Outside the Courtroom: Education Advocacy for Disabled Children in Foster Care by John Mattingly

Attorneys, caseworkers, foster parents and parents share the responsibility for ensuring that the multidimensional needs of children placed in out-of-home care are met. For children with disabilities, these needs often include ensuring their participation in appropriate early intervention, preschool, or school-age special education services. The National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being concluded recently that “the vast majority of children who have spent one year in out-of-home care have substantial social and cognitive impairments,” regardless of the age of the child. More than 50 percent of the youngest children entering foster care have developmental delays. The circumstances that surround each child who enters the foster care system also increases the risk of the child developing disorders that will interfere with his/her ability to learn. Yet many competent attorneys, caregivers and caseworkers possess little knowledge of these programs or how to navigate roadblocks when attempting to access early intervention or special education services for children in need. When delays in development or academic progress are identified, early intervention or special education services are a significant component of a comprehensive service plan needed to enhance the child’s level of functioning. Accessing these services for children in foster care, however, can present a challenge to even the most determined advocate.

The Administration for Children’s Services (ACS) is New York City’s first free-standing agency in the City’s history dedicate solely to protecting children and strengthening their families. Established in 1996, the agency oversees the City’s programs of child protection, foster care, preventive services, adoption, child care and Head Start. In order to enhance ACS’ ability to protect the educational rights of disabled children in its care, ACS is developing an in-house interdisciplinary advocacy unit consisting of attorney and social work staff. It is critical that, as advocates and representatives of children involved in the child protective system, we inquire after their educational status, ensure that suspected developmental delays or disabilities are identified, and ensure that these children are receiving all of the services to which they are entitled that will allow them to progress (continued on page 7)

Child Advocacy Practice Groups by Frank P. Cervone

It is not uncommon in large, diverse firms for two of the firm’s lawyers to be involved in volunteer service with a particular non-profit, yet not know of the other’s involvement. Opportunities for mutual support and collaboration are lost. For the Support Center for Child Advocates (Child Advocates) in Philadelphia, Child Advocacy Practice Groups are helping to bridge these gaps.

Like a law firm’s traditional departmental or substantive stratifications, pro bono practice groups exist within the larger organization and structure of the firm. Some gain formal recognition of the law firm, while others exist or at least start out as informal relationships and gatherings.

Rob Hawn convened Cozen O’Connor’s Child Advocacy Advi-

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As child advocates we are beginning to talk more about cultural competency issues, as we should. Differences in language and culture can result in divides that make representation difficult at best. I recently read *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, a book that describes in some detail the collision of American medicine and Hmong culture through the story of Lia Lee, a Hmong child diagnosed with severe epilepsy. Written by journalist Anne Fadiman, this book is thoroughly researched and describes the many disconnects between Lia’s doctors and her parents and how their inability to communicate led to tragedy. This inability was not just due to language, though there were few professional translators available to ensure that Lia’s family and doctors were communicating effectively, but was also based on the dissimilarity in how Lia’s family and her doctors viewed not only Lia and her illness but also the world.

For child advocates this book is a fascinating exploration of how cultural divides can interfere with a child’s medical treatment, which in Lia’s case led to a stay in foster care despite loving parents who cared zealously for their child (this section of the book will leave you wondering where her lawyer was). The full presentation of each side gives readers an opportunity to think about what could have been done differently, which is a good way to begin thinking about what we can do in our daily practice to ensure that we are connecting with our clients and their families.

This book won the National Book Critics Circle Award, and after reading it you will understand why. I highly recommend it.

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As mentioned in the last newsletter we are putting together an editorial board to work with us on this newsletter. We hope to have some new features including perhaps more book reviews. I would like to get feedback from our readers about what types of articles and features you would like to see, so please call me at 202 547 3060 or e-mail me at catherinekrebs@prodigy.net with your requests or ideas and be sure to let me know if you would like to be part of the editorial board.

