

Best Practice Court Matters

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

Court Improvement Program

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Office of the Executive Secretary, Supreme Court of Virginia

Summer 2004

Best Practice Courts of Virginia - Keeping Up the Momentum !

mo-men-tum 1. capacity for progressive development: the power to increase or develop at an ever-growing pace 2. *the Best Practice Courts of Virginia*

The Best Practice Courts of Virginia program, now in its third year, defines the word "momentum" as local court teams continue to work diligently toward the goal of improving the response of the judicial system to litigation involving Virginia's dependent children and their families. Following are summaries of activities recently reported by various Best Practice Court communities:



Judge Ellen White, Campbell JDR (far right) and Judge J. Samuel Johnston, Jr. Campbell Circuit (far left) participated in Campbell County's first Adoption Day Celebration. The second annual Celebration will be held on November 20, 2004.

Alexandria: Under the leadership of **Judge Stephen Rideout** (retired as of August 1, 2004) and **Judge Nolan Dawkins**, Alexandria has collaborated with the Alexandria Regional Housing Authority, DSS, Northern Virginia Transitional Living Program, Headstart, Alive and the Carpenter's Shelter in developing the Family Unification Voucher Project. This provides housing vouchers to families in danger of losing their children and to families who are having children returned from foster care. Community outreach continues with this court team through television appearances to discuss initiatives of the court and DSS and a foster parent/adoptive parent recruitment forum.

Bedford: Bedford's FOCAS (Foster

Care Solutions) members have had a productive 2004. The group is implementing successful dependency mediation while making plans to implement family group conferencing as well. **Judge Philip Wallace** at tended a dependency mediation training conference in Washington, DC in May. Also, the Guardian Ad Litem Handbook, created by FOCAS, is now available in hard copy and on CD for distribution to other localities.

Campbell: "Campbell's Children First Committee," led by **Judge Ellen White**, continues to hold monthly luncheon meetings. The community's Second Annual Adoption Day

Celebration is scheduled for November 20, 2004, at Campbell Circuit Court. Other activities include the filming of an informational video for litigants taped in early August and contract negotiations with Piedmont Psychiatric Center and Central Virginia Community Services to have all court ordered psychological and substance abuse evaluations performed and filed within 60 days of the preliminary removal hearings to implement the front-loading order.

Charlottesville/Albemarle: The Charlottesville/Albemarle Guardian Ad Litem Performance Standards Training, held on June 10, was a huge success. **Judge Edward Berry** opened and closed the session. The training panel included: Deborah Tinsley, DSS counsel, who discussed guidelines of the foster care system; Catherine Lowe, guardian ad litem-immigration law and how to be prepared; Thistle Newcomb, Charlottesville DSS-importance of concurrent planning; and Rory Carpenter, Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee-results of a survey to investigate the impressions and

concerns of those involved in the juvenile court system. The Charlottesville team was very pleased with the turnout and the information provided.

Culpeper: *Judge Frank Somerville* reports that the Culpeper team has conducted regular meetings with guardians ad litem, mediators, the local department of social services, the court services unit, local service providers, and the police department. Culpeper DSS has been approved for training on concurrent planning; the Culpeper mediator has been approved to mediate foster care plans; and the court has been involved in a district-wide training on the Standards to Govern the Performance of Guardians Ad Litem for children.

Fairfax: The Fairfax J&DR District Court and the Fairfax County Permanency Planning Forum, under the leadership of *Judge David Schell* and *Judge Gayl Carr*, will hold its local CIP training on two separate occasions this fall – September 8 and October 13. The total number of attendees for the two days of training is expected to be approximately 225.

Fredericksburg: The Fredericksburg J&DR District Court sponsored a local CIP training on April 30, 2004, with more than 60 participants from Fredericksburg, King George, Spotsylvania, and Stafford. *Judge David Peterson* welcomed the group in the morning and closed the day's events after leading a discussion of future plans for the handling of child dependency issues in that locality.

Hampton: In addition to regular team meetings held every other month, *Judge Jay Dugger* meets with representatives of the Hampton Department of Social Services every two weeks to review local

policy and procedures. Hampton's "Safe Harbor for Kids" supervised visitation and exchange center for children involved in foster care or private custody cases is now open and accepting referrals from the Hampton DSS and the court.

Henrico: The Henrico Best Practice team, led by *Judge Sharon Will* and *Judge Denis Soden*, is sponsoring a very special training event from 1:30-4:00 p.m., September 7 for the Greater Richmond area. Jennifer Renne of the ABA Center on Children and the Law, and Gary Mallon from the National Resource Center for Foster Care & Permanency Planning, Hunter College-School of Social Work in New York City, will present a program on teenagers in foster care.

