

JUVENILE COURT PROJECT



PARENT ADVOCATES



Shattered Bonds Author to Speak at JCP Forum

Shattered Bonds—The Color of Child Welfare has been proclaimed “a wake-up call to child advocates” and a forceful argument for the notion that the “child welfare system is destroying Black families and communities.” The social critic behind the book, Northwestern University law professor Dorothy Roberts, will be the featured speaker at the Juvenile Court Project’s 1st annual Public Policy Forum on Nov. 18.

In her book, Roberts argues with both sentiment and empirical evidence that state intervention in families is disproportionately inflicted upon Black communities. Recent U.S. Census Bureau statistics support Roberts’ claim. According to those statistics, African American children, who comprised 15% of the U.S. child population in 1999, constituted 45% of the children in substitute care. Conversely, white children comprised 60% of the child population and accounted for 36% of children in substitute care.

Roberts asserts that “major shifts in federal and state policy on child protection, welfare reform, and criminal justice are converging to proclaim a dangerous message: the solution to the problems of poor Black children is either to dissolve their family ties so that they can be adopted by more privileged parents or to lock them up in the nation’s expanding prison system.”

Roberts believes that recent child welfare policy initiatives such as the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act show that

Congress has abandoned its focus on preventive and reunification programs in favor of programs supporting adoption. She adds that this policy shift is based on society’s failure to value the relationship between poor parents and their children.

“The very structure of child welfare is fundamentally flawed. Instead of targeting the systemic reasons for family hardship to prevent child maltreatment, it lays the blame on individual parents’ failings after a crisis has already occurred. Instead of supporting families, it punishes them by taking children from their homes for placement in foster care,” declares Roberts.

Promoting cultural sensitivity within the child welfare system while addressing the deprivation of poor families through strong social programs will go a long way toward fixing the child welfare system, states Roberts.

“The ingredients for a strong child welfare program are clear and simple: first, reduce family poverty by increasing the minimum wage, instituting a guaranteed income, and enacting aggressive job creation policies; second, establish a system of national health insurance that covers everyone; third, provide high-quality subsidized child care, preschool education, and paid parental leave for all families. Increasing the supply of affordable housing is also critical,” concludes Roberts.

Invitations to the Public Policy Forum will be mailed in the fall. For an invitation, please contact the Juvenile Court Project at (412) 391-4467.

INSIDE

- Director’s Letter 2
- SNAP Mission Statement 3
- Independent Courts Celebrated 3
- Briefs 3
- New Staff Members 4

SAVE THE DATE

Nov. 18, 2003

**Allegheny County Bar
Foundation
Juvenile Court Project
Presents
DOROTHY ROBERTS
Author of *Shattered Bonds***

**ACBA Conference Center
9th Floor City-County Building
2:00 p.m.**

MISSION STATEMENT

The Juvenile Court Project is a legal assistance program of the Allegheny County Bar Foundation. Our mission is to advocate for the interests and protect the legal rights of indigent parents whose children are the subjects of Juvenile Court dependency and termination of parental rights proceedings.

JUVENILE COURT PROJECT

Parent Advocates

DIRECTOR
Mark D. Edwards

DIRECTOR EMERITUS
Linda Ehrenreich

MANAGING ATTORNEYS
Sharon Biasca
Eleanor Grainy
Catherine Volponi

SUPERVISING ATTORNEY
Kiersten Frankowski

ATTORNEYS
Yolanda Bacharach
James Ball
Frank Bogatay
Gina Cipolletti
John Hayes
Nellita Moore
William Petulla
Jim Robertson
Elizabeth Schooley
Armand Velez

PARENTAL SUPPORT ADVOCATES
Linda Cuttler, Supervisor
DeLisa Coleman
Deborah Fisher
Betty Williams-Pryor

SUPPORT STAFF
Kelly Berry-Jones
Sharon Ciechalski
Carolyn Fisher
Christina Veason

ACBA COMMUNICATIONS
DIRECTOR
Jennifer Pulice

ACBA GRAPHIC ARTIST
Tracey L. Shanko

EDITOR
Sharon Biasca

The Juvenile Court Project newsletter is published twice each year by the JCP and the Allegheny County Bar Association Communications Department. Comments and inquiries should be sent to: Editor, Juvenile Court Project, Suite 300, Allegheny Building, 429 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15219.



Director's Letter

By Mark D. Edwards

The Year in Review

Time, or lack thereof, is the most significant challenge facing parents in dependency and termination of parental rights cases. The traditional practice model of attorney and client meeting in an office to discuss the case can no longer be the sole means of providing legal representation to our clients. During the course of the last year, the Juvenile Court Project has made significant strides in adjusting our practice to assist clients in responding to the time-driven realities of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

With funding secured through grants from District Attorney Stephen Zappala's office and Pittsburgh City Council members Alan Hertzberg and Gene Ricciardi, a parent educational video has been produced and is now being shown in the Juvenile Court waiting room on Wednesday and Friday mornings, and is available to agencies upon request. Outreach legal clinics have been established at 23 different sites throughout Allegheny County including the Allegheny County Jail, CYF regional offices and key service providers who have significant interaction with our clients. These clinics have resulted in over 300 contacts in the community which would have been unlikely in the traditional office setting. The Parental Support Unit, operating since January and consisting of four Parental Support Advocates, has been instrumental in initiating numerous contacts in the community and assisting our clients in achieving their Family Service Plan goals. These endeavors are critical in making the Juvenile Court Project more accessible and visible in the community.

In October, the Juvenile Court Project hosted a CLE attended by 70 attorneys from throughout the commonwealth to discuss legislative, practice and appellate issues impacting parents. In May, the Juvenile Court Project hosted a seminar in Harrisburg focusing on ethical dilemmas facing attorneys for parents. These CLEs are the first step in developing a State-

wide Network of Advocates for Parents (SNAP) to facilitate communication and collaboration between Parent Advocates in the numerous counties in Pennsylvania on various legal and practice issues that affect parents. The Juvenile Court Project has collaborated with our counterparts in Philadelphia at the appellate level regarding a critical dependency case in Allegheny County and will continue this joint effort when significant appellate issues arise.

From an operations standpoint, our office has moved into the 21st Century with the completion of a client database which enables our office to identify the difficult types of issues our clients face, i.e., drug abuse, mental health, domestic violence. This in turn will help us in developing programs and strategies to assist them.

In April, we were fortunate to have four of our attorneys receive scholarships to attend a week-long trial advocacy seminar. This intensive seminar, sponsored by the National Institute of Trial Advocacy, was held at Drake University and focused on legal issues facing public interest lawyers nationwide. The seminar gave the lawyers the opportunity to interact and exchange ideas with some of the leading practitioners in the country and will enhance their representation of clients.

As we enter the new fiscal year, the issue of time limitations imposed by the Adoption and Safe Families Act will continue to present challenges to parents. Additionally, budget uncertainties in the areas of drug and alcohol and mental health services will also present obstacles. The Juvenile Court Project will be implementing an intensive education/orientation program to assist our clients in meeting these challenges. In addition to the intake process, significant time will be spent with clients at the inception of the case to educate them about the court process and their rights and responsibilities. A parent orientation handbook will also be available by late fall.

Statewide Parent Advocacy Group Adopts Mission Statement

The steering committee of the new Statewide Network of Advocates for Parents adopted a mission statement at its May meeting in Harrisburg and is defining its organizational form as it begins soliciting members.

Juvenile Court Project attorneys Mark Edwards, Linda Ehrenreich and Sharon Biasca are members of the steering committee and attended the May meeting where Peter Schneider of Philadelphia and Shirley Makuta of Westmoreland County were named co-chairs.

The newly adopted mission statement is as follows: "We, the members of the Statewide Network of Advocates for Parents (SNAP), are attorneys who advocate for parents in all stages of dependency proceedings, including the termination of parental rights. It is our mission to maintain a high level of pro-

fessionalism among this group of attorneys by facilitating exchange of information and providing a forum for discussion of procedural, practical and substantive issues related to these proceedings. We recognize the need to develop continuing legal education and training programs and to foster professionalism in this area of legal practice."

Activities planned by SNAP include implementation of an e-newsletter and brief bank. Additionally, the group will establish a presence in the legislative arena so that parents' issues will be considered whenever legislators enact or amend laws affecting parents' rights.

Annual dues have been set at \$35. Attorneys who are interested in receiving a membership application or more information about SNAP can contact Linda Ehrenreich at (412) 391-4467 ext. 208.

BRIEFS...

Summer Interns—Four student interns are assisting the JCP with legal and public policy endeavors this summer. Travis Hill and Randy Johnson, second-year University of Pittsburgh law students, are helping attorneys with case preparation. Danielle Foster, a senior Administration of Justice major at Pitt, has provided research support. Colin Holloway, a senior at Carnegie Mellon University, is researching public policy issues surrounding the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

Bench-Bar—JCP attorneys were in attendance at the 41st Annual Bench-Bar Conference at Seven Springs in June. The Juvenile Law Sound-Off portion of the conference featured a presentation on subsidized permanent legal custody as a permanency option for children. This form of permanency places the child in the custody of a legal guardian without terminating the rights of the parent and allows for regular visitation to be crafted into the custody agreement.

Family Resources—The JCP's Mark Edwards, Cathy Volponi, Eleanor Grainy, Sharon Biasca and Linda Cuttler were pleased to attend Family Resources' 8th Annual Child Abuse Prevention Month Awards Dinner in April. Family Resources offers parents vital support and resources to prevent child abuse, and hosts a monthly JCP law clinic at its McKeesport office. The Family Resources website is <http://trfn.clpgh.org/familyresources>.

National Fatherhood Initiative—JCP attorney Eleanor Grainy and parental support advocate Linda Cuttler attended the 6th National Summit on Fatherhood in Philadelphia in June. The program featured sessions on best practice trends in assisting fathers in fragile families, and examined what organizations are doing to engage expectant fathers. The NFI can be contacted at www.fatherhood.org.

