

Best Practice Court Matters

An update on the latest events of Best Practice Courts of Virginia
Court Improvement Program

Volume 6, Issue 1 Office of the Executive Secretary, Supreme Court of Virginia Winter 2008

BEST PRACTICE COURT MINI-GRANTS ENCOURAGE LOCAL PROGRAMS AND ESTABLISH COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

As the Best Practice Court program in Virginia enters its sixth consecutive year, the 26 local court teams continue to engage local stakeholders in training events, Adoption Saturday Celebrations and team meetings aimed at improving court practice for all of Virginia's children and families.

BEST PRACTICE COURT MINI-GRANTS

In 2007, Virginia's 26 Best Practice Courts were awarded mini-grants to support their efforts to develop a local training program. Courts were encouraged to sponsor a multi-disciplinary event focused on current issues that impact the local J&DR District Court.



www.forkeepsvirginia.org

In addition to financial assistance, the Court Improvement Program, Office of the Executive Secretary, provided staff support, as needed, to each of the local teams. The results of this initiative were far-reaching.

Local teams sponsored 19 mini-grant events, reaching well over 1,000 local stake-

holders. Speakers for the programs came from many different professional backgrounds and included representatives from the legal, medical, law enforcement, child welfare and counseling fields. The majority of speakers were from within the community; however, some jurisdictions elected to use their funds to engage national speakers.

Topics for the programs varied based on the particular needs of each community. Permanency for teens in foster care, substance abuse, practice pointers for local stakeholders, case processing in child dependency cases and future team initiatives were all topics that appeared on many agendas.

FOR KEEPS **FAMILIES FOR ALL** **VIRGINIA TEENS**

In the past year, much attention has been paid to older teens in foster care in Virginia. The children in this demographic are often over-

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71ST ANNUAL NCJFCJ CONFERENCE TO BE HELD IN NORFOLK, VA

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) will host the 71st Annual National Conference in Norfolk, Virginia on July 27—30 2008.



The mission of NCJFCJ is "to improve courts and systems practice and raise awareness of the core issues that touch the lives of many of [the] nation's children and families." Since 1999, NCJFCJ has conducted 67 local training events in Virginia. These trainings have reached over 4,200 judges, magistrates, commissioners, attorneys and other juvenile and family court related professionals.

Many of Virginia's J&DR judges successfully worked for the opportunity to host this national conference in Virginia. The opportunity for so many Virginia judges to attend a national conference is not likely to present itself again in the near future.

Five Best Practice Court judges are currently serving on a subcommittee that has been charged with developing educational topics. Their ef-

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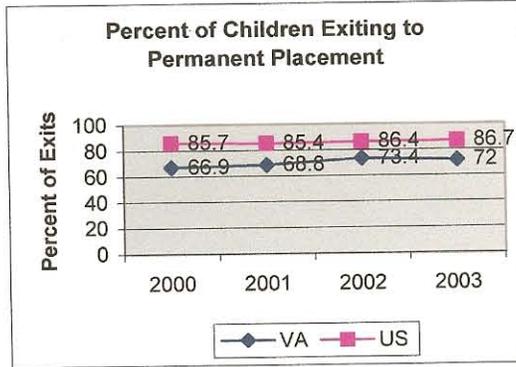
demographic are often overlooked and as a whole, have a much lower rate of achieving permanency when compared to other children in Virginia who enter foster care at a younger age.

The First Lady of Virginia, Anne Holton, through her work with the *For Keeps* initiative, has made these children her priority. She travels throughout Virginia raising awareness about this cause and has teamed-up with the Casey Strategic Consulting Group (CSCG) to make presentations at Best Practice Court events in **Bedford/Campbell** and **Pulaski**.

In addition to the work that the *For Keeps* project and CSCG are doing, Child Trends, an independent research organization focused on children, is analyzing Virginia's child welfare system using data obtained from the Department of Social Services' OASIS database and CSA data.