Louisa: Gail Proffitt, Clerk of Court, writing on behalf of *Judge Susan Whitlock*, reports that the Louisa Best Practice Team is holding regular meetings. The Louisa DSS applied for and was accepted as a pilot agency for concurrent planning training. Together, the court and the agency have initiated parenting classes. Also, the team is currently working locally with someone to handle community service referrals.

Newport News: A current priority for the Newport News team, led by *Judge Ronald Bensten*, is a new intake process for front loading services for reunification of children and families. The Newport News DSS is partnering with other community agencies to provide services. The court is also undergoing training in order to implement a Family Treatment Drug Court.

Pulaski: *Judge Lee Chitwood* reports that in May the Pulaski Best Practice Courts team held a half-day "children in foster care" seminar with approximately fifty atten-

dees. With regular meetings held quarterly, the original team has expanded to include CASA and an additional attorney. One significant accomplishment is the implementation of a uniform appeals process with the Circuit Court to ensure a quick resolution of child dependency case appeals. They have also instigated a process to ensure that child support matters are heard no later than at a 75-day hearing.



Judge Lee Chitwood, Pulaski, and Judge Anita Filson, Staunton/Augusta, attended the 2004 Child Abuse and Neglect Institute: The Role of the Judge, held in Reno, Nevada in June. This weeklong course enhances the knowledge and skills necessary for judges to effectively handle child abuse and neglect cases.

Richmond: Recent activities of Richmond's "Millennium Team," under the leadership of *Judge Anne Holton*, have included: a pre-court staff training on foster care case processing; an expanded CIP training, "Law, Procedures and Best Practices in Child Dependency Cases," held on June 4 (with an attendance of approximately 170 people); and a joint meeting with Family Drug Courts from Alexandria and Charlottesville on June 29. Also, various team members have been active participants in the "Virginia Safe Families in Recovery Project," the technical assistance project of the National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (NCSACW).

Roanoke Co./Salem: The Roanoke County/Salem Best Practice Court

team, "Community Advocates for Children," holds regular stakeholder meetings. Current goals for improvement for children in foster care include the issues of transportation, psychological counseling, substance abuse treatment, and better dental care. The team, under the leadership of **Judge Philip Trompeter**, ultimately hopes to obtain as many types of services as possible within the community to benefit those in need and to provide clear information to all parties regarding court and social services procedures.

Staunton/Augusta: The Staunton/Augusta team, led by **Judge Anita Filson**, met on January 21, 2004 to plan for the community's focus on children in foster care, and chose the name, "CAP Team" (Children Achieving Permanency). A community-wide meeting was held on March 26, 2004. Guest speaker, **Judge Philip Wallace** from Bedford County JDR, addressed the enthusiastic group on how to handle foster care in a creative and inclusive way. Specific short-term goals include: supervised visitation for parents of children in foster care; improving communication with foster parents; and obtaining medical and psychological evaluations more quickly. Developing a family foster care facility is a current long-term goal.

Tazewell: The Tazewell County Best Practice Courts Committee, led by **Judge Teresa Chafin**, has considered many important issues during its regular community meetings. Two of those issues are counseling needs for juveniles involved in the court system and juvenile substance abuse. Lelia Hopper, Director of the Supreme Court of Virginia's Court Improvement Program, attended the committee's

meeting on the afternoon of June 14, and the following day conducted a local CIP training at the Southwest Community Center in Richlands for approximately 75 attendees from Judicial District 29.

Virginia Beach: The Virginia Beach Best Practice Courts Committee, led by **Judge Ramona Taylor** and **Judge Winship Tower**, held an organizational meeting on March 19, with follow-up meetings on April 30 and June 14. Three subcommittees have been formed: Services and Resources; Prevention; and Communication. Issues currently being addressed by these groups include mentoring for post-residential placements, exploration of mediation for foster care cases; improvement of communication among all parties in order to advance children to permanency more quickly; development of an educational videotape for families in dependency proceedings; and exploration of the Family Drug Court concept and other means of substance abuse treatment for parents.

Warren: **Judge William Sharp** reports that the Warren County Best Practice Courts team is working toward setting up a CASA program, possibly joining forces with the new team from Winchester/Frederick. Court user group meetings for members of the group working directly with the Court will be held soon. Plans for a November Adoption Day Celebration, a joint effort of the local dss agency and the court, are in process.

Wise/Norton: The Best Practice Court Team of Wise County, led by **Judge Elizabeth Wills**, holds meetings on the second Tuesday of each month. One of this team's initiatives involves forming a close relationship between the court and the

local dss agencies in reviewing cases on an individual basis to assure accuracy and timeliness in the handling of each case. In addition, Judge Wills has met with the Circuit Court Clerk to emphasize the importance of making foster care cases a priority on that court's docket. The group is working on a form-tracking system, interstate compact issues, and the education of new attorneys in the proper court procedures for handling abuse/neglect and foster care cases.

