

# Best Practice Court Matters

## *An update on the latest events of Best Practice Courts of Virginia*

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Court Improvement Program  
Office of the Executive Secretary, Supreme Court of Virginia

Spring 2003

### Best Practice Courts Local Updates

The December 9-10, 2003, meeting of twelve Best Practice Courts in Richmond, Virginia provided participants a chance to share how their communities are serving children and families in child dependency cases. Teams of juvenile court judges and clerks, attorneys and social services professionals had the opportunity to learn from their colleagues around the state as they exchanged success stories. New approaches were offered to encourage enhanced case management of these cases.

Learning from each other was the focus of the meeting with the anticipated result being better service to Virginia's youngest citizens and their families. Working with professionals from other localities, each team member found many ideas to take home.



Judge Richard J. FitzGerald, Senior Judge Commonwealth of Kentucky, inspires the audience with his opening keynote address.

Here's what we've heard from you:

#### ALEXANDRIA:

The Alexandria team attended a Model Court Core Group meeting in January to report on ideas generated at the December Best Practice Courts meeting. At a subsequent meeting in March, the group discussed progress on dependency mediation, drug court and plans for establishing a child advocacy center in Alexandria. The group is planning another Adoption Day Celebration in May and an all-day retreat in September.

In addition, Judge Stephen Rideout reports that Alexandria has established an initiative called "Kids, the Court, and the Arts." This led to the planning and development of "Art in the Courthouse," which enables the framing and placement of art created by children who are before the court. The art will be displayed throughout one of the court's waiting areas and will be rotated every three to four

months. The "Arts" group held a reception and grand opening in February with 125 people attending.

#### BEDFORD:

Bedford J&DR is planning a local training session with Campbell J&DR on May 2. CIP staff will present an all day training on best practices in handling child dependency cases for the judges, clerk's office staff, attorneys (DSS counsel and GALs), local social services agencies, CASA, court service unit staff, and other interested stakeholders in those communities.

#### CAMPBELL:

Campbell J&DR, led by Judge Ellen White, hosted a kick-off luncheon at the Colonial Inn and Restaurant on March 4. (See related article.) In addition, a local DSS training on concurrent planning was held on March 6. Attendees viewed a related video provided by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

As noted above, a local CIP training in conjunction with Bedford County is planned for May 2.

#### CHARLOTTESVILLE:

Charlottesville is in the process of applying for grants for its Family Treatment Court program. Jody Shelley, deputy clerk, reports that this program is going very well.

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## "Campbell's Children First" Hosts Community Gathering



The Campbell J&DR Best Practice Courts Team, having chosen the name "Campbell's Children First," hosted a kick-off community luncheon at the Colonial Inn and Restaurant on March 4, 2003. Lelia Hopper, Director of the Court Improvement Program - Foster Care and Adoption, and Rob Baldwin, Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia traveled to Rustburg for this event at the invitation of Judge Ellen White. As guest speaker, Mr. Baldwin discussed the overall concept of Best Practice Courts and challenged attendees to support the court system's continuing efforts in improving the handling of child dependency cases.

This event was truly a community affair. There were representatives from a wide range of organizations who care about child dependency issues in Campbell County and who want to make a difference in the lives of local children and families. In addition to Judge White and her clerk's office staff, Circuit Court Judge Sam Johnston and County Attorney David Shreve attended. There was a representative from DSS, the County Administrator's office, Central Virginia Community Services-MHMRSAS, the local sheriff's office, the local school board, and the YMCA. Other attendees included a school guidance counselor, a retired Lane Company executive, members of the clergy, as well as various members of the community involved with Habitat for Humanity, the Court Appointed

Special Advocates (CASA) program, and the Guardian Ad Litem program.

One issue addressed during the lunchtime discussion was the need to recruit, train and retain members of the community who are willing to become foster parents for children in need. As for the biological parents of these children, a guardian ad litem in attendance noted that many are not well educated and do not understand the process or the serious consequences of short time frames for compliance. Drug addiction was also mentioned as a particular challenge.

