



UNIFIED FAMILY COURT *Connection*

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UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE SCHOOL OF LAW ■ SAYRA AND NEIL MEYERHOFF CENTER FOR FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND THE COURTS

Tools of Science Become Instruments for Justice

RONALD A. SILKWORTH

Reflecting on the “many twists and turns” of a law career, including those that can never be “predicted or anticipated,” Maryland Court of Appeals Chief Judge Mary Ellen Barbera said she never imagined she would head up Maryland’s highest court one day.

Like Judge Barbera, who offered her reflections during a talk to law students shortly after being named Chief Judge, I never thought that I would become a judge. I was not even sure I wanted to be a lawyer. What I did know, after a less than successful attempt at Biology 101 and freshman Calculus, is that I did not want to pursue a career in the sciences.

My “twists and turns” led me to serve over eighteen years on the Circuit Court for Anne Arundel County, Maryland, and to become an Advanced Science and Technology Adjudication Resource Center (ASTAR) Fellow, one of 58 Maryland judges

and approximately 450 judges nationwide who have been trained extensively in science. I now serve as Chair of the Center for Membership of the National Courts and Science Institute¹ (NCSI), a national foundation geared to the training of ASTAR Fellows.

Since 2004, Maryland has been a leader in the national movement toward increased science training for judges, including neuroscience and the behavioral sciences. The late Judge Robert Moyer, the Chief Judge of the Supreme Court of Ohio who partnered with former Chief Judge Robert Bell of the Maryland Court of Appeals in 2004 to make the vision of

Since 2004, Maryland has been a leader in the national movement towards increased science training for judges, including neuroscience and the behavioral sciences.

ASTAR a reality, described the commitment made by these judges: “to help lead the way nationally to understand the scientific issues that impact our courtrooms and to transform the tools of science into instruments for justice.”

From my experience of over 40 years as a lawyer and judge, I have seen firsthand that drug use and mental illness issues predominate in about 85 percent of the cases filed in our courts. In families, this often leads to abuse, harmful relationships, violence, separation of parents and children, single parenthood, severe money problems, and behavioral difficulties in children. The courts are called upon to deal with all of these issues and more in an adversarial system that too often exacerbates the problems and most often lacks the necessary resources to enable the litigants to resolve them through counseling.

I recently interviewed a 10-year-old girl in a custody case. As she walked into my office, tears streamed down her face. After introducing her to my law clerk and offer-

Overview

As a growing number of families enter the court systems nationwide, the creation of problem-solving courts and expanded judicial training have helped address the needs of families and children in a more holistic and therapeutic way.

This issue of the Unified Family Court Connection offers the perspectives of judges and practitioners on the problem-solving approach to judicial decision-making:

- **Judge Ronald A. Silkworth**, the Chief Judge of the Anne Arundel County Circuit Court and the Fifth Judicial Circuit in Maryland, writes about the importance of science training for judges to help them address behavioral issues that destroy families and disrupt the lives of children.
- **Kertisha L. Dixon, Esq.**, a staff attorney with the House of Ruth Maryland, one of the nation’s leading intimate partner violence centers, discusses the importance of stopping the cycle of domestic violence that affects scores of victims nationwide.
- **Judge Ginger Lerner-Wren**, a Broward County (Florida) Court judge and pioneer of the first mental health court in the United States, writes about the importance of utilizing the therapeutic approach in courts.
- **Gray Barton**, the director of the Maryland Judiciary’s Office of Problem-Solving Courts, addresses the issue of how courts are now more focused on problem solving and alternative remedies that are not effectively accommodated by the current legal and adjudicatory process.

In our Family Courts, the opportunity is there to effect change, and to address the behavioral issues that not only destroy families and disrupt the lives of children, but also lead to an increase in juvenile and criminal filings.

ing a new coloring book, I learned that she was not afraid of me, the judge. She was frightened of how her parents would react when the case concluded. Her 9-year-old brother was less emotional but also scared. Like so many other children, they were caught up in an adversarial process that caused parents to lose sight of the short-term and long-term impact of the stress placed on their children. This scene plays out in courtrooms across this state and country. These children are the victims of child abuse. Unfortunately, too often these children do not get the help that they need because the resources are not available. The supportive environment that is necessary to help these children cannot exist without adequate resources and trained judges familiar with the new paradigm.

