

Connection

UNIVERSITY OF BALTIMORE SCHOOL OF LAW ♦ CENTER FOR FAMILIES, CHILDREN AND THE COURTS

Dispelling the Myths of Unified Family Courts

BY JUSTICE BOBBE J. BRIDGE, RET., AND JUDGE PAULA CASEY

The advent of Unified Family Courts (UFCs) and the changes in procedure that necessarily ensue have given rise to certain misperceptions about UFCs.

While the state of Washington is working diligently on court reform, one potential barrier to widespread implementation in the state is the need to overcome the myths that have developed around UFCs. Exposing these misconceptions hopefully will inspire judges to lead and lawyers to support UFCs.

Judicial leadership should not be confused with judicial activism.

In particular, three myths stand out:

- **UFCs do not involve “real” judging or lawyering.**
- **Teamwork and collaboration are unethical for judges and lawyers.**
- **Dedicating judges solely to UFCs limits the flexibility of court calendars and diverts resources from the important work of the courts, chiefly criminal cases.**

Such misperceptions have influenced unfairly the sense of worth (though not the sense of pride) of the lawyers and judges who participate in the UFC system. In reality, satisfaction derived from working in UFCs is often greater than that found in traditional legal settings.

UFCs provide judges and lawyers with satisfaction that comes from actually solving problems; professionals who participate in a UFC contribute to their communities and are seen as true public servants. In addition, litigants often feel they are better understood.

In our examination of the myths, we have concluded that none accurately reflects the actual experience of UFCs.

MYTH: UFC WORK IS NOT “REAL” JUDGING OR LAWYERING — OR — “LEGAL WORK IS NOT SOCIAL WORK.”

The most widespread misconception about UFCs is that courts and lawyers should not engage in “social work.” Yet society expects judges, in the traditions of the Biblical King Solomon and the 1930s American movie equivalent, “Judge Hardy,” to judge according to reality and circumstances. These iconic judges recognized that their constituents desired lasting resolutions to issues brought to court and that a problem-solving focus worked best to avoid their repeated return to court.

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New York Family Court Legal Services Project Benefits Children and Families

BY JUDGE JOSEPH LAURIA

The New York City Family Court Legal Services Project represents a unique collaboration between the public and private sectors to provide free legal services to needy populations.

In 2005, nearly 102,000 new support and paternity petitions were filed in the New York City Family Court throughout the five counties—Bronx, Kings (Brooklyn), New York (Manhattan), Queens, and Richmond (Staten Island). Nearly 90 percent of the litigants in those cases did not have counsel representing them in the proceedings.

That same year, about 67,000 new custody, visitation, guardianship and family offense petitions were filed in family court. In these cases, despite the parties’ right to court-appointed counsel if indigent, more than 75 percent of litigants appeared pro se in the proceedings.

Besides not having an attorney to represent them, data showed that most of the litigants—the majority of whom were women or racial minorities—had low income and educational levels.

The challenges confronting the litigants are exacerbated because family court matters present complex legal issues and involve significant rights of the parties regarding the welfare and financial support of their children.

These concerns and the critical need for legal services for these litigants served as the impetus behind the creation of the New York City Family Court Legal Services Project in September 2006. Similar initiatives existed outside the state of New York, including the District of

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CFCC gratefully acknowledges funding for this issue provided by Kramon & Graham, P.A., Baltimore, Maryland.

A Unified Family Court Proves To Be Effective In Rhode Island

BY JUDGE HOWARD I. LIPSEY

A Unified Family Court (UFC) touches upon each issue occurring within a family in crisis and provides appropriate services to help each family member. In Rhode Island, where the first UFC was developed in 1961, UFCs have made a difference in the lives of many family members.

The Legislative Blue Ribbon Committee that recommended a Unified Family Court said in its report to the state legislature:

“This Committee feels that there is considerable relationship between marital discord in cases currently heard by the Domestic Relations branch of the Superior Court and the symptoms manifested in many of the persons involved in issues being heard by the Juvenile Court and for this reason feels that a correlation within a Family Court would make possible a consideration of the whole family problem with probably salutary effects so far as both family and individual juvenile difficulties are concerned.”

As a sitting Unified Family Court judge, I continually am amazed at the committee’s prescience as I work on cases that involve the entire family.

