburg	Roanoke Co./Salem	Wmsburg/James City
Hampton	Smyth	Winchester/Frederick Wise/Norton

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tive outcomes for dependent children and youth.

• Coordinated Community Response to Children Not Attending School

Campbell and Warren Best Practice Court teams shared steps being taken in their communities to improve court, school, and community services relationships, to ensure that those most at-risk (young children and children with special needs) achieve educational success.

• ABC's of Successful Community Collaboration Utilizing Judicial Leadership

This session explored the Bristol/Washington and Winchester/Frederick Best Practice Court teams' challenges and critical components to successful court team and community initiatives. Both teams presented on their approach to creating a system of care and enhancing permanency to benefit children and families before the courts.

Additional information on CIP-related matters and the Best Practice Courts Program is available on-line at: <http://www.courts.state.va.us/courtadmin/aoc/cip/home.html>. Please contact a member of the CIP Staff for more information on the breakout sessions at the 5th Statewide Best Practice Courts Conference.

CIP appreciates the dedication of all team members who made this conference a success. ✧

CASA Cardboard Kids

A dozen life size cardboard children were shared with CIP by Janet Cleveland, Executive Director of CASA for Children in Staunton and a member of the Staunton/Augusta Best Practice Court Team, to "bring the children into the room" during the plenary and breakout sessions of the conference. ✧



2010 Calendar of Events

April 21-22 - CIP Conference for JDR Judges and Clerks

June 14-18 - Child Abuse and Neglect Institute (Reno, Nevada)

July 18-21 - NCJFCJ Annual Conference (San Diego, California)

November 21- National Adoption Day

Fall 2010 - Class of 2010 Best Practice Courts Conference - for new courts only.

National Adoption Day 2009

November 2009 marked the 10th Anniversary of National Adoption Day. Celebrations took place across the Commonwealth to honor adoptive families and provide an opportunity for courts to open their doors and finalize the adoptions of children from foster care.

Participants in these events included local child welfare agency affiliates, attorneys/GALs, CASA representatives, local leaders, families of the adoptees, and members of Campbell County, Fredericksburg, Loudoun County, Newport News, Richmond City, and Roanoke/Salem Best Practice Courts of Virginia.



To learn more about National Adoption Day events in Virginia, log on to: <http://www.nationaladoptionday.org>. ✧