Science training for judges is critically important in our Family Courts as we move forward. In 2002, with the adoption of the Performance Standards and Measures for Maryland's Family Divisions, the judiciary realized, that

the effective resolution of legal disputes within a family requires a fundamental shift from the traditional adjudication focus to a more *holistic, therapeutic model* that attempts to improve the lives of families and children in substantive ways. To achieve this new paradigm, there must be a confluence of access to coordinated and comprehensive legal and *social services*, efficient case processing and management, and a more widely accessible court system.

We have made great strides in the case processing and management areas, which ensure that family law cases are heard on a timely basis. Currently, Anne Arundel County is rolling out the next generation of case management technology, the Maryland Electronic Court (MDEC) project that eventually will be introduced to all Maryland courts.

It is not enough to efficiently process cases. The Family Division paradigm requires not only timely access to the courts but also to the services necessary to effectively deal with the problems facing so many of our families. Indeed, the mission of Maryland's Family Divisions is to provide a fair and efficient forum to resolve family legal matters in a problem-solving manner—with the ultimate goal of improving the lives of families and children who appear before the court. The Performance Standards state that:

...[T]he court shall make appropriate services available for families who need them. The court also shall provide an environment that supports judges, court staff and attorneys so that they can respond effectively to the many legal and non-legal issues of families in the justice system.

I have learned from my ASTAR science training that key discoveries in neuroscience have revealed a more comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of the impact of stress and abuse on the developing brain. With incredible specificity, scientists have mapped how the experience

of abuse in childhood changes the growing brain and predisposes it to psychiatric disorders in adulthood. This overwhelming exposure to physiological stress, as experienced by the 10-year-old girl discussed above, results in damage to her developing brain. She is a victim of child abuse. Such children face problems, including depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, post-traumatic stress disorder, aggression, addiction and impulsiveness.

In our Family Courts, the opportunity is there to effect change and, to address the behavioral issues that not only destroy families and disrupt the lives of children, but also lead to an increase in juvenile and criminal filings. The Performance Standards provide us with the vision and framework needed to transfer our Family Courts from a destructive adversarial model to a more holistic and therapeutic one. Again, both my science training and experience tell me that effective treatment decreases future drug use and drug-related criminal behavior and can improve a person's relationship with his or her family. In addition, the family needs tools and support to help deal with these difficult issues.

Science is inextricably connected to the work of the courts. Today, more than ever, judges must appreciate, understand and apply science in the work that we do. The tools of science can help us transform our Family Courts. To do this, our magistrates and judges must understand and apply these tools.

If it is to embody these values, the Maryland Judiciary and courts nationwide must secure adequate resources and provide education to all judges who sit in our Family Courts. In order to justify the resources, the judiciary must gather facts and figures that demonstrate benefits to the citizens. This information must communicate outcomes clearly and offer viable recommendations to account for court system performance. These recommendations, in turn, must link to resources needs. This is what the Performance Standards require. This can only be accomplished by applying the principles of science to our approach to family law.

We must follow the lead of the ASTAR Fellows and make a serious commitment to understand the scientific issues that impact our courtrooms and – in the words of the late Judge Moyer – “to transform the tools of science into instruments for justice” in our Family Courts.



Ronald A. Silkworth is the Chief Judge of the Anne Arundel County Circuit Court and the Fifth Judicial Circuit in Maryland. He was a trial lawyer from 1976-1996, was appointed to the bench in 1996 and has been elected two terms. He was an ASTAR Fellow in 2006.

1. NCSI's Vision is to place advanced knowledge tools and the institutional connections to constantly renew them at the disposal of State and Federal courts. This will include advanced degrees in courts and science for judges, a new, interactive journal, Science in the Courtroom, on-site and on-line knowledge tools training for 1000 judges by 2015 and a bi-annual National Courts and Science Conference.

The Importance of Stopping the Cycle of Domestic Violence

KERTISHA L. DIXON

The scandal of former Baltimore Ravens player Ray Rice pounding his wife in a New Jersey casino elevator and knocking her unconscious transfixed the nation last year. For months, domestic violence became a national hot topic. Many questioned why victims stayed in abusive relationships. Most major news outlets had segments dedicated to domestic violence, but the focus on domestic violence eventually faded, while the issues facing domestic violence victims did not.