As an illustration of the above, a wife filed a domestic abuse petition in our family court. As a result, the husband was removed from the marital domicile, leaving the wife and two teenage daughters at the home. The judge hearing the abuse case ordered an immediate investigation by our Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF). It was determined that the mother was suffering from severe mental illness. DCYF immediately filed petitions on behalf of the two teenage daughters with the family court.

In accordance with our statutes, a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) was appointed “to represent the best interests of the children.” This CASA program is based on a format involving trained volunteer advocates who work with full-time staff attorneys and social workers as a team.

Contemporaneously with the domestic abuse petition and the DCYF petitions, the husband filed a divorce petition.

A Unified Family Court is truly able to reach every aspect of the family dynamic and attempt to provide appropriate services.

The husband filed a motion for temporary orders in the divorce petition. That motion came on for a hearing before me at that time. The husband had an attorney for representation; the wife did not.

I learned of the other cases pending before two other judges. All cases were consolidated before me. I was able to obtain a private attorney for the mother and had DCYF find a guardian ad litem (GAL) for her as well.

The cast appearing before me was then as follows: attorney for father, attorney for mother, attorney for DCYF, social worker for DCYF, attorney for CASA, volunteer for CASA, and GAL for the mother.

Utilizing the reports of DCYF and the CASA volunteer, services were immediately set up for the mother and the children. The facts surrounding the domestic abuse complaint were ferreted out and determined to have no foundation in reality.

Temporary orders were made so that all petitions which had been consolidated would have one operative order.

While the case still is proceeding, the teenagers are thriving, the mother is receiving the services she apparently has needed for many years, and the father has been absolved of any wrongdoing.

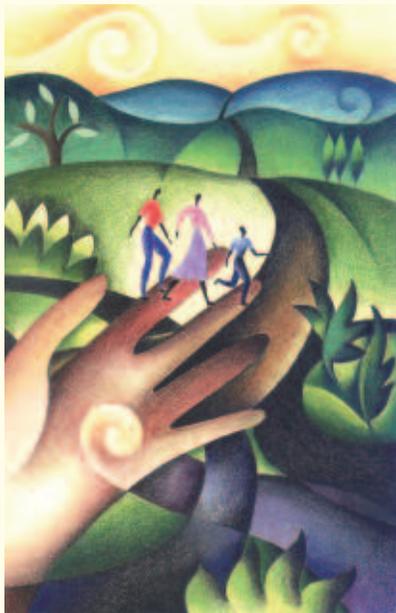
This is but one example showing the ability of a UFC to truly reach every aspect of the family dynamic and attempt to provide appropriate services in order to assist each member of the family involved in the court process.

Whether or not there will be a divorce or reconciliation remains to be seen. One might say—“And now for the rest of the story.” ■

Howard I. Lipsey is an Associate Justice of the Rhode Island Family Court. He is a Past Chair of the American Bar Association Family Law Section and a Fellow of the American College of Trial Lawyers and the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers.



Judge Howard Lipsey



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Overcoming Myths Essential for Unified Family Courts *from page 1*

Such methods are still viable—even more necessary—in 21st century courts. We lose nothing and can gain much by focusing on problem-solving.

Chief Judge Judith Kaye of the New York Court of Appeals, in a lecture entitled “Delivering Justice Today,” pointed out that “[p]roblem-solving courts are courts. They strive to ensure due process, to engage in neutral fact-finding, and to dispense fair and impartial justice. What is different is that these courts have developed a new architecture—including technology, new staffing, and new linkages—to improve the effectiveness of court sanctions.”

The opportunity to employ a problem-solving methodology in the courtroom gives judges an opportunity for creativity unavailable in other areas of practice and is an antidote to shrinking judicial discretion.

In Washington, a jurisdiction with the only structured sentencing law for juvenile offenders and one of the first determinate sentencing schemes for adults, problem-solving allows judges greater discretion. It also alleviates the frustration of working in a system that makes processing cases feel like factory work, which is not a satisfying way to expend judicial resources or to leave parties or counsel with a sense that they have been treated fairly.

Yet “problem-solving” does not mean that judges and lawyers must be social workers. The cases in UFCs offer complexity and challenges in areas of law that rarely overlap.

