

Henry County Family Court Project

Basic Information

Population: 48,403

County Seat: New Castle

Judicial Officers: Three

Project Implementation: February 2004

Family Court Judges: Honorable Michael D. Peyton & Honorable Mary G. Willis

Family Court Personnel:

The project is implemented through a part-time Family Court Administrator. The Family Court Administrator is responsible for any additional case management and administrative duties related to the implementation of the Family Court Project. The Family Court Administrator also supervises the ADR funds and is responsible for scheduling mediations and providing reimbursement to mediators.

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Funding:

Family Court Project Funding

\$50,000 (\$25,000 per year for two years through 2004-2006), \$6,000 continuation funding distribution in June 2005 for year 2006.

\$17,500 Distribution in 2006

Henry County Community Foundation

\$1,150 grant in the Spring of 2005.

Henry County Department of Child Services

\$12,500 to supplement Family Court Grant allocation for 2006.

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Family Court Mission Statement

The Henry County Family Court Project provides a comprehensive and coordinated process to handle multiple conflicts and justiciable issues involving high risk families by providing coordination and continuity of services, thus maximizing family stability and judicial economy.

Family Court Programming

Multiple-Case Family Coordination. Henry County uses a □One-Judge, One-Family□ model. Families are identified through the Family Court Project committee. Families are selected who have multiple cases pending in the court system and the committee determines that it is important to coordinate the family's multiple cases through bundled hearings and "family focused" case management. Cases heard in the family court proceedings include: Criminal, CHINS, Domestic Relations, non-support, Paternity, and Juvenile Delinquency. All of the families to date have had at least one CHINS case. Because of the

intensity of the coordination provided and frequency of the bundled review hearings, only 8 families at a time receive family court processing.

Once a family is identified, Family Court Notice is filed with the Court, bundling all relevant cases into one Court. This may entail the County Clerk reassigning case numbers to the designated Family Court. The Family Court Notice contains the bundled hearing date and directs parties to meet with the Family Court Administrator.

At the bundled hearing, consecutive hearings are held on each of the family's pending cases. All of the attorneys, family members, and service providers involved in the family's multiple cases are present for all of the hearings. In this way, the Judge and each person involved in the family's multiple cases know what is "going on" in each case and what is required of the party and the service providers before the next "bundled" hearing.

Another significant part of this model is the case coordination that occurs between hearings. The family court administrator monitors all of the family's pending cases, checks for new case filings on any family members, and communicates with the family's multiple service providers to update and receive new information on the family. Emergency situations are reported to the family court administrator by the family's service providers or attorneys so that necessary action and communication can occur to avoid a crisis, schedule an emergency hearing, or avoid a future continuance in a scheduled hearing. The written case management reports by the family court administrator update the Judge and each family member, attorney, and service provider for the next hearing.

Circuit and Superior Court No.1 are both Courts that have Family Court hearings. The hearing schedules are slightly different in each Court, Superior Court No. 1 conducts Family Court hearings with its families once every other month. Circuit Court initially held hearings with the first four families once a month. This was later moved to once every six weeks or longer depending on the progress of the family.

The benefits of this intense □One Judge-One Family□ model for high-risk families with pending CHINS cases are:

- Consistent orders for all the family's pending legal cases
- More accountability of judiciary, family, and service providers in knowing what is ordered and needed by the family
- Monitoring families more closely to avert crisis and delayed court hearings
- Prioritizing the goals to be completed by the family members
- More efficient and coordinated service delivery
- Expediting children to permanency through coordinated service delivery enabling earlier determination of whether reunification will be feasible

Another important aspect of this "family focused" Project, is the ability to focus on the siblings that may not be officially involved in the court case, and thereby avoid their future delinquency or other involvement in the court system.

Assisted Substance Abuse Treatment. A unique aspect of the Henry County Family Court Project is providing some very limited pilot funding for drug screens, monitoring, or drug treatment for families in the "one judge-one family" project that do not have financial or other means to secure these services. With CHINS families, this programming facilitates parent drug rehabilitation so that children can eventually be reunited with families. Also, in some situations, the drug use monitoring/drug screens for parents allows children to have home visits that otherwise would not be considered safe. To date, there have been two individuals that have been financially assisted regarding substance abuse costs. Family court funding cannot adequately meet this need in the future, and Court Improvement Program funding will be sought for CHINS families.

ADR: Divorce and Paternity Mediation. The Family Court also coordinates and directs ADR programming through Circuit and Superior No 1 Courts. The ADR program uses two local mediators, and will contract with outside mediators when conflict. The mediations are provided at low or no cost to pro se parties that have high conflict in their divorce and or paternity actions. The Court has also directed parties to mediation when there is one party that is unrepresented. The mediations have been successful in working out issues in divorce and paternity proceedings without Court involvement.

Families Served by Family Court Project

Since its inception in February 2004, the Henry County Family Court Project has served 28 families, involving 168 cases to date. The ADR program has provided services involving 39 families.