Two questions remain dominant: Why do domestic violence victims stay in abusive relationships? Further, how does Maryland address the legal and non-legal issues related to and stemming from domestic violence?

Consider these statistics: 20,547 peace orders were filed in Maryland's District Courts in 2013.¹ The total number of domestic violence filings in Maryland District Courts that same year reached 25,533.^{1,2}

Serving as a civil litigator for the House of Ruth Maryland, one of Maryland's largest non-profit organizations leading the charge to eradicate intimate partner domestic violence, I have seen it firsthand. On average, I represent 180 intimate partner domestic violence victims each year. This has been one of the most fulfilling, yet challenging, experiences in my career as a public servant. When the Ray Rice video leaked via a tabloid, it brought my daily view of domestic violence center stage nationally.

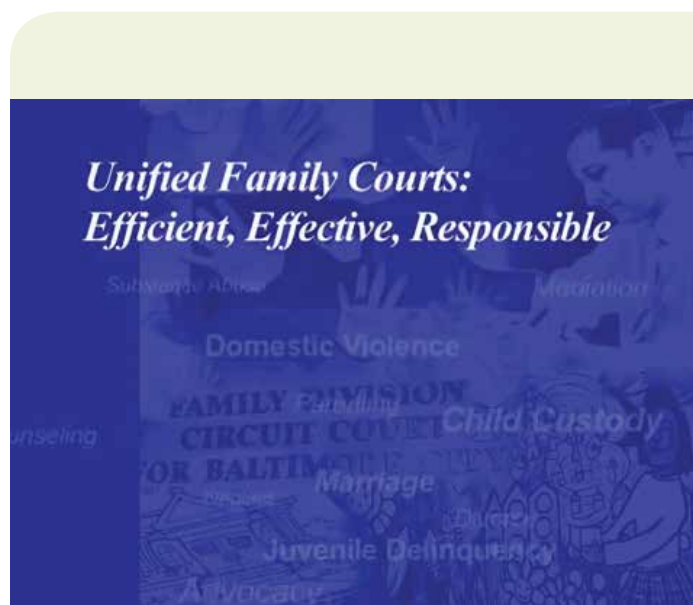
Men and women are victims of domestic violence. Domestic violence does not correlate to certain socio-economic backgrounds. One of the greatest misconceptions about domestic violence is that victims and

abusers are the uneducated and unemployed of our communities. Those myths are false. I have litigated some extreme cases of domestic violence involving prominent community leaders and government officials who were abusers and victims who were well-educated. Victims of domestic violence are not stupid or weak. They have complex issues that must be understood and addressed with legal and non-legal resources. To understand solutions, you must first understand the cause-and-effect sequence in domestic violence relationships.

Some perpetrators of domestic violence have witnessed domestic violence as children and, consequently, believe that disputes are resolved through physical force or threats. Many victims also have observed domestic violence in their homes as adolescents and have grown up thinking that violence is normal. Frequently, due to the lack of counseling, abusers and victims see domestic violence in romantic relationships as par for the course. For my clients who do not fall into the former category, the latter is often true—many victims find themselves emotionally, financially and/or socially connected to their abusers. How does Maryland address these connections?

Maryland's civil domestic violence laws are primarily found in Md. Code Ann. Fam. Law § 4-501- §4-511, and Md. Code Ann. Cts. & Jud. Proc. § 3-1501 – §3-1509, for protective orders and peace orders, respectively. During the 2014 Legislative session, critical changes were made to civil and criminal laws related to protective orders and peace orders.

I will briefly focus on the major civil changes. Prior to October 1, 2014, a petitioner seeking a final Maryland protective order or peace order was required to prove an incident of abuse by clear and convincing evidence, a standard equivalent to beyond a reasonable doubt in criminal cases. Due to Maryland HB 307, which became effective October 1, 2014, petitioners are only required to prove an incident of abuse by a preponderance of the evidence, a more feasible standard, especially when considering the fact that many incidents occur when the only individuals present are the perpetrator and the victim or minor children, who should not be forced to testify in court or are prohibited from testifying. Additionally, under Maryland SB 434, which became



DVD ON UNIFIED FAMILY COURTS NOW AVAILABLE

A compelling DVD, "Unified Family Courts: Efficient, Effective, Responsible," puts a human face on the Unified Family Court (UFC), a court model designed to address therapeutically and holistically the complex nature of family law cases. The DVD contrasts the experiences of two women in their divorce proceedings.