Purveyors of this myth focus on the emotional challenge of working in a UFC, yet the work presents significant intellectual challenges. Legal professionals must navigate the intersection of social security law, health care law, probate law, child welfare law, education law, sociology, and psychology, among other areas.

The substantive nature of the work has been recognized in the formation of specialized practice manuals created by the National Association of Counsel for Children, the American Bar Association (ABA) Center on Children and the Law, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and others.

At issue are real lives, real cases, and real jobs for the court and its officers.

MYTH: TEAMWORK AND COMMUNITY COLLABORATION ARE UNETHICAL PRACTICES FOR JUDGES AND LAWYERS.

Washington’s Canons of Judicial Conduct require judges to avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety. More specifically, the canons provide that judges may neither initiate nor consider ex parte or other communications concerning a pending or impending proceeding.

The appearance of fairness and avoidance of ex parte contacts are worthy considerations, but judges are capable of respecting them without sacrificing full and fair case resolution. The lawyer’s duty to zealously advocate for the client can be fulfilled even when solutions are collaborative.

Research has demonstrated that public trust and confidence in the legal system are enhanced by a problem-solving, collaborative style, according to resolutions of a task force appointed by the Conference of Chief Justices and Conference of State Court Administrators. In traditional proceedings, the American public can view judges as detached from reality. The public believes that the judicial process takes too long, costs too much, and does not end up resolving matters in a clear and permanent way, the task force determined.

Outreach, straight talk, and tangible results mitigate these perceptions, resulting in an increased overall benefit of court proceedings—real benefit and perceived benefit.

The California Judicial Code recognizes the importance of judicial outreach to the community and encourages judicial participation in community outreach activities. An official judicial function of California judges is to promote public understanding of and confidence in the administration of justice. These are values that judges should espouse in every jurisdiction.

Reaching out to the community is not unethical; it is public education. It is not activism; it is leadership.

Judicial leadership should not be confused with judicial activism. Chief Judge Kaye also points out in her lecture:

“[L]awyers, of course, are completely comfortable with the notion that the substantive law must change and adapt to meet changing social conditions. But they are distinctly less comfortable with the idea that the structures of the justice system may also need to evolve to meet current demands. I suppose this shouldn’t be surprising: my work uniform hasn’t changed for centuries, and I do my job in a building smack out of ancient Athens. You don’t need a degree in semiotics to conclude that ours is a profession that values formal stability and continuity.”

But times do change and so does judging. Judges lead when they get out front, when they lead through social change but do not create it. We should ensure that court proceedings adapt to the real needs of the parties who are families and children. That is how UFCs promote the accountability of the judicial branch: accountability to our own standards of quality performance; accountability to the parties before us; accountability to our public.

A judge working with a team and collaborating with non-judicial professionals does not mean that the judge loses her authority over a case. The judge retains the responsibility for ensuring the quality of the process and making the ultimate decision. High-quality judges, who receive education in all issues implicated in these cases and who can appropriately weigh input from the team, are invaluable.

Concerns that attorneys sacrifice the interests of their clients by engaging in collaborative problem-solving are equally unfounded.

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Unified Family Court Myths *from page 3*

The ABA has found that mediation, one component of UFCs, results in self-determination and better communication between participants, promotes the best interests of children, and reduces economic and emotional costs.

UFCs result in better outcomes for families and children, not in the sacrifice of ethical conduct.

MYTH: DEDICATING RESOURCES TO UFCS LIMITS THE FLEXIBILITY OF COURT CALENDARS AND DIVERTS RESOURCES FROM THE IMPORTANT WORK OF CRIMINAL CASES.

This is perhaps the hardest myth to respond to, for we acknowledge that the work of UFC judges can be complex and time consuming. Yet, in the long term, by stabilizing families, UFCs can lower recidivism or even prevent first-time criminal activity, stemming the pipeline to the adult criminal system and reducing the work of the criminal court.

Best practices indicate that we should implement longer assignments for UFC judges, but assigning judges to any calendar for extended time admittedly reduces flexibility. The mandate of the presiding judge is always, “Move those cases!”

Our constitutions and our statutes dictate that the courts act on cases—the choice is simply how. The choice is whether to handle cases according to tradition, or in a new way that is demonstrably more effective, addressing both the presenting issue and the underlying issues that may continue to breed the same or similar problems if ignored. New UFC methods enhance both effectiveness and efficiency.