Campbell County currently has approximately fifty-six children in care. Future plans for the "Campbell's Children First" group include holding an Adoption Saturday celebration next fall, concentrating on front loading services regarding mental health and substance abuse issues, supporting foster parent recruitment by offering incentives, and establishing a Drug Court with family treatment.

### Best Practice Courts Meeting Memorialized on Enclosed CD

With this newsletter we are providing each participant with a CD which was taped during our two-day meeting in December 2002. Our Education Department and Department of Judicial Information Technology worked diligently with CIP staff to produce this tape for each participant.

Our hope is that each of you will find the CD to be a valuable resource, not only for your personal use, but also as you share it with others in your locality through trainings and other educational events. Detailed instructions for its use are attached to the CD.

## August Meeting of BPC Judges at Virginia Beach

Tentative plans are underway for a meeting of *current* and *prospective* Best Practice Court judges during the District Court Judges Conference in Virginia Beach on August 13. CIP hopes to host a meeting that day, beginning at 8:30 AM and lasting until 2 PM, to discuss the value of the Best Practice Courts experience as we inaugurate the next group of BPC courts. Details will follow.

### Juvenile Law and Practice in Virginia: a Manual

The Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia is providing a copy of the newest edition of *Juvenile Law and Practice in Virginia*, recently published by Virginia CLE, to each Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court judge who responded to the offer from CIP. This manual was first published in 1994. The new edition contains updates throughout, including valuable information about child dependency litigation. A number of the books have been personally delivered already, and the remainder will be mailed or distributed at court-sponsored events this spring to those judges who requested a copy.



Speaker, Emily Cooke, Special Assistant for the Court Improvement Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and Sandy Karison, CIP staff attorney, take a moment during a break to pose for the photographer.

*(Continued from page 1)*

The Best Practice Court team holds monthly meetings with members dividing into committees dealing with issues related to schools, foster care, guardian ad litem/DSS counsel, and cross training. The team is also discussing the re-defining of assessment services for families in pre-foster care cases.

#### FAIRFAX:

According to Judge David Schell, Fairfax held a meeting of its Permanency Forum on March 18. Commitments have been made to provide, at the first (five day) hearing, an appointment time and place for parents to attend mental health evaluations and substance abuse evaluations. This step is intended to remove one roadblock to provision of services to the parents. Parents will receive written notification of the time and place of both evaluations before they leave the courtroom. Local mental health officials are supporting implementation of this practice. The next meeting is planned for June 17.

#### HAMPTON:

Judge Jay Dugger reports that Hampton now has a Community Services Board (CSB) liaison at all removals and is using an adapted form of Judge William Sharp's order, so that parental capacity evaluations can be completed immediately after removal. This effort required coordination with FAPT and has gone well so far.

Hampton now requires GALs to file a pleading with the court confirming that they have lived up to their duties, including speaking with the child before and after the hearings. They have improved the coordination of appeals to the Circuit Court

which will soon have a designated judge to hear these appeals. Efforts continue to create a visitation and mediation center to serve the court.

Hampton has scheduled its local CIP training for Friday, June 13.

#### HENRICO:

Henrico J&DR is planning a local CIP training on Monday, June 2.

#### NEWPORT NEWS:

Interested members of the Newport News community, including team members and their colleagues, were invited to a meeting in February to discuss making a difference in court cases involving children who are abused, neglected or in foster care.

Newport News is planning a local CIP training on Thursday, July 17.

#### PULASKI:

Pulaski plans to host a local CIP training on Wednesday, July 28.

#### RICHMOND:

Trish Muller, Chief Operating Officer, Richmond J&DR, wrote that since the December conference, the court's Millennium Team, which has been meeting since 1999, considered and adopted a formal mission statement (below) and invited additional members to join the group. Upcoming meetings will include an extensive review of data available from all of the participating agencies, a presentation from KIDS COUNT, and strategic planning to determine the Team's priorities to address over the next year.