*Catherine Krebs is the Committee Director of the Children’s Rights Litigation Committee and also editor of this newsletter. Previously she was a staff attorney at the Children’s Law Center of Massachusetts.*
Resources for Child Welfare Professionals by Althea Izawa-Hayden

Since the American Bar Association’s Center on Children and the Law (ABA Center) was established in 1978 by a federal grant, it has celebrated many firsts in the child welfare arena. For example, in 1981, the ABA Center created the first national litigation manual for judges in child abuse and neglect cases; in 1983, staff developed the first major foster care system legal reform book; and in 2001, the ABA Center helped ABA-Africa to organize and participate in a legal/judicial reform conference in Tanzania.

For over 25 years, ABA Center staff have published dozens of books and manuals, presented at numerous national and state conferences, provided quality training and technical assistance to judges, attorneys, child welfare agencies, court appointed special advocates (CASAs), guardian ad litem (GALs), and other child advocates throughout the country. Currently, there are about 20 ABA Center staff that include attorneys, social scientists, editors and marketing experts. The staff come from diverse backgrounds, the attorneys have practiced in many jurisdictions, some have represented parents, others the child welfare agency, and others the children in the child abuse and neglect system. The ABA Center currently has approximately 18 grants which fund a variety of projects including the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues, the Permanency Barriers Project, the Partnership in Program Planning for Adolescent Health (PIPPAH), and the Child Law Practice. Each offer a wealth of information for practicing lawyers.

National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues

The Children’s Bureau, an entity of the United States Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, awarded the ABA Center a grant in 1995, which funds the National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues (Resource Center). The grant was recently renewed again this past summer for the next five years. Seventeen ABA Center staff members and nine consultants work on projects funded under the Resource Center grant. Resource Center staff provide training and technical assistance and write articles and books on issues such as meeting the educational needs of children in foster care, legal ethics for child welfare attorneys, co-occurrence of domestic violence and child maltreatment, performance measurements for courts in dependency cases, improving representation for all parties in dependency cases, working with foster parents, and best practices to implement the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), as well as other federal child welfare laws. These trainings are offered to child welfare agencies, judges, attorneys, CASAs, GALs, and others. Individuals can contact their local child welfare agency or state Court Improvement Project (CIP) to request that they contact the Resource Center to set up a training.

Child and Family Services Reviews and Program Improvement Plans

The Resource Center has also been instrumental in helping states prepare for their federal Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) that assess and rate each state’s performance in child welfare on issues such as meeting children’s needs of safety, permanency, and well-being. These CFSRs include a state self assessment of how they meet the needs of families in the child welfare system, and an on-site performance review by a team from the state and federal government.

Along with the CFSRs, staff help individual states draft and implement program improvement plans (PIPs) that address areas the CFSR found as “needing improvement.” These PIPs are an important part of improving outcomes for children in foster care. Examples of activities that are often included in PIPs include improving agency representation, drafting model court orders, providing services to prevent initial removal, efforts to place children close to their home so that visitation is easier, and training foster parents, relative caretakers, and adoptive parents.

Court Improvement Project

In 1993, states started to receive annual federal funding for Court Improvement Projects (CIPs) which

(continued on page 4)
Resources for Child Welfare Professionals (continued from page 3)

are focused on improving court performance in child abuse and neglect cases. A requirement of receiving these funds is that each state’s CIP must draft and implement a CIP plan that addresses the weak areas of court performance in such cases. Each state’s CIP plan is reassessed every few years. Resource Center staff have been involved in advising states and helping them draft their initial CIP plans, and have also received contracts to conduct reassessments in several states, including Michigan and New Hampshire.

Additionally, since 1998, Resource Center staff and consultants have written and published the annual Court Improvement Project (CIP) Progress Report. The CIP Progress Report is a source of national as well as state specific information on CIP efforts. The Report is divided into national summary and state summary sections. The national summary provides examples of innovative projects and programs from states on court improvement topics such as court hearing quality and depth, technology, and legal representation of parties. The state summaries go further in depth into these topic areas. In recent years, only the national summary is printed out in hard copy, while both the national and state summaries are available online at the Resource Center’s CIP catalog web page (http://www.abanet.org/child/cipcatalog/home.html). Users are able to search by states or subject/topic categories, and they can also find CIP related materials for each state.