“From the attorney’s perspective, a key advantage to the UFC model is the dedication of judicial officers who are experienced in family and juvenile law, knowledgeable, well-trained, and interested in the subject matter,” notes Mary Wechsler, who appointed King County’s first UFC task force as president of the King County Bar Association. Experience brings efficiency.

Wechsler maintains that consistent judicial assignments to UFCs, which ideally last longer than two years, ensure that decisions are made according to UFC principles and greatly enhance consistency for the clients. “Family and juvenile law practitioners want fair and just resolutions to their clients’ cases, and many have experienced the frustration of facing a judicial officer who lacks interest in and/or understanding of family and juvenile law principles,” according to Wechsler.

The obligation of judges and officers of the court under the law is to serve the needs of the children and families who come before the court. Successful service to children and families is a priority that merits a significant place on the court calendars.

Overall, these myths regarding UFC systems should not be permitted to delay such readily apparent practical benefits. Lawyers and judges doing this work need the support of the judicial and legal communities.

Our community, our youth, and our families deserve the widespread implementation of UFCs. ■

Unified Family Courts in

BY JUSTICE BOBBE J. BRIDGE, RET., AND
JUDGE PAULA CASEY

For one Washington state family of five, chaos reigned in the family home and the local family court. The family was involved in seven different court matters pending before multiple judicial officers.

This was clearly a family in trouble. The mother was heavily involved in using methamphetamine, and she freely shared that activity with the children. Under the terms of the parents’ separation agreement, the children were to reside with the father in the family home. Instead, they were living in a trailer with the mother, often without the benefit of running water or heat.

The mother periodically reported violence in the home, but she never followed through with court action. The three children often were absent from school, frequently on the run, and engaged in drug use with the mother.

The family members were involved in multiple pending court matters, including the dissolution of the parents’ marriage, an assault prosecution, at-risk youth petitions for each of the three adolescents, and a truancy action for one of the children. In addition, the oldest child had three pending juvenile offender matters.

The court frequently had to step in to resolve the family crises. The several courts involved in adjudicating the myriad of family legal matters initially responded by creating a new cause of action for each issue and assigning each case to a different judicial officer for each hearing. Each judicial officer ordered services to address the immediate issues without having the full picture of the family situation.

After King County developed a Unified Family Court (UFC), all this family’s open cases were assigned to one judge and one team of court personnel. (The juvenile offender cases could not be consolidated because of the physical location of the probation officer.) The assigned team worked with the family to develop an achievable set of services and a plan to stop the chaos.

With regular review and constant monitoring, the mother entered drug treatment and completed that treatment successfully. The two middle school

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Washington State: A Case Study in System Change

Counties that have developed UFCs have found that the leading advantage of such courts is that all of a family's cases can be heard before the same judge.

children returned to school. Their father participated in counseling to address his issues surrounding control and violence. All of the family's cases were closed within the next year.

This family, like hundreds of others in Washington, experienced firsthand the benefits of UFCs.

Several counties in the state of Washington have enjoyed significant success developing and maintaining UFCs. In doing so, these counties have found that the leading advantage of a UFC is that all of a family's cases can be heard before the same judge.

In Washington, family and juvenile court matters accounted for 46.5 percent of total court proceedings and 44 percent of filings in the superior court in 2006. In some types of family law matters, at least one party is pro se more than half of the time, and in some counties, the number of unrepresented parties is anecdotally reported to be over 80 percent.

This high incidence of self-representation has dramatically heightened the need for a well-trained and well-informed judiciary because, in the majority of family law cases, there are no longer attorneys to present relevant facts or the law to the judge.

The dual challenges of a high volume of cases and a high percentage of pro se parties are complicated by the fact that many families have various actions pending before the family court.

Except in the smallest of counties, the traditional mode of case management in Washington courts is to treat family law cases separately; thus, cases involving the same family may be heard by more than one judge. Consequently, it is not unusual for a family to appear in court before a series of different judicial officers several times in a matter of weeks or months.

INCONSISTENCIES BECAUSE OF OVERLAPPING CASES

Not surprisingly, inconsistent court orders emanate from the separate proceedings and cause confusion among the parties and law enforcement, particularly in situations involving domestic violence. With each new court appearance, families are further fragmented and financially marginalized. A new judge inadvertently can revive previously rejected arguments, fueling acrimony and continued litigation.