"Mission Statement - The Millennium Team is a forum to promote and to enhance: inter-agency col-

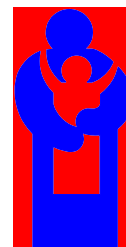
laboration, information dissemination, best court practices, and delivery of services for children in foster care and their families. The Millennium Team facilitates cooperation and coordination between the courts, social services, service providers, and the community we serve to explore and to implement improvements in the foster care system. The goal of the Millennium Team is to provide children involved in dependency cases with appropriate placements and services to allow them an opportunity to have successful and productive futures through safe, healthy, and permanent placements."

#### WARREN:

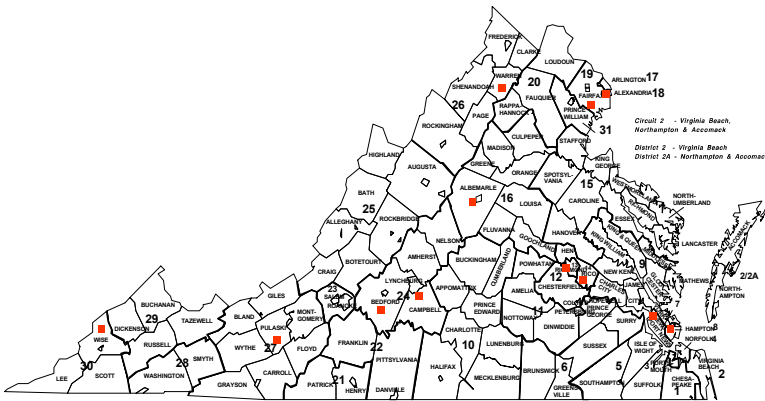
Judge William Sharp reports that the Warren County Best Practice Court group has been meeting monthly since December. This group has expanded to include the public school system, Northwestern Community Services and the Warren County Health Coalition, which represents health care providers. The group devotes a significant part of each meeting to presentations by one of the agencies represented to educate the others about its role with children in foster care. Plans for this court group are underway for educational programs aimed at teachers, health care workers and social workers.

#### WISE:

Attorney Greg Stewart wrote that follow-up meetings are scheduled, including attorney sessions with social workers and others involved in child dependency case process. Wise is planning a local CIP training on July 29.



**Best Practice Court Matters...**



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*Contributions of articles or information  
are always welcome.*

**Calendar of Events**

- May 2 - Bedford/Campbell CIP Training*
- May 31 - Alexandria – Adoption Saturday*
- June 2 - Henrico CIP Training*
- June 13 - Hampton CIP Training*
- July 17 - Newport News CIP Training*
- July 22 - Wise CIP Training*
- July 23 - Pulaski CIP Training*
- August 13- District Ct Judges Conference,  
Virginia Beach :  
Meeting of current and future  
Best Practice Court Judges  
(Tentative)*

**We Want E-Mail Addresses!**

*Yes, we already have addresses for some of you, but please don't assume that we have yours!* In our busy work environments, often the fastest and easiest method to “get the word out” is by e-mail. CIP would like to collect e-mail addresses for all Best Practice Courts participants in order to keep you informed. After you read this, please take a moment and send a quick e-mail to [Bet Lissenden at blissenden@courts.state.va.us](mailto:blissenden@courts.state.va.us), so that she will have your address in the file. Thanks so much!



Panelists here are reporting back to the group following the Professional Designation Meeting held on the second day of the December 2002 Best Practice Courts Conference in Richmond. This breakout meeting was an opportunity for each professional group to discuss the implications of collaboration among community entities with responsibilities for meeting the needs of children and families involved in child dependency cases. Members of the panel from left to right are: Hon. William W. Sharp, Judge, Warren County; Jennifer W. Flanagan, Clerk of Court, Fairfax County; William Traylor, DSS Supervisor, Charlottesville; Tim Kirtner, Esq., DSS Counsel, Pulaski; Janet Brown, Esq., Guardian Ad Litem, Richmond; and special guest moderator Judge Richard J. FitzGerald, Senior Judge, Commonwealth of Kentucky.