As portrayed in the DVD, one woman was subject to a traditional court system, while the other's divorce was handled in a UFC. The University of Baltimore School of Law's Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families Children and the Courts produced the DVD, which includes interviews with judges, attorneys, services providers and UFC experts.

For a free copy of the DVD, please email Professor Barbara A. Babb at bbabb@ubalt.edu.

effective October 1, 2014, victims whose abusers are found guilty or plead guilty to second-degree assault, among other offenses, are now eligible for permanent protective orders.

The House of Ruth Maryland, many other domestic violence organizations, the Maryland General Assembly and the administration of then-Gov. Martin O'Malley worked together to create the changes that make it easier for victims to break the cycle of domestic violence.

Final protective orders and peace orders are obtained in one of two ways. Respondents may consent to final orders without a judicial finding that they have committed some prohibited act. Or, after a hearing on the merits, a judge may find by a preponderance of the evidence that a prohibited act has occurred and grant a petitioner a final order.

After a final protective order is granted, petitioners may receive all or some of the following relief, ordering the respondent:

- Not to abuse, threaten to abuse, or harass the petitioner;
- Not to have contact with the petitioner;
- Not to go near specific residences, including vacate orders;
- Not to go near petitioner's place(s) of employment;
- Not to go near childcare provider(s);
- To surrender all firearms to law enforcement; and
- To pay filing fees and costs of a proceeding.

Other relief can include granting petitioner:

- Temporary custody;
- Emergency family maintenance; and
- Temporary use and possession of a jointly titled vehicle; use and possession of a pet.

The court also may order the petitioner and/or the respondent to complete court-supervised counseling.

After a final peace order is granted, a petitioner may receive all relief available in protective order cases, excluding vacate orders, custody orders, emergency family maintenance orders, use and possession orders, and orders to surrender firearms.

With a wide range of relief available to petitioners, some of the emotional and financial ties binding victims to their abusers are broken. There are a number of organizations in Maryland that do significant work in breaking social chains in the domestic violence cycle by providing counseling services, advocacy training and vital research. Those organizations include: The House of Ruth Maryland, Community Advocates for Family and Youth, (CAFY), and the Maryland Women's Law Center, to name a few.

In reviewing the number of domestic violence filings in Maryland for 2013, our state is not where it could be. With strong domestic violence laws and a willingness to make changes in the same, however, it is clear that Maryland is fashioning efforts to decrease the incidence of domestic violence.



Kertisha L. Dixon, Esq. is a staff attorney with the House of Ruth Maryland, an Adjunct Professor at Bowie State University, and a graduate of Howard University.

1. Maryland Judiciary Annual Statistical Abstract, Fiscal Year 2013, TABLE DC-8, District Court, Prepared by Court Operations Department Administrative Office of the Courts, July 1, 2012-June 30, 2013.

2. Maryland Judiciary Annual Statistical Abstract, Fiscal Year 2013, TABLE DC-10, District Court, Prepared by Court Operations Department Administrative Office of the Courts, July 1, 2012-June 30, 2013.

Creating a Therapeutic Unified Family Court System: Lessons from a Mental Health Court Judge

BY GINGER LERNER-WREN

As the pioneer of the first mental health court in the United States, I always have utilized a therapeutic approach in both my specialized mental health court and my regular criminal division.

In this article, I will provide a brief historical overview of the Broward Mental Health Court and describe the evolution of problem-solving courts and the problem-solving justice paradigm. I also will outline the essential need for and benefits of integrating public health and therapeutic principles into a Unified Family Court process.

BROWARD'S MENTAL HEALTH COURT

We like to say in Broward County, Florida, that Broward's Mental Health Court was an innovation that emerged from desperation. I am a former member of The President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2002-2003. It is well documented that the nation's mental health delivery system is in shambles. In fact, that was exactly how the Commission Chair, Michael F. Hogan, Ph.D., described the state of the nation's mental health care delivery system in the Commission's Interim Report to the President. The intersection of law and mental health can be viewed from a wide variety of perspectives, such as disability rights law, research and policy data on mental illness and addictive disorders, and how the court process can be improved by applying a therapeutic jurisprudence approach.