Finally, the issues presented in family and juvenile court cases have become much more complex in the past decade. Addressing the underlying problems of the litigants involves an understanding of the law as well as knowledge about family

dynamics and child development, domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental illness.

Families and children are often in need of a number of services in order to return them to healthy development and wholesome relationships. The needs are great; the stakes are also high.

In addition, the roles of judges and counsel in family and juvenile court have changed significantly. Now a judge is often an active participant, a problem-solver, a leader, and a convener of collaborative efforts, and counsel must be an active participant of this team.

In response to these challenges, Washington embarked on new ways of doing business in family and juvenile court. In 1994, King County, Washington's most populated county, began investigating a new UFC approach to the work of family and juvenile court. Thurston County, the site of the state capitol, followed with study and planning in 1996. Both counties had active programs when the legislature passed UFC legislation in 1999, earmarking \$200,000 for the development of three pilot sites. King, Thurston, and Snohomish counties were selected as UFC pilot sites and developed new approaches to the management of family and juvenile court cases.

STRONG CASE MANAGEMENT IS KEY

King County developed a strong case management system for concurrent family and juvenile dependency cases and those evidencing high-conflict issues at its Regional Justice Center, while maintaining traditional case management practices at the downtown Seattle courthouse for comparison.

UFCs are now located at both courthouse sites in King County, with a UFC presiding judge overseeing all UFC functions. Seven judges are assigned to the UFC for two-year assignments, as are eight court commissioners. At least two chief judges at juvenile court have served for five years.

Thurston County moved all family and juvenile court proceedings into a new courthouse, separate from the other business of the court. The environment alone positively impacted the family and juvenile law practice. Snohomish County focused on dependency actions for families that had other court involvement.

All of the projects required training for judicial officers in child development, domestic violence, cultural awareness, child abuse and neglect, chemical dependency, and mental illness. They also necessitated longer-term assignment of judicial officers and assignment of one judicial team to one family for all of that family's hearings and cases. All of the projects called for judicial leadership in the development of new systems to meet the needs of a specialized workload.

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New York Family Court Legal Services Project Benefits Families *from page 1*

Family court matters present complex legal issues and involve significant rights of the parties regarding the welfare and financial support of their children.

Columbia Family Court project that served as a model for the New York project. The New York City model, however, represented the first of its kind for the family court in New York state.

The New York City Family Court Legal Services Project was court-based from its inception, unlike the D.C. model, which was a creation of the local bar association and then transferred to the court after a successful pilot period.

Under the leadership of Chief Judge Judith S. Kaye, the court system in New York state sought to put into action the deeply held belief that all available resources should be dedicated to fulfill the court's fundamental responsibility to ensure equal access to justice for all of its users.

The project matches trained volunteer attorneys from the city's top law firms and corporations with self-represented litigants involved in family court proceedings. The attorneys provide brief advice services in the courthouse.

The family court, along with MFY Legal Services, a leading Manhattan-based not-for-profit legal services provider, recruited the initial firms (Greenberg Traurig, LLP; Stroock & Stroock & Lavan; Reed Smith LLP; Dechert LLP; Orrick, Herrington & Sutcliffe) and one corporation (Citigroup.) These organizations committed to staff an office in the courthouse, initially in the Kings County Family Court, with volunteer attorneys two days a week. The volunteers participated in court-sponsored training in the various areas of law covered through the project. Presenters at the training included family court judges, referees, support magistrates, family law practitioners, law guardians, and family violence victim advocates.

Since its official start in November 2006, the project has tripled the number of participating organizations, up to 17 by the end of 2007, permitting expansion to a second site in the New York County Family Court for an additional two days a week. (New participants include: Bank of America; Proskauer Rose LLP; Cadwalader, Wickersham & Taft LLP; Shearman & Sterling LLP; DLA Piper; Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP; Dickstein Shapiro LLP; Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher & Flom LLP; Kaye Scholer LLP; Ropes & Gray LLP; and Cooley Godward Kronish LLP.)

Recruitment of the new participants is due largely to the efforts of the original six organizations. Simply put, the volunteer attorneys become the project's most active and effective recruiters.

After attending both the formal training and participating in a period of "on-the-job training" at the court, the volunteers begin their work, providing brief legal services for indigent, self-represented litigants. The consultations occur on a walk-in basis.

