

Louisiana State Bar Association Children's Law Committee

Wednesday, September 9, 2020, 12PM

Attendees:

- Tiara Barnes, Acadiana Legal Service Corp
- Danika Benjamin, Acadiana Legal Service Corp
- Pamela Crawford, Mental Health Advocacy Service
- Kristina Douglas, Assistant City Attorney Shreveport
- Steven Farber, Metropolitan Human Services District
- Jesse George, The Pro Bono Project (co-chair)
- Hon. Ernestine Gray, Orleans Parish Juvenile Court Judge
- Karen Hallstrom, Attorney & Pelican Center Board Member
- Mark Harris, Pelican Center for Children and Families
- Jack Harrison, East Baton Rouge Indigent Defender
- Kellie Johnson, Mental Health Advocacy Service
- Barry LaCour, Mental Health Advocacy Service
- Sowmya Mandava, 24th Judicial District Court
- Rebecca May-Ricks, Mental Health Advocacy Service
- Rachel Nastasi, Acadiana Legal Service Corp
- Curtis Nelson, Louisiana Supreme Court
- Michelle Perkins, Caddo Parish Juvenile Court
- Hon. Kathleen Richey, Casa
- Leigh Sakla Rood, Jefferson Parish Juvenile Court
- Courtney Schroeder, Attorney at Law
- Briana Spivey, Acadiana Legal Service Corp
- Ariel Test, LA Center for Children's Rights
- Franchesca Hamilton-Acker, Acadiana Legal Service Corp
- Cherrilynne Thomas, LA Dept of Children and Family Services
- Madalyn Wasilczuk, Louisiana State University
- Jacqueline Williams, Acadiana Legal Service Corp
- Jennifer Womble, Jefferson Parish Indigent Defender Board

Staff:

- Monte Mollere, LSBA
- Stephanie Beagh, LSBA

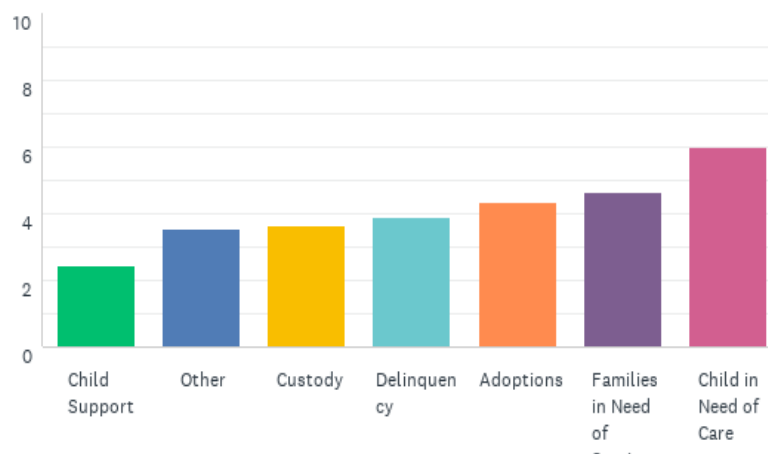
Minutes

1. Welcome & Introductions
 - Minutes from 5/19/2020 meeting approved without objection.
2. COVID-19 & Hurricane Laura: Issues & Updates

- Acadiana Legal Services reported that 50% of residents in Lake Charles are still without power.
- Courts are still being held by Zoom and live in some circumstances. One attorney reported that a court in northern Louisiana was holding court in a bifurcated manner—both virtually and live.
- Clients still reporting issues with Wifi; court continued matter due to concerns with confidentiality.
- Jesse George asked if, regarding COVID, anyone has success arguing group homes present an inherent danger to kids. His client is an older teenager, allegations are by a sibling and were unsubstantiated after forensic interview, and no criminal charges have been filed. The agency has used that as a reason to keep him out of his home and away from his mother despite the fact that the sister, who is the alleged victim, is not in the home. The court keeps continuing the matter without ruling. Suggestion to develop a safety plan to offer to the court. Judge Gray signed off and will return later.
 - The committee discussed issues and inconsistencies with DCFS and visitation policies. And these issues are being seen in multiple cases.
 - Curtis Nelson mentioned there is an upcoming meeting with the judges and agencies and he will share this information with them.
 - Advocates may want to give a copy of the Memo from the Children’s Bureau to the court.