Broward's Mental Health Court is an example of a specialized problem-solving court. It was the first court in the nation dedicated to the decriminalization of persons arrested for non-violent misdemeanors in the U.S. Tragically, the over-representation of persons with serious mental illness in U.S. jails and prisons has been a human stain on this nation for decades. As reported by the Treatment Advocacy Center: "Ten times more individuals with serious mental illness are residing in prisons and jails than in state mental hospitals." Our mental health court operates on a part-time basis and the defendant must agree to get involved with the court. Its primary goals are to break arrest cycles and link individuals to community-based mental health treatment and holistic services, including housing, through collaboration with community based treatment providers and stakeholders. Broward's court is a national and international model and was the basis for America's Law Enforcement and Mental Health Project in 2000.

THERAPEUTIC JURISPRUDENCE

There are countless legal texts and scholarly law articles pertaining to therapeutic jurisprudence (TJ), which is a scholarly law reform theory developed by the late Professor Bruce Winick of the University of Miami and Professor David Wexler of the University of Arizona.

Essentially, the two professors asked whether courts can be therapeutic agents. Given the goals and objectives of Broward's Mental

Therapeutic approaches have given way to a vast number of problem-solving justice strategies, also known as smart justice, and other restorative justice approaches across the U.S. and international legal systems.

Health Court, TJ was the perfect platform for this new therapeutic court. Not only did TJ help tell the story of the plight of persons with mental illness in our nation, but the reform was vital to the court's goals of delivering hope, dignity and respect. Therapeutic jurisprudence was instrumental not only for procedural justice, but also to minimize coercion and promote recovery.

The essential tenets of TJ must relate to the willingness of a judge, legal actors and court personnel to view the law through a therapeutic lens. The integration of public health policy and the interdisciplinary marriage of the law to varied social science issues, such as mental health, trauma, substance abuse, domestic violence, school violence, bullying and psychology, created the opportunity for growth, education and health literacy. The basic elements of TJ include:

1. The creation of a therapeutic court process which strengthens the court's ability to identify unmet needs of the family and child, as well as indicators of risk.
2. Empathy, respect and validation through communication skills, such as active listening and story-telling.
3. The implementation of procedural justice mechanisms so that individuals feel they have been heard by the court, feel their needs have been addressed, and therefore will be more likely to comply with court orders, even if they do not prevail.
4. Evidence-based research and public health policy that informs the court process, helps educate and enlighten families and provides a foundation for a therapeutic and positive court experience.
5. Ensuring that all cases meet the procedural rules of law.

PROBLEM-SOLVING JUSTICE

It is almost impossible for me to overstate the acceleration and growth of the problem-solving court movement. Therapeutic approaches have given way to a vast number of problem-solving justice strategies, also known as smart justice, and other restorative justice approaches across the U.S. and international legal systems. The capacity for further growth is as boundless as the judicial creativity and needs of civil and criminal court systems, across all spheres. For further details, see "Problem-Solving Justice: Reducing Recidivism and Promoting Public Safety- A White Paper."¹

THE GAINS FOR A UNIFIED FAMILY COURT SYSTEM AND THE COMMUNITY

I am confident that many dedicated Unified Family Court (UFC) judges are applying the TJ principles in their courtrooms. Clearly, the highly complex needs and challenges of those families whose legal matters are being heard in UFC systems are reaping the benefits of judges who hear a family's case from beginning to end. A sense that the court has a

vested interest in the positive promotion of a family's overall welfare, safety and public health is truly a win-win for all involved. That is particularly true for those families who may be financially struggling and in need of the supportive alliances and community resources that the UFC can deliver. If you have not yet applied a TJ approach and would like to learn more, please go to the website for Therapeutic Jurisprudence in the Mainstream, sponsored by Professor David Wexler, who is the co-founder and pioneer of Therapeutic Jurisprudence.²



Ginger Lerner-Wren is a County Court Judge in The Criminal Division of the 17th Judicial Circuit, Broward County, Florida. She is an adjunct professor at Nova Southeastern University. In 1997, Judge Lerner-Wren pioneered the first Mental Health Court in the U.S., based on a human rights model dedicated to the decriminalization of persons with mental illness.