A family court staff attorney conducts a pre-consultation interview with litigants. That interview garners information about the parties and their children, as well as the details regarding the proceeding in which the litigant currently is involved or is seeking to commence in court. Prior to meeting with the pro bono volunteer, the litigant clearly is advised and must consent in writing to the limited scope of the legal services provided by the volunteer attorney.

Integral to the project's success is the dedication of a court attorney, experienced in all aspects of family law, who supervises the project's operations and provides ongoing training and assistance to the volunteer attorneys. The court attorney also is responsible for giving legal information directly to litigants, creating and maintaining a library of legal and social services resources for litigants, and conducting informational sessions for groups of litigants and other members of the public on topics related to family law and procedure.

The project served over 800 families in its first year. An additional 400 litigants received free legal services so far in the second year of the project's operation.

The project's one-year anniversary was marked with an awards ceremony, held at the New York City Bar in October 2007. At that ceremony, Chief Judge Kaye presented each of the founding firms and Citigroup with a trophy in recognition of their significant contribution to this under-served population of court users.

Recruitment efforts to attract new firms and corporations continue in an expectation to expand the project's days of operation in the two existing sites, as well as to establish the program in a third site in either Queens or the Bronx.

While the project's success so far is measured by the consistently favorable responses elicited from litigants and volunteer attorneys, a formal evaluation of the project currently is underway to assess its impact on all of the participants—court personnel, including judges, support magistrates, and volunteer attorneys, and, most importantly, the litigants whom the project serves.

What truly we have advanced is a genuine collaboration between the public and private sectors which can have a positive, life-altering impact upon our neediest population. Empowering first hundreds and now a thousand, we look forward to a future of helping thousands of children and families in our great city. ■



Judge Joseph Lauria

Joseph M. Lauria was appointed Administrative Judge of New York City Family Court in 1999. He also has served as supervising judge of Kings and Richmond Counties and as a family court judge in Queens County.

Final Report Detailing Unified Family Courts Summit Available

The University of Baltimore School of Law's Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC) recently published the *Final Report of the Summit on Unified Family Courts: Serving Children and Families Efficiently, Effectively and Responsibly*.

Participants from 25 states seeking to learn more about family justice system reform attended the summit, co-sponsored by the American Bar Association and CFCC in May, 2007. The conferees focused on all aspects of Unified Family Courts, designed to address the legal and non-legal needs of families in a holistic manner. The plenary sessions and workshops that comprised the conference focused on issues related to planning, implementing, and evaluating family court structural and procedural initiatives, in addition to those related to the importance of judicial leadership and family court services.

The articles contained in the report include:

- "A Report on the Proceedings of the Summit on Unified Family Courts: Serving Children and Families, Efficiently, Effectively and Responsibly," Judith D. Moran.
- "Reevaluating Where We Stand: A Comprehensive Survey of America's Family Justice Systems," Professor Barbara A. Babb.
- "Judicial Leadership and Unified Family Court Implementation: It Starts at the Top," Judith D. Moran.

- "Vision and Evaluation: The Indiana Family Court Project," Judge Frances G. Hill and Loretta A. Olesky.
- "Parenting Following Divorce: A Critical Resource for Children," Amanda Sigal, Irwin Sandler, Sharlene Wolchik and Sanford Braver.
- "Integrated Justice for Families," Alicia Davis, Bob Roper and Nancy Thoennes.
- "The Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study," Abstracted from P.J. Pecora, R.C. Kessler, J. Williams, K. O'Brien, A.C. Downs, D. English, J. White, E. Hiripi, C.R. White, T. Wiggins, and K. Holmes.
- "Improving Family Foster Care: Findings from the Northwest Foster Care Alumni Study." Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs.
- "An Example of the Effectiveness of a Unified Family Court," Judge Howard I. Lipsey. ■

To obtain a free copy of the report, please contact Professor Barbara A. Babb, at bbabb@ubalt.edu.

Unified Family Courts in Washington State *from page 5*

Recently, other family and juvenile court projects have begun around Washington. In Spokane County, at the far eastern border of the state, most family law cases are assigned to a two judicial officer team, one family law judge and one court commissioner. The family court judges serve an eighteen-month rotation, and the court commissioners stay with their assigned cases indefinitely.

