



## **NATIONAL PROJECT TO IMPROVE REPRESENTATION FOR PARENTS INVOLVED IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM**

### **SAMPLE AGENDA: PARENT ATTORNEY TRAINING**

9:30 – 9:45 Welcome and poll the audience for questions they want answered

9:45 – 11:15 Panel – How Does Child Welfare Work Differ from Criminal Law Practice?

Speakers could include: ABA Parent Attorney Project Staff, Local Attorney, Local Judge, Child Welfare Agency Staff, and Parent

*Similar to attorneys in criminal cases, parents' attorneys in child welfare cases have a duty of loyalty to their clients and a duty to zealously represent their clients, even when allegations are disturbing. Parents' attorneys' role is not to judge or play agency social worker.*

*However, zealous advocacy does not equal adversarial -- not every case is adversarial all the time -- attorneys need to be flexible as information-sharing and collaboration can serve your client better in many cases.*

*Unlike in the criminal system where you don't want to be found guilty or serve time, the goal here is to prevent placement, and reunite or help the family -- the situation is sometimes not about who did what to whom and when, but rather where do we go from here -- legal strategies should be tailored to lead to the desired goal.*

*Attorneys representing parents need to especially focus on building trust with clients, providing counsel, and supporting clients with case planning. In many cases, your client will have too much to accomplish in too little time and under so much stress and emotional heaviness -- they need a parent advocate to provide ongoing advice and participation in case planning.*

*Discussion of permanency planning and time frames -- the parents' attorneys' role in ensuring reasonable efforts are provided and "frontloading" services. How and when should you push the agency to provide services and explore the options that your client suggests for placement? What is your role in pushing for the best visitation schedule/situation possible?*

11:15 – 11:30

Break

11:30 – 12:30

Continuation of Panel – Focus on Practice Tips

*Client interviewing and client counseling including some written materials and forms, tips/strategies for establishing rapport, building trust, explaining your role, explaining confidentiality, and eliciting information that is critical to effective representation.*

*Special considerations, tips/strategies regarding client interviewing and communications when your client is a teen parent, parent with a cognitive disability, incarcerated, LEP, deaf or hearing impaired.*

*Importance of maintaining contact with clients, tips on keeping track of hard to reach, on the move clients.*

*Traditional lawyering skills still important in most cases -- practice tips related to reviewing the allegations, evidence, investigations and pulling together evidence to support your client (lay witnesses and expert witnesses).*

12:30 – 1:15

Lunch

1:15 – 3:15

Ethics, Professionalism and Implementation of Practice Standards

*(Working with others to resolve problems and going the extra mile for your clients)*

3:15 – 3:30

Wrap-Up – revisit original questions