

MINUTES
PROBLEM SOLVING IN FAMILY MATTERS COMMITTEE
MAY 18, 2009

The Problem Solving in Family Matters Committee of the Implementation Plan met in Courtroom 4B at 400 Grand Street, Waterbury, CT.

Those in attendance: Hon. Lynda B. Munro, (Chair), Chief Family Support Magistrate Sandra Sosnoff Baird, Family Support Magistrate John E. Colella, Mr. Andrew Clark, Mr. Patrick J. Deak, Mr. John Dillon, Mr. Joseph DiTunno, Mr. Joseph Greelish, Ms. Michelle Hayward, Atty. Charisse E. Hutton, Mr. David M. Iaccarino, Ms. Debra Kulak, Atty. David Mulligan, Ms. Dalia Panke, Family Support Magistrate Linda T. Wihbey, and Mr. Edgar Young. Guests in attendance: Mr. Richard Burt, Department of Social Services, and Chief Child Protection Attorney Carolyn Signorelli.

Judge Munro thanked all members for their hard work and announced that a third work group will be formed. It will be called the Funnel Work Group. This group will be responsible for digesting the findings of the other two groups and blending the pieces together in order to provide a seamless product. The group will meet once to accomplish the task. The membership is comprised of representatives from the other two workgroups. They are: Ms. Barbara Geller, Ms. Michelle Hayward, Mr. David Iaccarino, Ms. Debra Kulak, Atty. David Mulligan, Ms. Dalia Panke, and Ms. Bernice Zampano.

New York Problem Solving Court Model

This item was addressed first as Judge Munro had to leave early to attend another commitment. Judge Munro announced that Representative Bruce Morris is interested in the committee's work. She also extended an invitation to all committee members to be part of a conference call where the New York Problem Solving Court model will be discussed. Specifically, the successes they have had and challenges that should be anticipated. Those interested in participating in the conference call should email Ms. Greenfield or Ms. Lugo Gines to sign up. The date has not yet been determined.

Approval of minutes

The minutes from the last meeting held on March 23, 2009 were approved by the committee.

Progress Update - Work Group 1 Identification, Assessment, and Recommendations

Magistrate Wihbey accepted an invitation from Judge Norko to observe Community Court. She confirmed during this visit that community resources are a key element as well as computer access and information. Also, a very helpful tool at Community Court is a database containing statistics.

Magistrate Wihbey reported that the Department of Correction's Offender Accountability Manual is in the process of being revised and that some of the recommendations offered to DOC are being considered for inclusion. She also stated that there are minor barriers between probation and the Department of Labor. Therefore, Bill Carbone's involvement is critical.

Housing issues continue to offer the most challenges. Ms. Barbara Geller will be providing some information for the Funnel Group. The Court Service Centers maintain some housing referral information. Group I is still attempting to determine how to best utilize the Court Service Centers and their localized resources. Group I also needs to discuss how the resources will be gathered and who will be responsible for managing the information. Proper case management is key.

A successful program should have more involvement from the parents. For example, the curriculum offered by the fatherhood program managed by Career Resources, Inc. (Bridgeport) includes a co-parenting curriculum which is like a contract and a cooperative effort by both parents which leads to better parenting and respect. Kids are improving.

Magistrate Wihbey reported that in Bridgeport the collection rate improved by 2%. Perhaps it is due to incoming tax returns or because Support Enforcement Services is processing more modifications and using outreach to get orders in line with earning capacity. The strategy family court is using is “modify it or pay it.” It will get a better collection rate and more buy-in from the custodial parent. A discussion ensued regarding how success is measured. By increasing the collection rate and, as a by-product, the non-custodial parent has more involvement in the child’s life. A Colorado study was mentioned where success is measured by the relationship between increased collection and increased parental participation in a child’s life.

Progress Update – Work Group 2 Overlap

Work Group 2 was charged with identifying areas of overlap. Technology appears to be key in tying these overlapping areas together. The group has looked at:

1. Data elements to help connect systems
2. Data elements helpful to the judicial authority
3. Who has access to that system
4. Identification of any memorandum of understanding with the Judicial Branch

The Overlap group developed a survey and distributed it to three family support magistrates and Judge Munro. The group will review the information captured by the survey and will go forward from there. The results will help identify what needs to be done in the future with clients and understand the character of the person when standing before the magistrates. The group is also looking at how the information gets to the court.

Concern was expressed regarding custody and visitation not being part of the IV-D program despite the statutory authorization in C.G.S. § 46b-231 for Family Support Magistrates regarding agreements. It was noted that currently some magistrates do not feel comfortable using the statute to make decisions regarding custody and visitation agreements since they do not have complete access to information. Perhaps, a change to the law is necessary.

Role of DSS in working with inmates prior to their release

Mr. Richard Burt from the Department of Social services spoke about DSS’s involvement with the inmates prior to being released. He explained DSS provides free medical benefits as well as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly food stamps. The challenge, he stated, is that SNAP is geographically oriented and a case worker has to be assigned to each inmate. Vermont currently has this program in place and is doing a great job running it. He explained, in VT inmates are released with a \$1.00 pre-loaded card and must see their case worker to load the card after their release. Inmates are eligible for expedited SNAP upon their release. There are only three contractors in the state working with pre-released inmates for SNAP. Unfortunately, Connecticut has administrative problems managing the program.

The inmates get referrals with medical coverage. SAGA replaced General Assistance. Most inmates are eligible for the two programs under SAGA: the cash program and the medical program. To qualify for the cash program, the inmate must be disabled and had been receiving SSI prior to entering prison. The program piggy backs on the Social Security disability determination. Although, people with no SSI could qualify for the SAGA cash program but it may take up to 60 days to establish need. It was agreed that it would be helpful to have a direct link to resume SSI. A suggestion was made to bring a Social Security representative to the

table. It would be important because DOC notifies Social Security at the time an inmate enters DOC, however, that is a one way street. There should be a way for SS to send the information back to DOC. Mr. Burt was invited to continue attending the committee meetings. He will speak to the contractor's managers about doing a better job. Also, a recommendation was made to have outreach staff in the courts, such as "third age initiative", a group of retired executives.

New Business – any other background work required

Chief Child Protection Attorney Carolyn Signorelli stated her agency is trying to be more efficient and was there to learn what the committee is working on and see if her office can be of assistance.

Attorney Charisse Hutton will be forwarding some information to Ms. Lugo Gines for distribution to the entire committee.

Future Meetings

The large committee agreed to meet on June 29, 2009 in Courtroom 4B at 400 Grand Street, Waterbury, CT at 9:00 a.m. The Funnel Group will meet on June 8, 2009 at 9:30am. The location will be determined based on conference room availability. Members will be notified.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:35 a.m.