1. https://www.nsulaw.nova.edu/students/orgs/lawreview/documents/WREN_FINAL.pdf
2. <https://mainstreamtj.wordpress.com/>

SUPPORT CFCC'S VITAL WORK

The Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC), a non-profit organization, offers strategic planning and technical assistance to structure Unified Family Courts (UFCs), as well as evaluations of the effectiveness of these courts and their related programs.

Other CFCC services include compiling surveys and reports, formulating performance standards and measures, providing training and workshops, and organizing conferences for the judicial, legal and court communities. CFCC relies on the support of foundations, grants and partners to fulfill its mission to improve the lives of families and children and the health of communities through family court reform.

Visit <http://law.ubalt.edu/centers/cfcc> for additional information. See also: <http://www.facebook.com/CFCCatUBaltLaw>.

Problem-Solving Courts Providing Effective Resolution of Cases in Maryland

By GRAY BARTON

Courts increasingly have become the institution of choice by the public and other branches of state government to address complex and problematic societal issues, including drug related crime, mental illness, family dysfunction, and recidivism of nuisance crimes in urban, suburban and rural communities in Maryland.

Throughout the United States, courts are now more focused on problem solving and alternative remedies that are not effectively accommodated by the current legal and adjudicatory process. Problem-solving courts provide sustained and meaningful resolution for thousands of difficult cases that enter our courtrooms daily.

DRUG COURTS

Drug courts are the best known and perhaps the first institutionalized problem-solving innovation nationwide. They are a judicially-led and coordinated system that demands accountability of all participants and ensures immediate, intensive and comprehensive drug treatment, supervision and support services, using a cadre of incentives and sanctions to encourage compliance. Drug courts represent the coordinated efforts of criminal justice agencies, behavioral health, social services and the treatment community to actively and forcefully intervene and break the cycle of substance abuse, addiction, and crime.

As an alternative to less effective interventions, drug courts quickly identify substance-abusing offenders and place them under strict court monitoring and community supervision, coupled with effective, long-term treatment services.

In this blending of systems, the drug court participant undergoes an intense regime of substance abuse and mental health treatment, case

management, drug testing, and probation supervision while reporting to regularly scheduled status hearings before a judge with specialized expertise in the drug court model. Additionally, drug courts provide support services that address problems which contribute to addiction, such as housing, job training and placement, General Education Development (GED) readiness, life skills training and family/group counseling.

MENTAL HEALTH COURTS

Increasingly, large numbers of mentally ill people are entering the criminal justice system each year. The criminalization of people with mental illness is a growing social problem and is a burden to both the criminal justice system and the public mental health system. It is estimated that 16 percent of the incarcerated population suffer from a serious mental illness, and at least 75 percent of those have a co-occurring substance abuse problem.

The traditional approach to processing criminal cases often creates a barrier that prevents the court from identifying and responding to the unique needs of the mentally ill offender. These offenders frequently spend unnecessary time in jail and, lacking access to mental health treatment services on release, tend to be re-arrested and cycled through the system over and over again. The needs of the community are not addressed, the costs to the taxpayer escalate, and the defendant continues to have the same problems and associated risks as they did before they entered the criminal justice system.

Modeled after drug courts, a mental health court is a specialized court docket that addresses the needs of people who have been charged with a crime and have a psychiatric disability. The purpose of the court is to deal with the crime in a way that addresses the person's mental health needs. The mental disability, rather than criminal behavior, is the court's focus. Treatment, medical care and medical supervision, case management, and service referral are primary components of the mental health court.

TRUANCY COURTS

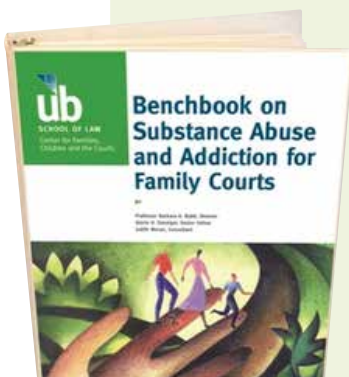
Truancy has long been identified as linked to many behavioral problems, school dropout, and juvenile delinquency. Truancy reduction programs take a broad-based collaborative approach to identify barriers to

BENCHBOOK ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE IS NOW AVAILABLE

While substance abuse and addiction are pervasive throughout the family court system, few resources are available for family law attorneys and members of the judiciary who want information specifically geared to parents and children in the family justice system.

