



Colorado Justice: Celebrating 42 years of fair
and impartial courts through merit selection

news

Colorado Judicial Branch
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Weld County court earns special designation

Model Court project aimed at improving handling of child abuse and neglect cases

GREELEY, Colo. – In partnership with the Colorado Court Improvement Program, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, a membership organization consisting of judges and other professionals dedicated to improving the effectiveness of the nation's juvenile courts, has designated the Weld County court as a “Model Court.” The Model Courts project is designed to examine and improve the courts’ handling of child abuse and neglect cases.

The Council’s announcement came three years after Colorado became the first state to have three sites awarded the Model Courts designation.

Bill DeLisio, court improvement coordinator for the Colorado Office of the State Court Administrator, said the Model Courts program in the Fourth Judicial District (El Paso and Teller counties), Second Judicial District (Denver) and Seventeenth Judicial District (Adams and Broomfield counties) has led to significant progress and improvement in the courts’ handling of cases alleging child abuse or neglect.

“The creative solutions and innovative programs developed through the original Model Courts project served as an excellent example for long-term systems change,” DeLisio said.

“Those examples strengthened our proposal to make the Weld County court a Model Court

through a contract that is designed to promote the sharing of effective practices across jurisdictions in order to improve outcomes for the children and families the courts serve.”

Leading the project will be District Judge J. Robert Lowenbach, who in 2005 called together interested parties in an effort that led to the establishment of the Weld County Child Welfare Collaborative (CWC). Through the CWC, the agencies and individuals associated with the child welfare system have worked very closely together, have learned to respect the roles of each and have discovered that through the collaborative process much more is possible than they originally imagined. Judge Lowenbach said he hopes the Model Court designation will build upon the CWC’s successes, including creation of the Family Treatment Court for drug-involved families, more timely scheduling of substance abuse evaluations and treatment for parents, and the establishment of orientation sessions to help parents provide a safe home for their children.

“We believe that with the assistance of the Council’s Model Courts Program, we are poised to make great strides in 2008 toward improving how we handle dependency and neglect cases,” Lowenbach said. “The work of the Brighton, Denver, Colorado Springs and Teller County Model Courts has been of great assistance to our court and others in Colorado. We are very excited to have this opportunity to improve our system and showcase our innovative programs that other courts may choose to adapt to their use.”

In addition to sharing Weld County’s experiences with others, jurisdictions throughout Colorado will benefit in other ways. Through the contract, the Council will provide training on best practices in abuse and neglect cases, scholarships for judicial officers to attend Council conferences, Council memberships for judicial officers and Model Court liaison site visits in three court locations.

In Weld County, parents and representatives from related professions and agencies such as social service personnel, guardians *ad litem*, parents’ attorneys, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), schools, court personnel advocacy groups and treatment providers will

continue to meet and work together to identify best practices and implement innovative solutions that will promote better outcomes for children and families.

“Weld County will look to build upon the successes of the 2005 designated Model Courts in preventing unnecessary out-of-home placements of children, reuniting children with their families when feasible and facilitating timely adoption of children unable to return home,” DeLisio said. “The well-being of families and the best interests of the children are the focus in all cases.”

The Model Courts are a group of juvenile and family courts committed to making a difference. Working with the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges’ Permanency Planning for Children Department, and using the acclaimed best practices bench book *RESOURCE GUIDELINES* as a guide to systems reform, the Model Courts identify impediments to the timeliness of court events and delivery of services for children and families in care, and then design and implement court and agency-based changes to address these barriers. The Model Courts Project provides judges, attorneys, and other professionals who work in the courts and child welfare agencies with practical, concrete, and effective tools for creating court improvements in the handling of child abuse and neglect cases.

For more information on the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges’ Model Courts Project contact ebarnes@ncjfcj.org or visit <http://www.ncjfcj.org/content/view/81/145>.