Child Trends data indicates that 72% of all children in foster care in Virginia achieve permanency. Nationally, this number is 86.7%. When a Virginia child enters foster care at the age of 12 or older, his chance of achieving permanency drops to 43.7%.

The First Lady's presentations at the local Best Practice Court events



focused on strengthening permanent families for teens in foster care. She places much emphasis on the importance of children's involvement in court proceedings that determine their futures.

In addition to presentations by the First Lady, many Best Practice Courts have included panel presentations made up of young adults who have spent time in the foster care system.

This type of panel was on the agenda at the statewide Best Practice Courts Conference held in November 2006 and has been included in local events for **Bedford/Campbell, Tazewell, Pulaski, Charlottesville/Albemarle, Louisa, Culpeper, and Stafford**.

"This was the 'poetic moment' of the day that brought to life issues in foster care. The articulate, competent young people were utterly transparent, open about their pain, successes, and failures."

-Evaluation Response about Foster Care Panel

The panels allow local stakeholders to hear how these young adults really feel about the foster care system and offer a rare opportunity for

the panelists to have an impact on the way foster care

cases are handled in the future.

Most of the teens say that they are grateful for the services they have been provided in foster care and appreciate the help they have been given with becoming independent adults, especially with pursuing higher education.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE ISSUES IN VIRGINIA

Substance abuse continues to have a major impact on Virginia's foster care population. While the drug of choice may be different from one locality to another, the ultimate impact on children in care is the same.

A number of Best Practice Courts included sessions related to substance abuse on the agendas for their local programs.

The **Wise** and **Bedford/Campbell** Best Practice Court events took a closer look at growing problems related to methamphetamines. Meth has quickly become a major problem in the western part of Virginia. Police officers and representatives from the Department of Social Services travel throughout Virginia educating local stakeholders about the serious risks this drug poses both to users and to anyone else who may come in contact with the hazardous chemicals emitted when the drug is being manufactured.

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From Left: Clerk Dawn Williams, First Lady of Virginia, Anne Holton and Clerk Stacey Arrington at the Bedford /Campbell Best Practice Court event.



From Left: Judge Gerald Daltan, Kay Murphy and Dr. John Childress all spoke at the Stafford Best Practice Court event held on November 9, 2007.



James McCarron, CSU, and Katherine Froyd, DFS, attended the Best Practice Court Conference in Fairfax on November 30, 2007.



Above: Judge Stephen Rideout, Judicial Consultant for CIP, presented on the ICPC at the Loudoun Best Practice Court event and facilitated the Henrico "Children First" Team Retreat held in January 2008.



From Left: Judge Frank Somerville, Deborah Tinsley, Esq., Judge Edward Berry and Judge Susan Whitlock all helped to develop the agenda for the Charlottesville/ Albemarle/Culpeper/Louisa Best Practice Court event.

Below: Participants enjoy refreshments at the Charlottesville/Albemarle/Louisa/Culpeper event.



Right: Jennifer Renne, Esq., National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues and John White, Guardian Ad Litem for Children, presented at the Loudoun Best Practice Court event on November 1, 2007.



From Left: First Lady of Virginia, Anne Holton, Judge Lee Chitwood, Shannon May and Dr. Maria Encarnacion at the Pulaski Best Practice Court event.



From Left: Susan Read, Guardian Ad Litem for Children, Barbara Balogh, Assistant Ethics Counsel for the Virginia State Bar, and James Glick, Counsel for Shenandoah Valley DSS, presented at the Staunton/Augusta/Waynesboro Best Practice Court event on November 2, 2007.



Over 100 representatives from the community filled a courtroom at the Pulaski J&DR District Court for the program, "The Older Child in Foster Care."

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substance abuse on child development and the physical and emotional impact it has on children. They also included a brief session on drug and alcohol testing. Lynn Beatty from Transformations Counseling Services discussed the uses of substance abuse evaluations and issues related to treatment.