In order to meet this need, the University of Baltimore School of Law Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts has published the *Benchbook on Substance Abuse and Addiction for Family Courts*. The long-awaited publication provides clear and concise information about the range of substance abuse and addiction issues affecting families and children in family courts.

To learn more, visit: <http://law.ubalt.edu/centers/cfcc/publications/index.cfm> or email cfcc@ubalt.edu.



Research shows that problem-solving courts have proven to be more effective than traditional court strategies at recidivism. These court programs, when implemented correctly, improve public safety and save taxpayer dollars by addressing the many issues that lead to court involvement in the first place.

attendance and develop a supportive framework for the family and child. There are a number of models, including those which are school-based, court-based or that operate through community service agencies. They all share the same goals to improve school attendance, raise grades and encourage graduation.

A substantial percentage of high school dropouts, who are over-represented among prison and jail inmates, were truant from school. Studies further show that re-incarceration rates for those who complete educational programs while incarcerated are significantly lower. One national study estimated that increasing the high school graduation rate by one percent would yield \$1.8 billion dollars in social benefits, largely as a result of preventing an estimated 94,000 crimes yearly.

The primary mission of truancy courts is to address the concerns and issues that prevent the students from going to school and doing well. Parents learn ways to provide better support and guidance for their children. Such courts offer a wrap-around approach and integrated community services to re-engage students and their families with the schools.

RE-ENTRY COURTS

Re-entry courts seek to stabilize those who return from extended stints in jail or prison. During the initial phases of their community reintegration, the program assists them to find jobs, secure housing, remain drug-free and assume familial and personal responsibilities. Re-entry courts call for prisons and jails to prepare offenders for release. They

involve community corrections agencies and community resources in transitioning offenders back into the community. Judicial oversight of the offender's progress also is a critical component of these courts.

Research shows that problem-solving courts have proven to be more effective than traditional court strategies at recidivism. These court programs, when implemented correctly, improve public safety and save taxpayer dollars by addressing the many issues that lead to court involvement in the first place. By treating defendants with dignity and respect, the problem-solving courts can help reduce recidivism, improve community safety and enhance confidence in justice.



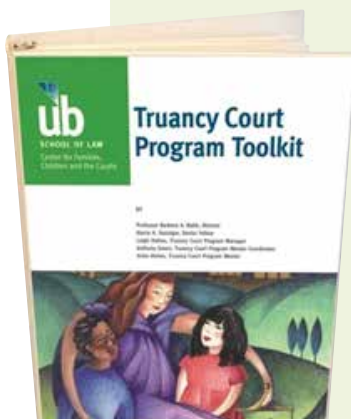
Gray Barton is the Director of the Maryland Judiciary's Office of Problem-Solving Courts in Annapolis, Maryland. In this position Mr. Barton oversees the planning and administration of various types of drug and DUI courts, mental health courts, truancy courts and other problem-solving court programs for the Maryland Judiciary.

IMPROVE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

Do you want to keep more students in school and help them re-engage and get excited about learning again? The University of Baltimore School of Law Sayra and Neil Meyerhoff Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC) Truancy Court Program has a solid track record with proven results: nearly three-fourths of participating students during the 2013–2014 academic year reduced their unexcused absences and tardies by at least 65 percent. CFCC's early intervention program leverages the stature and authority of volunteer judges to help students substantially increase attendance and improve grades and behaviors.

Learn how we do it by ordering the *Truancy Court Program Toolkit*. This guide enables you to implement a new program in your schools or enhance an existing one. It includes forms and detailed guides for the team, teachers, and judge.

To learn more, visit <http://law.ubalt.edu/centers/cfcc/publications/index.cfm> or email cfcc@ubalt.edu.





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“CFCC has been a key partner in promoting family court reform in our state. Its work helps courts and their community partners remain focused on how our work can benefit families.”



Pamela Cardullo Ortiz

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ASK THE EDITOR: Unified Family Courts cover a myriad of issues, problems and innovations. If you have questions you would like us to address, or if you want to contribute to the newsletter, please send your suggestions to us. We will try to include them in upcoming editions of the *Unified Family Court Connection*. Send your questions or contributions to: cfcc@ubalt.edu.

FEEDBACK: We value your opinions and your comments! We look forward to hearing from you at cfcc@ubalt.edu.

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