



# Model Court Communicator

A community collaboration to improve the lives of children and families in Weld County

Winter 2008

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To the child we cannot answer "Tomorrow," The child's name is "Today."

## *Nineteenth Judicial District designated as Model Court site*

*by the Honorable J. Robert Lowenbach*

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges [NCJFCJ] and the Colorado Court Improvement Program [CIP] designated the Nineteenth Judicial District as a Model Court site on December 23, 2007. This distinguished achievement allows our community to implement new practices and programs that will improve the lives of our children and families.

The Weld County Child Welfare Collaborative [CWC] was established on June 9, 2005. Its mission is to "promote and restore our children's well being by coordinating community efforts and resources within child protection systems, and adapting new and promising programs that support and sustain safe and healthy families." Through the CWC's work, new programs and practices have been established including:

- Orientation hearings for new parents and special respondents.
- In court, on-line scheduling of drug and alcohol evaluations for parents and special respondents.
- In court preparation and distribution of orders to all who attend motions day hearings.
- The Division 7 Family Treatment Court was established.
- Providing a voice to children through the Voices of Youth program.

The trust and collaborative culture established through the CWC placed our community in a favorable position to be tapped as a Model Court site because of our proven willingness to critically examine our present system and make changes to maximize the support and services we can provide.

Our first step as a Model Court occurred on January 9, 2008, when more than 30 members of the CWC met at a collaborative retreat to establish our 2008 goals. As a result, the CWC has been renamed the "CWC Model Court Steering Committee," but our purpose of improving the lives of children and their families remains unchanged.

In this inaugural issue of the Model Court Communicator, Robin Overmyer describes the work of the Family Treatment Court that recently celebrated its one year anniversary. In coming issues, the chairpersons of the committees instituted at our retreat will describe why the 2008 goals were established and the progress that they are making to achieve those goals by the end of the year. As Lead Judge for the Weld County Model Court, I look forward to witnessing the achievement of each of these goals. *Carpe diem.*



Judge Lowenbach

A full description of the benefits and responsibilities of Model Courts is available at

<http://www.ncjfcj.org/content/view/full/82/146/>

### Upcoming Events

Monthly subcommittee meetings: All at noon, Court House, Fourth Floor, Jury Room C4

- Emancipation Subcommittee 3-5-08
- Orientation/Visitation Subcommittee 3-18-08
- Permanency Subcommittee 3-28-08 (fourth Friday of each month)

Collaborative meetings:

- Child Welfare Collaborative Model Court Steering Committee, 3-11-08, noon, United Way (814 9<sup>th</sup> St.), Ponderosa Room

## Family Treatment Court Now in Session

*by Robin Overmyer, Department of Social Services*

In January 2007, the first Family Treatment Court Hearing was under way. One mom sat in the court room with about seven team members looking at her. She sat there scared, depressed, and lonely and was coming off of drugs. She had been there before, with a previous child, but this time things were different. This time she had a support team, a team who perhaps wanted her to succeed even more than she did. She was thinking, "Will this make a difference? Can I stop using drugs? Will I ever get my child back?"

As court progressed during the next six months this mom found the support she needed not only from the treatment team but also from other mothers who had joined the program. When it came time for her baby to come home, this mom panicked. She wondered if she could do it. The treatment team set a date for the baby to be returned. She had done it. She had remained clean and was living in a stable place.

Throughout the next six months this mom found herself questioning if she was a good mom, could she remain sober? She even questioned if her child should stay with her. With the support of the treatment team this mom became confident in herself as a mother and as a person.

This mom graduated from family treatment court on January 15, 2008. She still keeps in contact with people from the treatment team and with the others moms. Would she have made it without Family Treatment Court? I don't know. What I do know is that she did make it and that is all that matters.

Family Treatment Court is a collaborative program between the Court, Respondent Parent's Counsel, Guardian Ad Litem, Social Services, Mentor Moms, and Island Grove Regional Treatment Center to work as a team to provide services for parents who are addicted to drugs. The goal of this program is to reunify families faster and to make life lasting changes for these parents.

During the pilot program in Division 7 only mothers were accepted into the family treatment court program. As of March 12, 2008, Weld County Court will be accepting fathers through the expansion into Division 9.

In the Family Treatment Court Model the treatment team meets weekly to discuss the progress of each parent in the program. The parents in the program must then attend court weekly to discuss how their week went. The goal of meeting every week is to keep parents on track and to motivate them to stay active in their treatment.

As a result of Island Grove receiving a Federal regional partnership grant to treat methamphetamine addiction, we will be adding North Range Behavioral Health, a drug and alcohol evaluator and a therapeutic parent educator to our team. In addition, the grant will allow us to provide transitional housing for some parents coming out of treatment. We believe that with these services children will be able to return home more quickly and that they will remain home.

On February 4, 2008 the Division 9 treatment team held a six-hour retreat to put the final touches on its Family Treatment Court. We are all confident that we are ready to move forward and we are all very excited about this new Court and being able to offer these services to more parents.

### **The child's name is "Today."**

**Right now is the time that bones are being formed,  
Blood is being made and senses are being developed.  
To the child we cannot answer "Tomorrow,"  
The child's name is "Today."**

Chilean Poet Gabriela Mistral penned these words before her death in 1957. To those who touch the lives of children and families in the child welfare system, these words should provide a central focus for our efforts. Whether our goal is to reunify the family or to provide a different permanent home for a child, we know that the passage of time is the enemy of both children and parents.

It is for this reason that we have included Mistral's words in the banner for our Model Court newsletter. In all the decisions that we make that affect children served by our efforts, we should ask the question, "Does my action give meaning to the phrase 'The child's name is Today?'" If we can each respond "yes" to that question, our level of professional practice will surely rise and the lives of the children and families that we serve will be improved.