The **Pulaski** Best Practice Court hosted an event at the courthouse which focused on issues related to teens. Dr. Maria D. Encarnacion, Medical Director for the Life Center of Galax, spoke about the impact that drug and alcohol addiction has on teens in foster care. She called addiction the greatest threat to teens in care and included materials on usage, symptoms, and treatments for drugs often used in Virginia.

PRACTICE POINTERS FOR LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

A number of courts included sessions related to best practices in child dependency cases on their mini-grant agendas.

In **Loudoun**, Judge Avelina Jacob and Judge Pamela Brooks teamed up with attor-



Judges Kimberly Daniel, Michael McWeeny, Thomas Mann, Janine Saxe and David Schell attended the Fairfax County Best Practice Court event on November 30, 2007.

neys John White and Matthew Snow to discuss how to represent parents and children in child dependency cases. A spirited presentation and discussion followed on the ethical dilemmas facing parents' attorneys and GALs in these cases with Jennifer Renne of the ABA and Buta Biberaj, Esq.

The **Tazewell** Best Practice Court asked Lelia Hopper, Director of the Court Improvement Program, to serve as moderator for a panel that looked at current best practices in this area. Panelists for this session included representatives from the Department of Social Services, Child Protective Services and the local bar.

Virginia Beach's Best Practice Court program included a session that discussed perspectives from the bench and the Department of Human Services on effective representation of parents in Virginia Beach Courts. This roundtable discussion included Judge Patricia West from the Virginia Beach Circuit Court, Judges Deborah Bryan and Winship Tower from the Virginia Beach

J&DR District Court, and representatives from the Virginia Beach Department of Human Services and the local bar.

In **Fairfax**, a one-hour session offered suggestions for best practices in the courtroom. Judges

David Schell and Teena Grodner from Fairfax J&DR District Court were included on the panel with Judge Michael McWeeny from Fairfax Circuit Court and Judge George Varoutsos from Arlington J&DR District Court. Evaluation results for this presentation were very positive and attendees appreciated the opportunity to hear this information directly from the judges.

The Best Practice Court Team in **Hampton** hosted a daylong event that focused on Parental Capacity Evaluations and effective communication with young children. The afternoon portion of the program featured Doctors Suzanne Starling and Michelle Clayton from the Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters who discussed the medical evaluation of child abuse and neglect. Dr. Starling will be presenting on this topic at the NCJFCJ Conference in July 2008.

LOCAL CIP TRAINING EVENTS

Two courts decided to return to the basics and focus their training efforts on case processing in child dependency

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Dr. Michelle Clayton, Judge Jay Dugger and Dr. Suzanne Starling at the Hampton Best Practice Court event on September 28, 2008.

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forts are providing a rare opportunity for Virginia to showcase the work being done in local courts before a national audience.

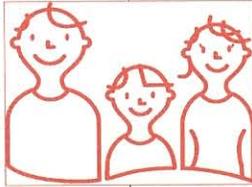
As a result of the work being done by the education subcommittee, 14 Virginia programs are currently included on the conference agenda.

Topics on the agenda include sessions that were originally developed for local mini-grant events in **Bedford/Campbell, Charlottesville/Albemarle/Culpeper/Louisa, Hampton and Winchester/Frederick.**

The First Lady of Virginia, Anne Holton, will speak to the conference about her "For Keeps" initiative and further highlight Virginia's efforts to improve the lives of children in foster care.

There will also be a breakout session that focuses on integrating best practices in child dependency litigation into local court processes and collaboration. Representatives from Virginia, Colorado and Utah will lead this panel presentation and provide information on the development and maintenance of their Best Practice Court programs.

CIP hopes that all interested judges will attend the NCJFCJ National Conference. This is an educational opportunity not to be missed!



