

FAMILY COURT SERVICES

Budget 2022

EXPANDED FOR PP & J 10/5/21

Director, Jenny Cooke, LMFT

SMALL BUT MIGHTY

LOCATED IN THE COURTHOUSE

Serving court ordered families through Parent Education, Mediation, Family Studies and Brief Focused Assessments as defined in Wisconsin State Statutes (767.401, 767.405, 767.41)

AFCC GUIDELINES & STANDARDS

- Association of Family and Conciliatory Courts
- “AFCC convenes members of multiple disciplines in the public, private and nonprofit sectors, from all over the world. AFCC is unique as a professional association because members do not all share a common profession. Rather, AFCC members share a strong commitment to education, innovation and collaboration in order to benefit communities, empower families and promote a healthy future for children.” (<https://www.afccnet.org/About/About-AFCC>)

PARENT EDUCATION

- Misnomer, Really is an orientation to the process
- Zoom format
 - Some deficits
- \$40 per parent
 - Spouse/significant other can attend free

MEDIATION

- Referred by Judge or commissioner
- Appointment scheduled within 45 days of referral; extra time with documented domestic abuse
- FCS only deals with custody and placement NOT child support or property division
 - Custody relates only to decision making: school, non emergency medical care, religion, driver's license, getting married or joining the military while still a minor
 - Placement relates to where a child is physically placed

FAMILY STUDIES

- Referred by Judge or Commissioner
- Much more detail based on 16 statutory factors (see attachment A)
 - Communication
 - AODA history
 - Criminal history
 - Domestic or child abuse history
- Interviews
- Parent child observations--sometimes
- Home visits—sometimes
- 90 days to complete

BRIEF FOCUSED ASSESSMENTS

- Referred by Judge of Commissioner
- Concentrate on one single issue only
- 60 days to complete
- Does not always include a recommendation
 - Information about a parent's progress in treatment
 - Assessment of a parents ability to meet needs of child

Front Office Staff

- Anchored by two administrative support professionals
 - Doors open to the public with face to face answers to brief questions from citizens
 - Phones answered directly in person
 - Manage correspondence
 - Maintain the database with up to date information
 - Input referrals
 - Track fees owed and fee payments
 - Keep supplies current, manage accounts in MUNIS
 - Complete biweekly payroll
 - Track case assignments
 - Assign to Parent Education classes
 - Arrange interpreter services

Limited-Term Employees

- 2 LTE's
 - One assists with front office coverage and office projects as needed
 - One assists with back scanning/scanning to eliminate/minimize paper files
 - Labor intensive process started by the previous Director
 - Oldest paper files are 2009
 - Transitioning to electronic files intensified during COVID, working from home
 - Most counselors now have hybrid files, some paper some electronic

FAMILY COURT COUNSELORS

- Eight counselor positions with 2 current openings
- All hold Master's Degrees
- All hold Licenses from the WI Department of Safety and Professional Services
 - 3-Advanced Practice Social Workers, 1 Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, 1 Licensed Professional Counselor and 1 Licensed Clinical Social Worker
- Conduct mediations, brief focused assessments, family custody/placement evaluations and facilitate Parent Education classes
- Seek resolutions that are in the best interest of children
- Highly skilled, passionate about children and highly dedicated

WE ARE NOT CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES (CPS)

- People get our agencies confused
- FCS does not assess for safety; report to court on strengths and concerns
- We sometimes make reports to CPS
- In our cases, we only have Parent 1 and Parent 2; sometimes a grandparent or third party to work with; foster care is not an option

2021 Numbers (as of 8/31/21)

- 362 families referred for mediation
 - 371 August 2020
 - 489 total 2020
- 120 families referred for Family Study
 - 113 August 2020
 - 184 total 2020
- 6 families referred for Brief Focused Assessment
 - 10 August 2020
 - 14 total 2020

Pandemic Issues

- The case referrals continue to be steady, in spite of the Pandemic
- It was unclear how to safely accomplish our jobs when the Pandemic first arrived
- Due to the Pandemic, we experienced significant delays in receiving collateral records from community sources
- Parents sometimes struggled with technology access; this improved over time
- A wait list for families was instituted to allow counselors to give full attention to their caseloads
- The wait list was caught up early during the Spring 2021
- Due to staff changes the wait list is again growing

Revenue 2021

- FCS revenues have improved compared to last year January-August
 - 2020 January-August: \$111,000
- In fact we are over the 2019 (pre-Pandemic) total by \$26,000
 - 2019 January-August: \$124,600
 - 2021 January-August: 150,500
- Over \$16,000 in fees have been waived so far in 2021
- PP&J is assessing FCS fee procedures

Budget 2022

- No increases have been requested for 2022

PANDEMIC CHANGES TO SERVICES

- For the safety of all involved, FCS continues to minimize face to face contact with Dane County families
- Other FCS offices around the state have resumed/or continued normal face to face operations
- Other Family Court professionals around the country are mixed on what services will look like in the future
- My expectation is to use a hybrid model with some video conferencing ability but also a return to face to face meetings with families when it is safe
 - There will be a budget impact with the cost of electronic platforms

EQUITY PROGRESS

- New database will be in place soon
 - demographic information
- Working with OEI to hire a Spanish speaking counselor and a Spanish speaking front office professional
- Researching options to provide Parent Education in different languages
- Working with IM on a translation application for phone and front desk

DANE COUNTY FCS

- We are the largest FCS office in the state
- Our counselors are the most educated with a master's degree and mental health licensure required
 - Helps settle cases whether through mediation, study or BFA; saves judicial resources; better for children
- Testify at trials and receive challenges to our "expert witness" role

THANK YOU

- FCS has been in the process of an electronic upgrade for several years
 - In spite of the pandemic, IM has made significant strides and has been highly responsive to our needs
- The Dane County Judiciary and the Dane County Family Law Section of the State Bar continue to appreciate and support the hard work FCS does on a daily basis for Dane County families
- Thank you Board members for your continued support--please call/ email to schedule a time to tour the office and learn more about FCS