
JEFFERSON COUNTY MEDIATION SERVICES
VOLUNTEER COLLOQUIUM MINUTES
September 20, 2011

Volunteers Present: Peggy Evans, Dick Gearke, Anita Gilbertson, Billy Harris, Nancy Martch, Elaine Rains, Steve Shaver

Staff Present: Mark Loye, Julie Carter, Helena Jo Goldstein

I. Welcome:

Mark Loye welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked those present to introduce themselves.

II. Program

- A. Case Status Report: This report shows all open cases. If you have an open case, please remember to keep the office informed about case activity.
- B. Cases Available: Emails are sent regularly to inform volunteers about available cases. Please remember to respond only if you are volunteering for a case. (Hint: change the subject line if you are using the email to correspond about something else!)
- C. Statistics: The case load in 2011 is at or near record pace.

III. Presentation: Father Hunger: Ray Washington

The mission of Jeffco Child Support Services (CSS) is to collect child support. By law, it cannot intervene in parenting time disputes. This leads to a lot of anger. Custodial parents have CSS to help them collect child support, but traditionally no one has offered help to non-custodial parents who are being denied access to their children. CSS staff has to tell these parents (usually, but not always Dads): I can't give you legal advice, and by law I can not get involved in parenting time issues. The Fatherhood Program seeks to fill this gap, by providing all types of assistance to non-custodial parents. (More information about the Fatherhood Program can be found at: http://jeffco.us/cse/cse_T86_R31.htm.)

For non-custodial parents, the legal system is daunting- finding the right paperwork, let alone completing it, to request a court hearing on parenting time is a huge hurdle. Mr. Washington has arranged for some lawyers to volunteer their time to this effort- once a month they come to the father's support group to help the participants complete legal paperwork. The Fatherhood Program also encourages the non-custodial parent to further their education. This is one way for them to show they are changing their lives. They can say, yes I did time, but that was because of what I did back then. Look at what I have done since then- I've gotten my GED, my associates degree, etc.

Recently CSS began adjusting support orders whenever a payer goes to jail. This is a huge development. In the past, people did not have their order adjusted while they were in jail. This meant the moment they got out, they could be thousands of dollars behind in their child support. This experience was very frustrating for the non-custodial parent, and also affected their driver's license and their ability to get a job. (Unfortunately, there are still many people who are still thousands of dollars in arrears from before the institution of this policy.)

Another positive development has been the Jeffco Problem Solving Court. It has vastly reduced the number of non-payers going to jail (which certainly does not help their ability to pay). The Court has done a fantastic job of separating the people who want to pay but can't from the people who could pay but refuse to do so. It is only the later group that belongs in jail.

Mr. Washington then turned to the topic of Father Hunger. He discussed the devastating impact on children growing up without Dads. Those Dads often grew up without Dads, and their Dads may have grown up without Dads. This leads sons to wonder if they are ok, if they measure up. Daughters wonder, am I ok, will any guy ever love me. If these children do not have validation from a father figure, they seek acceptance in gangs, they seek love by making babies of their own. This desire for a father is so profound that even adults continue to seek their fathers and be overwhelmed by the experience if they finally meet them. For more information about Father Hunger, see websites such as www.libertyconsultantgroup.com/rffdads and www.coloradodads.com.

Over time Mr. Washington has learned that he also needs to work with the custodial parent. The custodial parent, often the Mom, has been hurt by the absence of financial and emotional support from the Dad. This hurt leads to anger which can lead to a negative reaction to a Dad trying to get back into his child's life. (JCMS often deals with this when trying to get custodial parents to agree to participate in mediation.) The Moms in these cases also need support, to deal with their anger so they can focus on the needs of the child. Mr. Washington runs a Saturday class where the kids play while the Dads have a support group, and then the custodial parents are invited to play with the kids and the non-custodial parents. For many of the children, it is amazing to see their parents having fun. Often this is the first time they have ever seen their parents be in the same room without yelling at each other.

There are a few key goals in working with the non-custodial parent. First, the parent should have reasonable access to their child. This gives them the motivation to work and pay child support- the child they are supporting is a real person in their lives. Next, the parent needs stable employment, so they can pay support. Thirdly, the support order should be a reasonable one. An unreasonably high order leaves the non-custodial parent feeling buried, hopeless, and unmotivated to work.

Mark Loye thanked everyone who attended for participating in the discussion. He also thanked for Mr. Washington for his presentation. The talk about Father Hunger was quite moving .

IV. Next Colloquium: Tuesday November 15 2011, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m. in the Open Space Hearing Room (Ponderosa Room). The topic will be announced closer to the date. Suggestions for Colloquium topics are always welcome!

The meeting was adjourned.

Submitted by: *Helena Jo Goldstein*

Helena Jo Goldstein, Programs Manager

Approved by: *Mark Loye*

Mark Loye, Director