3. 2020-2021 Initiatives Discussion – Thanks to everyone who completed the survey. Below are some of the results:

- If you would like to be on one or more of the following Subcommittees, please let Stephanie know:
 - i. Legislative
 - ii. Trauma-Informed Care
 - iii. Education
 - iv. Disparities & Disproportionalities
- The following areas of law were ranked by level of importance:



- b. Respondents indicated they would like to hear from guest speakers who have subject matter expertise—specifically on topics presented by judges and on topics about disparity and disproportionality in the juvenile justice system.
 - c. This Committee expressed a lot of interest in continuing and increasing its engagement of law students in the area of children’s law.
4. Trauma Informed Care Subcommittee
- Karen Hallstrom reported that several trauma informed court events were scheduled before COVID and has been delayed or postponed. They are now starting to regroup and evaluate what we can do to inform courts, staff, and individuals what we could. The Judicial College is looking for topics to present to judges and hearing officers. Karen to reach out to Michael at the Judicial College to find out what the parameters are and update the group.
 - If anyone else wants to join, please email Stephanie.
 - Bar Journal Special Edition Article on trauma-informed courts was submitted for publication and should be coming out in the Oct/Nov issue of the *Bar Journal*.
5. Pelican Center Report – *Mark Harris*
- The Pelican Center is heavily involved in executing the Louisiana Court Improvement Program’s Strategic plan, which includes implementation of certain strategic parts of the State’s Child and Family Services Review & Improvement Plan. Specifically, Pelican Center is working improving the quality of legal representation and improving service array.
 - My Community Cares pilot programs taking place in Caddo, East Baton Rouge, Livingston, & Rapides Parishes. They are also working with Judge Gray and looking at expanding into Orleans, Parish, and expanding to Lafayette Parish.
 - Regarding improving quality legal representation, they are looking at the possibility of implementing multi-disciplinary representation models where attorneys are paired with social workers and either parent mentors or child mentors.
 - Trainings on this: They are near completion of the curriculum to help train and educate legal stakeholders on the state’s new child welfare assessment and decision-making model. This is the model that emanated from the program improvement plan designed to improve decision-making and making sure that children only enter foster care as a last resort. It is designed to help prevent or eliminate the need for removals, but also to expedite permanency. It will be in October over 2 days and available afterwards too.
 - They have a contract with the American Bar Association’s Center on Children and the Law to develop a trial’s child welfare trial skills building curriculum and training. Actual trainings will be held in 2021.
 - Pelican Center sponsored over 40 attorneys to attend the National Association of Council for Children Conference, which was held virtually last week. The Pelican Center does have some openings available for sponsorships, for attorneys who wish to become NACC child welfare law specialist certified that attorneys. After certification, if certain are requirements met, the Pelican Center and Court

Improvement Project could help underwrite your annual fee. See here for more information:

https://clarola.org/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=1442:child-law-specialists-certified-louisiana-attorneys&Itemid=247

6. Education Workgroup

- The group met with some local schools, but progress was halted due to COVID. Curtis Nelson will touch base with Barbara Ferguson on rescheduling meetings virtually.
- The Children's Cabinet Advisory Board has a committee that addresses early childhood, as well as K-12, and their focus is on increasing access to remote learning because and for support services this year. Kathleen Richey to provide contact information.

7. Updating the Becoming an Adult Brochure – Updates to this brochure had previously been put on hold due to lack of resources for printing. But since everything is going virtual, we should revisit this issue. Curtis has the great idea of using QR codes that people can scan that will go to the electronic version. We just need help updating the brochure and would require members of this committee to do that work.

- Ariel Test mentioned that she worked on updates, but we should determine if this brochure is being used. Kathleen said this would be a great resource for CASA volunteers and trainings and offered to help.
- Consider partnering with teen courts.
- Karen suggested adding referral information to the brochure and additional information on legal resources.
- Stephanie & Curtis to follow up.

8. Training

- Together We Can in October and all virtual. Registration opened last week. \$125 for 3 days.
- Pelican Center put together a training for prosecutors on CINC work. Curtis received positive feedback.

9. Other Business

- Legislative Updates: The Louisiana Partnership for Children and Families put together a [2020 Legislative Report](#).

10. Adjournment – Next meeting is November 18, 2020 at noon.