

Eighth Judicial Circuit Family Law Advisory Group (FLAG) Minutes of July 28, 2008

The FLAG met on Monday, July 28, 2008 at the Alachua County Family and Civil Justice Center. Present were: Glenna Auxier, Harvey Baxter, Jill Conti, Ted Curtis, Randi Dincher, Bill Farley, Arlene Huszar, Judge Martha Ann Lott, Myrna Neims, and Bill St. Amour.

The minutes of the June 23, 2008 meeting were approved.

Old Business

It was noted that OSCA was providing money to individual circuits for education in lieu of sponsoring a statewide Family Court conference this year. Some circuits are using the Florida AFCC meeting as their education program. Court personnel are able to get a 2-for-1 deal on registration for the conference which will be held next February.

The Parenting Plan Committee reported that the Florida AFCC is putting guidelines together that will conform to the new statutes going into effect October 1.

Program

Judge Martha Ann Lott spoke to the group about the \$1 million grant that Alachua County got from the State. The project started with the Public Safety Coordinating Council in 2005 and was a collaborative effort. The Council identified a need in the community to look at mental illness and how it impacted public safety. In 2006, the State Attorney, Public Defender, Sheriff, treatment providers, and representatives from the court met to discuss issues regarding criminal justice and mental illness. Judge Lott characterized these brainstorming sessions as "meetings of robust dialog." Analyses were done of the needs of the community and criminal justice needs.

The group went to the Alachua County Commission with their data in August, 2006. The Commission offered \$300,000 to fund their work. A subcommittee developed a plan to use those funds instead of the \$2 million they had asked for.

In 2007, three statewide groups existed that were dealing with these issues. There was the Florida Substance Abuse and Mental Health Corporation, Partners in Crisis which started in Orlando, and a subcommittee of the Family Court Committee created by the Florida Supreme Court. These three recommended that the State work in partnership with the counties to solve the problem.

To apply for the grant, there had to be a collaborative group in place which we had. We got one of only five grants awarded statewide. Ours is the model for data collection.

It is significant that this program was not cut this year at a time of budget cuts. Justice Quince has a particular interest in family issues and substance abuse. The Department of Corrections just held a re-entry summit at which they recognized that the

current system is not working.

This grant is not for drug court, mental health court or felony forensic court. Case managers for Meridian were funded to help people connect with community services and housing. For example, if a person is released on community release, there had been no way to follow up. A regular review process was needed. Probation can become longer but softer – more like drug court. We now have the only mental health probation officer in the state.

There are still unmet needs such as housing, especially transitional housing for people coming out of mental health hospitals and jails. The Homelessness Summit and the Homeless Coalition are collaborating on this issue. Substance abuse, mental illness, and homelessness often occur together.

The grant would allow use with juveniles but it is currently being used just for adults because they are probably the most dangerous.

Judge Lott encouraged the FLAG to look at issues and apply for grants if we identify those that could be tackled at a local level. Her group proved it could be successful when everyone works together even though we are a small circuit.

The next meeting of the FLAG will be Monday, **August 25**, at 4:00 PM.