

Eighth Judicial Circuit Family Law Advisory Group (FLAG)
Minutes of September 24, 2007

The FLAG met on Monday, September 24, 2007 at the Alachua County Family and Civil Justice Center. Present were: Ruth Angaran, Harvey Baxter, Kristin Carpenter, Pete Enwall, Bill Farley, Josh Fischer, Arlene Huszar, Judge Ysleta W. McDonald, Myrna Neims, Judge James P. Nilon, Leon Plympton and Candace Valenstein. Also present were guests Linda Stroud and Sue Driscoll. A brief appearance was made by Kathleen Fox.

We discussed the brown bag lunches that the dependency folks have every month. Every other month they have an educational program. On alternate months, they meet with stakeholders. Their October 24 meeting will be a program presented by Mr. Edelman. We will try to make information about the educational programs available to FLAG members so those interested in the topics can attend.

Myrna Neims announced that the Florida Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (FLAFCC) is having their annual conference November 2 and 3, 2007 in Orlando. They always have a huge variety of workshops for those in all professions dealing with family law cases. We will try to get them not to pick UF Homecoming weekend for their conference next year.

Linda Stroud and Sue Driscoll gave a presentation about the Alachua County Family Visitation Center which is part of Children's Home Society of Florida. They have contracts and grants with several organizations including the Partnership for Strong Families, the United Way, and the City of Gainesville. About 50% of their referrals are related to families in dependency court, about 30% come from family court, and 20% come from domestic violence cases.

The Center provides supervised visitation only by court order. Most visits are one to two hours per week. They are open Tuesday – Friday from 10:00 AM – 7:00 PM and Saturday from 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM. Sessions are only videotaped by court order. They also provide supervised exchanges for \$5.00 per exchange. A security officer is on site from 2:30 – 7:30, Tuesday – Friday, and on Saturday mornings. They have very limited staff but a large number of volunteers including UF students and Junior League members. Volunteers received a total of ten hours of training.

There are five levels of monitoring that are done at visitations. They start with having someone present in the room during the visitation. Level Two involves constant video monitoring. Levels Three and Four are decreasing levels of intermittent video monitoring and Level Five is minimal monitoring. Most parties do not get to Level Five because they are able to have unsupervised visitation by then. The average length of time that the Center monitors visitation for one family is 6 – 8 months. Families that stay over a year are usually those involved in domestic violence cases.

The next FLAG meeting will be October 29, 2007. The one after that will be November 26, 2007 and the election of our next chairperson will take place at that meeting.