In Pierce County, two juvenile court judges serve a minimum of two-year terms. Additionally, two family court judges also serve two-year terms and hear all petitions to modify custody, relocation cases, non-parental custody matters, and selected high-conflict dissolutions involving children. Commissioners are scheduled in ways that maximize the one family/one judicial team concept. Dependency cases are coordinated between juvenile court and family court.

Meanwhile, Washington's Board

for Judicial Administration has adopted UFC best practices. The best practices call for judicial assignments of at least two years, specialized training for judges, and assignment of one judicial team to each family, if possible. In addition, they require case management, including case screening, implementation of case conferences, and other strategies to reduce protracted litigation and achieve compliance with court orders. Mandatory mediation is also a key factor of the best practices, emphasizing again the problem-solving nature of the UFC.

Finally, in Washington's most recent legislative session, the state legislature has allocated \$800,000 to a grant program under which other county superior courts can obtain funding to support changes in their family and juvenile courts that reflect UFC principles.

Most importantly, the legislation, as a condition of funding, requires specialized training for judicial officers and commitment that a consistent judicial officer is assigned to all cases involving a single family.

While we are proud of the strides that Washington has taken toward widespread implementation of UFCs, there is still much work to be done. ■

Bobbe J. Bridge, retired justice of the Supreme Court of Washington, is the founding President of Washington's Center for Children and Youth Justice. Before joining the Supreme Court of Washington, she served as the Chief Judge of King County Juvenile Court.

Paula Casey is the Family and Juvenile Court Presiding Judge of Thurston County. Judge Casey was instrumental in the development of Thurston County's Family and Juvenile Court.



Justice Bobbe J. Bridge (above) and Judge Paula Casey (below)



Funding Needed to Continue Family Justice System Reform Newsletter

"With Unified Family Courts, the job is to keep preaching about it. We have to keep working diligently to get every state to have some form of family court."

That message from Maryland Circuit Court Judge Marcella Holland speaks directly to the mission of the Unified Family Court Connection, the only newsletter of its kind devoted to keeping alive a national dialogue about Unified Family Courts (UFCs). Judge Holland's words, spoken after a national summit on UFCs in Baltimore last year, never have been more significant than they are now, as court systems struggle with how best to meet the needs of the increasing number of families who seek the court's assistance to resolve their problems.

The University of Baltimore School of Law's Center for Families, Children and the Courts (CFCC), the newsletter's publisher, is seeking support to enable it to continue to circulate the Unified Family Court Connection to the over 2,000 judges, lawyers, court administrators, family services providers, legislators, law school deans and academics who currently receive it.

CFCC recently has received funding for this current issue from Kramon & Graham, PA, a Baltimore law firm. CFCC deeply appreciates the law firm's generous support.

CFCC produces and publishes the newsletter entirely through grants and gifts. Without additional support, this Fall 2008 issue is the newsletter's last until CFCC secures further funding.

Within this past year of the newsletter's publication, CFCC has heard from many readers who are unanimous in their appreciation for the scope and breadth of the articles appearing in the Unified Family Court Connection. They comment that the information from the articles has helped them to do their jobs better, has generated ideas for reforms and innovation, and has assisted readers to inform and educate others about their work.

In order to continue the critical national conversation about family justice system reform, CFCC would appreciate receiving from our readers direct support at any level for the newsletter or information regarding potential sources of funding. We thank you in advance for your generosity and assistance, and we hope to be able to continue to provide this valuable information to you. ■

For further information, please contact: Professor Barbara A. Babb, Director, Center for Families, Children and the Courts, 1420 North Charles Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21201, 410-837-5661, bbabb@ubalt.edu.



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ASK THE EDITOR:

Unified Family Courts encompass a myriad of issues, problems and innovations. If you have topics for us to address or want to contribute to the newsletter, please email us your suggestions. If you have photos of recent accomplishments, we can include them in

future editions of the *Unified Family Court Connection*. Send your questions or contributions to cfcc@ubalt.edu.

FEEDBACK:

Your opinions and comments are important to us. Send them to cfcc@ubalt.edu.

MAILING LIST: If you want us to add you to our mailing list for the newsletter or if you know of others who would like to receive the *Unified Family Court Connection*, please send your request (with name, mailing address and e-mail) to cfcc@ubalt.edu.

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