

Unified Family Courts of North Carolina

Family Court Counties

BUNCOMBE COUNTY FAMILY COURT MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

Anson	Buncombe
Burke	Caldwell
Catawba	Cumberland
Durham	Greene
Halifax	Lenoir
Mecklenburg	Montgomery
Moore	New Hanover
Pender	Pitt
Randolph	Richmond
Stanly	Union
Wake	Wayne



OUR MISSION

To help resolve cases involving children and families through combined efforts of the family, the Court, and community services.

To approach each case in a way that is not overly adversarial or intrusive but always in a just, timely and efficient manner.

To be courteous, safe, and accessible and to provide quality service to those in need.

The Buncombe County Family Court was established in April 2005 to provide better alternatives for families and children in the legal system. By reducing the amount of time from filing cases until disposition, families, and particularly children, no longer "languish" in our complex and overburdened legal system. With specialized judicial and staff training, as well as "hands-on" case management, Family Court helps families become better educated about the court system as well as available services and provides them a less adversarial forum. Some of Buncombe County's recent accomplishments and projects are listed below.

Self Help Center. Family Court partnered with the 28th Judicial District Bar's pro bono committee to revise the available self-help packets for pro se litigants as well as to offer a new packet for Absolute Divorce, providing a means for parties to navigate the legal system with far more ease.

Age of Pending Domestic Family Cases. The pending median age of domestic non-child support cases in Buncombe County has decreased in 20 months from 115 days to 46 days (as opposed to an average median age of 311 days in non-family court districts). The number of cases in the same category that have been pending over 1 year has decreased over the same time period from 265 to 27.

Reduction in Truancy Project. Judge Rebecca Knight and Judge Marvin Pope are working with Buncombe County Schools in an intensive Truancy Diversion Program. Based on the Louisville Truancy Program from Louisville, Kentucky, this program is a strengths-based, family-focused intensive intervention program created to

address the root causes of truancy. It enlists the help of community agencies, both social and academic, that may affect the child's life. The Buncombe Truancy Diversion Team consists of: school principal and counselor, DSS representative, graduation initiative representative, mental health providers and other community representatives as needed.

Within the first six weeks of school, elementary and middle schools will identify students who have the most significant attendance issues. These students will be referred to the Team, and will then, with his or her family, meet in an information session with the Team and the judges, who outline the consequences of continued attendance violations, answer the families' questions and provide any additional pertinent or requested information. The student, parents and team enter into an attendance contract which includes an individualized case plan. It also usually includes ensuring that the student has no unexcused absences so that there will be no criminal charges brought against the parents and no truancy court for the student. The judges reiterate the consequences if the contract terms are not met. The teams and judges meet with the families weekly or bi-weekly to monitor the student's progress, remove barriers from achieving the attendance goals and to update the contract as needed.

The pilot program ran from January through June 2008 and each judge worked with one family. During the new school year, each judge will work individually with four families.

Ellen.G.Rose@nccourts.org

**FAMILY COURT NEWS FLASHES**

Anson/Richmond/Stanly-Judicial District 20A: The Family Court staff held a free Safe Surrender Law training on August 20, 2008 for the three counties in the district. The target population was the hospitals, EMS, fire, law enforcement, Department of Social Services, health departments and the schools. The speakers were Brenda Edwards and Phyllis Fulton from DHHS in Raleigh, with media coverage from News 14 and one of the local radio stations. The feedback from the participants on this very important topic was extremely positive. Tennelle.W.Hann@nccourts.org

Cumberland-Judicial District 12: Family Court partnered with several agencies in the community, including Cumberland County Schools, to implement a Truancy Mediation Council. The council had its first meeting in August and will begin processing cases in September. The purpose of the Council is to promote the regular school attendance of children enrolled in the public schools and to divert truancy cases from District Court through parental involvement, System of Care concepts, and mediation to assist families in the development of a well-designed plan of action for academic success. A special thanks to Suann Bechtel and the New Hanover Truancy Mediation Council for all their help! Mia.M.LaMotte@nccourts.org

Greene/Lenoir/Wayne-Judicial District 8: In June, the Family Drug Treatment Court in Lenoir County had a presentation from an OB-GYN doctor on the effects of substance abuse on unborn babies. Several participants were pregnant at the time and had the opportunity to hear what could happen if they continued to use drugs. District 8 also hosted a Lunch and Learn event on July 31, 2008 with Mark Sullivan as the presenter on "Military Pensions." The event was well attended by domestic attorneys and judges. Mr. Sullivan will be presenting the second part of the presentation on "Military Support" in September. The Family Court staff also participated in the FDTC and/or Family Court statewide conferences in August where they learned new ideas and techniques. Laura.H.Smith@nccourts.org

Halifax-Judicial District 6A: The Honorable Brenda G. Branch was appointed Chief District Court Judge of Halifax County on August 1, 2008 upon the retirement of the former chief, the Honorable H. Paul McCoy, Jr. Judge Branch is a former ADA and was appointed to the bench when a new judge position was allotted to Halifax County last year by the legislature. Judge Branch is a strong advocate of Family Court and looks forward to working with both the local and state teams. Susan.W.Horrell@nccourts.org

Montgomery/Moore/Randolph-Judicial District 19B: The Honorable Michael Sabiston will be the next Chief District Court Judge when Judge William Neely retires at the end of the year. Judge Sabiston has been on the bench since 1992 and has been a strong supporter of the new Family Court. He looks forward to continuing the integration of Family Court and believes that it will help both the public and the Bar in all three counties. Judge Neely believes that Judge Sabiston has the experience and expertise to take over the Family Court reins. Judge Neely thanks Chief Justice Sarah Parker for her support and for naming the new chief in advance, which will keep the program running smoothly through the transition. Nancy.M.Butler@nccourts.org

New Hanover/Pender-Judicial District 5: New Hanover County Family Court, in conjunction with the local YWCA, Legal Services and Child Support Enforcement, hosted a free legal clinic on August 5, 2008. The Family Court Administrator, Legal Services attorney, Child Support Enforcement Administrator and a New Hanover County private attorney donated their time for the 3-hour clinic. Suann.N.Bechtels@nccourts.org

Pitt-Judicial District 3A: Pitt County, one of the newest Family Court sites, implemented Juvenile Abuse, Neglect and Dependency Rules, effective July 1, 2008. These Rules were drafted by a committee consisting of Family Court staff, District Court Judges, the Guardian ad Litem Administrator and Attorney Advocate, parent attorneys and juvenile clerks. The Rules are designed to encourage early permanence for children by requiring early submission of reports, child planning conferences and pre-adjudication conferences. Mona.N.Williams@nccourts.org

Union-Judicial District 20B: As of July 4, 2008, the median age for pending domestic cases has dropped from 192 to 137 days. The district welcomes their new Family Drug Treatment Court and Juvenile A/N/D Case Coordinator, Katie Walter. Chief District Court Judge Chris Bragg recently taped interviews with the ten candidates who are running for the five contested seats for the North Carolina Court of Appeals as well as the two candidates for the one contested seat on the North Carolina Supreme Court. The interviews will air on local cable access during the months leading up to the November election. Martha.S.Hall@nccourts.org

Eight hundred and fifty (850) copies of this public document were printed at a cost of \$53.89, or about \$0.063 per copy.

AOC Family Court Management Specialists

Western Region 919-890-1204 Lori.C.Cole@nccourts.org
Central Region 919-890-1203 Alisa.D.Huffman@nccourts.org
Eastern Region 919-890-1211 DeShield.Smith@nccourts.org