Improving Court Practice For Children and Families

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training efforts on case processing in child dependency cases. Several years ago, Lelia Hopper traveled throughout Virginia conducting day long programs for judges, clerk's office personnel, attorneys and representatives from local departments of social services.

Judge Jeff Fairbanks, lead judge for the **Williamsburg/James City** Best Practice Court, along with local stakeholders from throughout the 9th Judicial District participated in a 3 hour refresher course that provided an overview of law, procedures and best practices in child dependency cases.

Judge Anita Filson from the **Staunton/Augusta** Best Practice Court supported a Local CIP training for participants in the 25th Judicial District. This court, along with the **Waynesboro** Best Practice Court team, also hosted a local training event that focused on Reactive Attachment Disorder and included a two hour presentation on ethical dilemmas for attorneys who represent children parents and the agency in child dependency cases.

**MOVING FORWARD
WHERE DO WE GO
FROM HERE?**

As part of an effort to initiate a new

Systems of Care program, the **Roanoke County/Salem** Best Practice Court enlisted the help of Mike Terkeltaub, former CSA Coordinator for Hampton, who is now Executive Director of Triad Training and Consultant Services. "Systems of Care is an approach to services that recognizes the importance of family, school and community, and seeks to promote the full potential of every child and youth by addressing their physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural and social needs."

During two separate day-long events, local stakeholders looked at plans and obstacles related to this new program and discussed the next steps for Roanoke County and Salem.

The **Winchester/Frederick** Best Practice Court, under the leadership of Judge Elizabeth Kellas, was joined by representatives from the **Warren** Best Practice Court for a day-long training focused on truancy issues in May 2007. The teams looked at the successful implemen-

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Dr. John Hunter, Dr. Jeffrey Fracher and Judge Frank Somerville were all involved with "Meeting Our Children's Needs", sponsored by the Charlottesville, Culpeper and Louisa Best Practice Courts.

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BEST PRACTICE COURTS OF VIRGINIA

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

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tation of Best Practices in Hampton and discussed ways to implement similar practices in their own area. Time was included on the agenda for group discussions and development of community strategies.

The **Henrico** J&DR District Court was a member of the Best Practice Court Class of 2002. After 6 years of service and many impressive accomplishments, the "Children First" team held a retreat in January 2008 to develop a new focus and new energy for this local effort. Judge Stephen Rideout served as facilitator for the half-day event which focused on past accomplishments and identifying future tasks.

As part of an effort included

in its Strategic Plan, the **Richmond** Best Practice Court hosted "Painting a New Picture: Changing the Way Richmond Serves Children and Families."

This program was coordinated by Richmond's Millennium Team and addressed issues associated with the use of residential placement and congregate care for Richmond youth in foster care. Karl Dennis and Ira Lourie, both nationally recognized speakers, shared their tips for successfully implementing this type of program locally.



national adoption day

www.nationaladoptionday.org

NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY CELEBRATIONS

"For the last seven years, National Adoption Day has made the dreams of thousands of children come true by working with courts, judges, attorneys, adoption

professionals, child welfare agencies and advocates to finalize adoptions and find permanent, loving homes for children in foster care." Last year, a total of 250 celebrations were held across the country, including 11 events throughout Virginia.

A quarter page advertisement in *Virginia Lawyers Weekly* included details about local programs and listed contact information for anyone interested in attending one of these events.

Best Practice Courts that hosted these events include:

- **Alexandria**
- **Campbell**
- **Charlottesville**
- **Fredericksburg**
- **Hampton**
- **Newport News**
- **Norfolk**
- **Prince William**
- **Pulaski**
- **Richmond**
- **Roanoke County/Salem**

With over 114,000 children currently awaiting permanency in our country, the importance of these events which raise awareness throughout the community cannot be overstated.

Please remember to keep CIP in the loop about local initiatives currently underway in your community. We are proud of the efforts being made throughout Virginia and try to take every opportunity to showcase the cutting edge work you are doing on behalf of Virginia's children and families.

KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK!