

# JUVENILE COURT PROJECT



## PARENT ADVOCATES



## Divorce Law Project Moves to JCP Office

The Allegheny County Bar Foundation (ACBF) Indigent Divorce Program has a new name and a new location with its January move to the Juvenile Court Project office.

According to Director Lisa Wezorek, the program has changed its name to the ACBF Divorce Law Project and is sharing office space with the Juvenile Court Project at the Allegheny Building. "I'm pleased to be here," said Wezorek. "It's a logical move since we are both Bar Foundation projects and serve the same client population."

The Divorce Law Project serves Allegheny County residents by assisting qualified low-income persons in obtaining simple, no-fault divorces. Prospective clients generally must meet all of the following criteria to be eligible for the program:

- Allegheny County resident for at least six months;
- Proof of low-income status;
- Separated from spouse for at least one year;
- Willingness to proceed only on a simple, no-fault divorce claim;
- Ability to provide complete address for spouse who will cooperate if accepting service.

Client intake hours for the Divorce Law Project are Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 1-3 p.m.; and Tuesday and Thursday from 10 a.m.-Noon at Suite 300, Allegheny Building, 429 Forbes Avenue in downtown Pittsburgh. For further information call 412-402-6714.

## Sanchas New Parent Advocate

Experienced local attorney Raymond Sanchas has joined the Juvenile Court Project as a staff attorney, and will represent parents with cases before Judge Kathleen Mulligan.

A 1980 graduate of the University of Pittsburgh School of Law, Sanchas has litigated in every division of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas in addition to bringing appeals to the Commonwealth Court, Superior Court and Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

From 1993 to 1999 Sanchas served as a Family Division hearing officer, presiding over support matters and related

issues. For the past four years he has provided representation to indigent parents in termination of parental rights cases, and served as a guardian *ad litem* for children in adoption matters.

Sanchas is a member of the Allegheny County Bar Association (ACBA) where he serves on various committees of the Family Law Section Council. He has been a presenter at numerous Continuing Legal Education programs for the ACBA, Pennsylvania Bar Association, Matrimonial Inns of Court, and the National Child Support Enforcement Association.

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## 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

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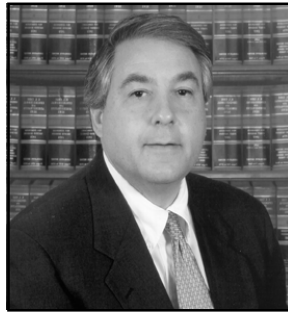
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# Director's Letter

By Mark D. Edwards

Many cases in Juvenile Court involve young mothers, who because of the lack of guidance or support from the family unit, find themselves facing a dependency petition and the possibility of having their child removed. Studies and national demonstration projects have shown that utilizing volunteer mentors to provide parenting education and support is an effective intervention.

In an effort to reach young mothers at risk of entering the system, the Juvenile Court Project will be embarking on a community-based mentoring initiative aimed at assisting young mothers between the ages of 18 and 28.

This initiative, which will commence in June, will provide 30 young mothers with an adult mentor for a six-month period. The Juvenile Court Project is collaborating with other agencies including A Second Chance, Inc. and the Mentoring Partnership of Southwestern Pennsylvania, who have assisted in the design of

the program as well as with the recruiting of mentors and mentees. Judge Cheryl Allen also has been instrumental in the development of the project.

Mentors will work with parents on life skills such as budgeting and workplace professionalism and assist parents in obtaining support services if needed. The program also will provide educational presentations and the opportunity for mentors and mentees to come together to share their stories and offer peer support.

Providing young mothers with a consistent mentor along with educational, skill-building and support components represents a multifaceted approach to assisting parents at this crucial time.

A kickoff breakfast will be scheduled in May. All inquiries should be directed to JCP parental support advocate DeLisa Coleman at 412-391-4467 ext. 219, who will assist a mentoring coordinator in supervising this initiative.

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## A Parent's Guide to Juvenile Court

### New Booklet Answers Common Questions

The Juvenile Court Project has produced a new 12-page booklet addressing questions frequently asked by parents involved in dependency and termination of parental rights cases.

*A Parent's Guide to Juvenile Court* provides a concise overview of the roles played by the judge, parent advocate attorney, county solicitor, guardian *ad litem*, caseworker and CASA in court proceedings.

Additionally, the booklet explains the court process from the time of the initial shelter hearing through

case closure.

The guide also explains to parents their responsibilities in a juvenile court matter, noting that parents' goals must be met quickly due to the strict timeframes of the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

The booklet is distributed to parents as part of the Juvenile Court Project intake process and is available in limited quantities to interested child welfare professionals. For further information, call the Juvenile Court Project at 412-391-4467.

# Public Policy Forum a Success

A distinctive gathering of 100 judges, lawyers and social workers from the child welfare system attended the Juvenile Court Project's first annual Public Policy Forum on November 18 at the Allegheny County Bar Association Conference Center in downtown Pittsburgh.

Speaker Dorothy Roberts, a Northwestern University Law Professor and author of *Shattered Bonds—The Color of Child Welfare*, noted that it was rare for her to address such a diverse group of child welfare professionals. "It's encouraging to see representatives of various interests gathered in the same room, starting a dialogue," said Roberts.

Roberts presented empirical evidence in support of her contention that state intervention in black communities is disproportionately high, and asked the group to consider whether children living in these communities develop a distorted view of the state's role in society. She added that the child welfare system would better benefit black communities by focusing on preventive services to families instead of using its resources to intervene after a child has been



*Pictured at the JCP Public Policy Forum are OCYF Deputy Director Dr. Marcia Sturdivant, Professor Dorothy Roberts and JCP Director Mark Edwards.*

abused or neglected.

"We were delighted by the response to the forum," said Juvenile Court Project Managing Attorney Sharon Biasca, who coordinated the event. "It's been great to hear judges, attorneys and service providers actively discussing the issues raised by Dorothy." She added that plans are already underway for next year's forum.

Family Division Administrative Judge Eugene Scanlon scheduled an abbreviated docket so that Allegheny County Juvenile Court personnel could

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## Workshop Offers Tips for Parents in CYF Cases

The Juvenile Court Project joined forces with Parents Anonymous of Pennsylvania and Family Resources on February 10 to present a workshop entitled "Empowering Your Family—Tips for Working With Children & Youth Services."

The two-hour seminar for parents included basic information on Pennsylvania child abuse and neglect laws, legal rights, and the timeframes of the Adoption and Safe Families Act. Its primary focus was to teach parents how to best advocate for their families in juvenile court dependency matters. The Family Resources office in East Liberty hosted the event.

Juvenile Court Project representatives on the discussion panel were attorney Yolanda Bacharach; parental support advocate Betty Williams-Pryor; and community liaison Linda Cuttler.

A second workshop for social services providers is planned for the spring, with additional workshops for parents to be held twice each year. For more information contact Yolanda Bacharach at 412-391-4467. Further information about Parents Anonymous and Family Resources can be obtained at [www.parentsanonymousofpa.org](http://www.parentsanonymousofpa.org) and [www.familyresourcesofpa.org](http://www.familyresourcesofpa.org).

## BRIEFS...

**SNAP NEWSLETTER**—Kiersten Frankowski, a JCP supervising attorney, is serving as editor of the Statewide Network of Advocates for Parents (SNAP) e-newsletter. The inaugural edition, which included an article by JCP attorney Frank Bogatay, debuts in March. SNAP is a newly formed group of Pennsylvania attorneys committed to advocating for parents in all stages of dependency proceedings, including the termination of parental rights. Annual dues have been set at \$35. For further information or a membership application, please call Linda Ehrenreich at 412-391-4467.

**SAVE THE DATE**—You won't want to miss the May 20, 2004 Continuing Legal Education Program co-sponsored by the JCP, Allegheny County Juvenile Law Practitioners and the Statewide Network of Advocates for Parents. This full-day program will feature issues of interest to attorneys representing children, parents and child welfare agencies in juvenile court dependency practice. The event will take place at the ACBA Conference Center auditorium in the City-County Building in downtown Pittsburgh. For further information call Linda Ehrenreich at 412-391-4467.

**APPOINTED TO BOARD**—JCP community liaison Linda Cuttler has been appointed to the board of managers for the Shuman Juvenile Detention Center, where she will serve a three-year term.

**LAW DAY 2004**—This year's national Law Day will commemorate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of one of the U.S. Supreme Court's most important cases, *Brown v. Board of Education*, which forever changed the civil rights landscape in America. For information about Law Day programs visit the American Bar Association website at [www.lawday.org](http://www.lawday.org).



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attend the forum. Joining him were Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas judges Kathleen Mulligan, Kim Clark, Christine Ward, Jill Rangos and Robert J. Colville.

Also in attendance were Department of Human Services Director Marc Cherna; Office of Children, Youth and Families Deputy Director Marcia Sturdivant; University of Pittsburgh College of Law Dean David Herring; and representatives from KidsVoice, CASA, the Allegheny County Law Department, the Women's Law Project, the Women's Center and Shelter of Greater Pittsburgh, the Urban League, Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh, FamilyLinks, Family Resources, A Second Chance and Neighborhood Centers Association.

Invitations to next year's Public Policy Forum will be mailed in the fall. Recipients of the Juvenile Court Project newsletter will automatically receive an invitation. Other interested child welfare professionals should call Sharon Biasca at 412-391-4467 to be added to mailing list.

## Holiday Project



The usually staid law library of the Juvenile Court Project took on a festive air in December as attorneys and staff members participated in a toy drive for the Allegheny County Department of Human Services Holiday Project. For over 20 years, the Holiday Project has ensured that families involved with the Office of Children, Youth and Families receive holiday gifts and other necessities. Pictured wrapping the gifts provided by the Juvenile Court Project are legal assistant Carolyn Fisher and attorneys Kiersten Frankowski and Armand Velez.