The Program for Female Offenders—Mark Edwards, Cathy Volponi, Eleanor Grainy and Sharon Biasca represented the JCP at May's Annual Dinner and Auction benefiting The Program for Female Offenders. This project offers assistance to both male and female offenders and their children, including productive alternatives to incarceration for non-violent offenders. For additional information, call (412) 281-7380.

Law Day Celebrates Independent Courts

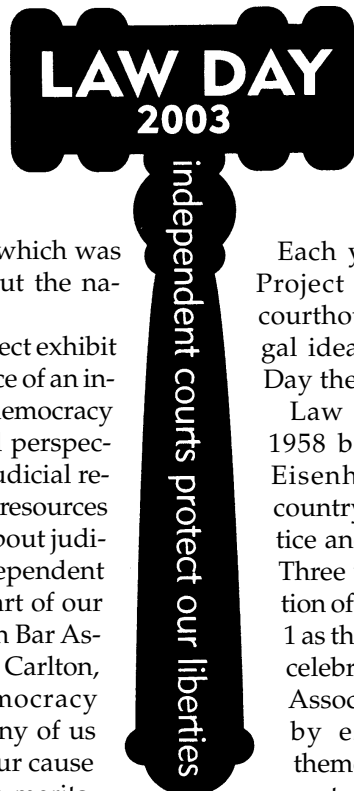
Law Day 2003 was recognized by the Juvenile Court Project through an exhibit at the Allegheny County Family Courthouse. "Celebrate Your Freedom - Independent Courts Protect Our Liberties" was the theme for this year's Law Day, which was acknowledged throughout the nation on May 1.

The Juvenile Court Project exhibit highlighted the importance of an independent judiciary in a democracy and included a historical perspective on the evolution of judicial review as well as a listing of resources for further information about judicial independence. "Independent courts are at the very heart of our freedoms," said American Bar Association President Alfred Carlton, Jr. "Our American democracy promises us that when any of us appears before the law, our cause will be heard only on its merits. Our system of liberty under law assures

us that the law will be fairly applied by an independent judge governed only by the rule of law. It further promises us that we will be treated without regard to our wealth or social status or capacity to influence."

Each year, the Juvenile Court Project erects a display at the courthouse that promotes the legal ideals expressed in the Law Day theme.

Law Day was established in 1958 by President Dwight D. Eisenhower to celebrate this country's heritage of liberty, justice and equality under the law. Three years later, a joint resolution of Congress recognized May 1 as the official date for Law Day celebrations. The American Bar Association sustains Law Day by establishing an annual theme and offering educational materials. The ABA Law Day website is www.lawday.org.





Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Pittsburgh, PA
Permit #130

Juvenile Court Project

Suite 300 • Allegheny Building
429 Forbes Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Phone: (412) 391-4467

Fax: (412) 391-4465

E-mail:

www.acbparentadvocates.org

JCP Announces New Staff Members

The Juvenile Court Project is pleased to announce the addition this past year of seven new employees. John Hayes and William Petulla joined the office as staff attorneys. Kathy Miehl was hired as a certified legal intern. Linda Cuttler, DeLisa Coleman, Deborah Fisher and Betty Williams-Pryor accepted positions in the new Parental Support Unit.

Hayes joined the office in September and is currently handling cases before Judge Kathleen Mulligan and Hearing Officer Mark Cancilla. He holds a master's degree in social welfare in addition to a law degree from Duquesne University. Hayes has 25 years of legal experience, most recently with the firm of Bashline & Hutton in Pittsburgh.

Petulla also joined the office in September and is currently representing parents before Judge Kim Clark and Hearing Officer Jim Alter. He is a graduate of the Washburn University School of Law in Kansas and was admitted to the Pennsylvania Bar in 2002. Petulla most recently served as a contract attorney for the firm Kirkpatrick & Lockhart in Pittsburgh.

Miehl, a third-year University of Pittsburgh law student, is a certified legal intern representing clients before Judge Clark. Additionally, she conducts in-depth new client interviews. She has been employed by the office for one year.

Cuttler, a certified addictions counselor, joined the staff in October and supervises the newly formed Parental Support Unit. Cuttler has a master's degree in organizational development and was a case manager for five years with POWER (formerly Healthy Start) before joining the office.

Coleman was hired in January and prior to that served as a



The JCP Parental Support Unit staff takes time out for a photo. From left are Linda Cuttler, Betty Williams-Pryor, Deborah Fisher, and DeLisa M. Coleman.

case manager for Welfare to Work National Homes Trust in the East Hills, where she was responsible for outreach, enrollment, advocacy and monitoring of clients.

Fisher also was hired in January and previously worked with the Allegheny County Treatment Alternatives program and the Healthy Start Substance Abuse Project, where she assisted clients with drug and alcohol treatment.

Williams-Pryor also joined the staff in January after retiring from Highmark Blue Cross where she worked for 20 years. She has counseling experience as well, most recently working for Auberle providing counseling to adolescents.