Concurrent Planning Pilot Agencies Selected by Virginia DSS

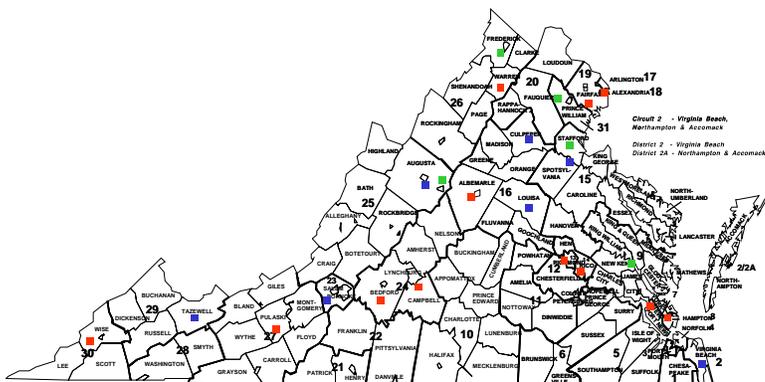
A focus of the 2003 Best Practice Courts Conference was the concept of concurrent planning, defined as "a structured approach to case management which requires working towards family reunification while at the same time, developing an alternate permanency plan." Virginia DSS has committed to adding additional local dss agencies to this initiative each year. The following Best Practice Courts dss agencies are currently involved:

- | | |
|-----------------|----------|
| Albemarle | Hampton |
| Alexandria | Henrico |
| Charlottesville | Louisa |
| Culpeper | Tazewell |
| Fairfax | Warren |



Judge Philip Wallace of Bedford, and **Judge Frank Somerville** of Culpeper, take a moment during the August District Court Judges Conference at Virginia Beach to visit with **Kathy Mays**, Director of Judicial Planning, Office of the Executive Secretary, Supreme Court of Virginia.

Best Practice Court Matters...



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Court Improvement Program
Office of the Executive Secretary
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100 North Ninth Street, Third Floor
Richmond, Virginia 23219*

*Director: Lelia Hopper
Editor: Bet Lissenden
Telephone: (804) 786-6455
Website: www.courts.state.va.us
E-mail: blissenden@courts.state.va.us*



**CLASS OF 2004 BEST PRACTICE COURTS judges are (clockwise from left):
Hon. Victor V. Ludwig-Waynesboro; Hon. Paul F. Gluchowski-Prince William;
Hon. J. Martin Bass-Stafford; Hon. George C. (Jeff) Fairbanks, IV-Williamsburg/
James City County; (seated) Hon. Janice Justina Brice-Prince William;
and Hon. Elizabeth Kellas-Winchester/Frederick.**

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Sept. 7- Henrico's Greater Richmond Area Program-Teenagers in Foster Care**
- Sept. 8- Fairfax BPC Training-Part I**
- Oct. 13 - Fairfax BPC Training-Part II**
- Nov. 14-16- Best Practice Courts Conference '04**
- Nov. 20- Adoption Saturday Celebrations:
~ Alexandria
~ Campbell
~ Hampton
~ Richmond**

Guardian Ad Litem Performance Standards Trainings for Best Practice Court Localities

Thanks to the efforts of the courts, local CASA groups, and local bar associations, training seminars for discussion of the *Standards to Govern the Performance of Guardians Ad Litem for Children*, adopted by the Judicial Council in September 2003, have been or will be held in the following Best Practice Courts localities this year:

- ~ Staunton/Augusta-May 28
- ~ Charlottesville/Albemarle-June 10
- ~ Virginia Beach-July 21
- ~ Louisa-August 2
- ~ Roanoke-September 10
- ~ Bedford/Campbell-September 16

For information about conducting this training for your locality, please call Caroline Cardwell at the Virginia Bar Association, 804-644-0041 (ccardwell@vba.org) or Lelia Hopper at 804-786-9546 (lhopper@courts.state.va.us).

**3rd Annual Best Practice Courts Conference
Welcome to the Class of 2004 !**

The **2004 Best Practice Courts Conference** will be held at the Sheraton Park South Hotel in Richmond, Virginia on November 15-16, 2004. In addition, plans are underway for an early orientation session on Sunday evening, November 14 for the Class of 2004 teams and mentor teams from 2002-2003. Special faculty, Judge Cindy Lederman of Miami, Florida, will offer a training presentation on young children in foster care. Judge Lederman is a nationally renowned lecturer on domestic law and children's rights and is a tireless advocate for women and children. She will be joined by Victoria Youcha, Ed.D., of Washington, DC., Project Director, Zero to Three.