Listservs

The Resource Center has several listserves. The child-court listserv promotes discussion and dissemination of information on efforts to improve the court process in child abuse and neglect cases and related proceedings. This listserv is open to anyone, and is moderated by a Resource Center attorney. The child-case listserv discusses issues that arise in the litigation of civil and criminal child abuse and neglect and related cases, including case law and practical solutions to specific issues that arise during litigation. This listserv is only open to attorneys and judges. Third, the child-education listserv provides a forum for discussion and information exchange on efforts to improve the educational opportunities and outcomes for youth in foster care, homeless youth, and others, both across the nation and within states. This listserv is open to anyone who is interested in the educational issues facing youth that are in foster care or who are homeless. These listservs are very useful to its members and are quite popular; there are 937 child-court members, 375 child-case members, and 49 child-education members. Interested people can join the listserv at: http://www.abanet.org/child/rclji/listserv.html.

Publications

Resource Center staff have developed and written a wealth of articles, manuals, and guides to help those in the child welfare arena better serve the children and families they represent. These publications are practice oriented and easy to use. Some recent publications include:

- Improving Outcomes for Older Youth: What Judges and Attorneys Need to Know
- Learning Curves: Education Advocacy for Children in Foster Care

This book is based on an article series that appeared in the ABA Child Law Practice, and focuses on how to meet the educational needs of children in the foster care system. The book is divided into six chapters that address: 1) general education advocacy strategies, 2) education rights and key federal laws, 3) the special education process, 4) education needs of young children, 5) how school

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discipline policies impact children in foster care, and 6) creative approaches to address education barriers for children in foster care. The book also includes at-a-glance practice tips, commonly used psychological tests, education advocacy resources, and excerpts from key federal laws and regulations.

- **Legal Ethics in Child Welfare Cases** This book is based on an article series that appeared in the *Child Law Practice*, and addresses the ethical issues for lawyers representing parents, children, and child welfare agencies in child abuse/neglect and termination of parental rights proceedings. Recognizing the unique nature of child protection cases, the book identifies ethical dilemmas, informs lawyers of their ethical obligations, and provides practical guidance on what to do in difficult situations where the appropriate course of action is not readily apparent. Specific ethical issues addressed include: conflicts of interest, dealing with clients with diminished capacity, confidentiality, high caseloads, and litigation issues. The book also contains a chapter on special issues for GALs.

- **Standards of Practice for Lawyers Representing Child Welfare Agencies** The goal of these standards is to improve the quality of child welfare agency representation. They are available online at: http://www.abanet.org/child/documents/agencyattystandards.pdf.

  Additionally, several publications are pending, including:

- **Achieving Permanency for Adolescents in Foster Care:**

- **Guide for Legal Professionals** Several Resource Center staff are writing chapters for this book on adolescent permanency planning, which will be published in September 2005. A few of these chapters have and will be featured in the monthly publication *Child Law Practice*. Two articles already published include “The Delinquency Factor in Permanency Planning for Adolescents” and “Teen Sexuality and Relationships.”

- **Permanency Barriers Project**

  Seven ABA Center staff members as well as three consultants work on the Permanency Barriers Project, which began in 1989 in New York State when the ABA Center received funding from the New York Department of Social Services and the United States Department of Health and Human Services. Funding for the initial two year project was extended and the project expanded to a total of 20 counties over a 15 year period. When the project was finally completed in the state at the end of 2004, it was estimated that it had saved thousands of children an average of 15 months in foster care, and the state over $15 million in foster care costs. In New York State, the goal of the project was to reduce the time children spend in foster care before being freed for adoption; now, the goal of the project has expanded to reducing the time children spend in foster care before achieving all types of permanency, such as reunification, adoption, or kinship care.

  Currently, the ABA Center has contracts with the states of Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and Wyoming to establish Permanency Barriers Projects. Staff implement the projects by working on the following steps:

  - Collecting data on a sample of cases, usually between 25 and 50 depending on the size of the foster care population, that include different goals for the child, including reunification, adoption, kinship care, permanent legal custodianship, and another planned permanent living arrangement. The data is entered into a computer program that generates information on time lapses, for example the average length of time a child is in foster care before being adopted, or before reunification.

- **Talking with different agency and court personnel to get a sense of the specific barriers to permanency in that county or region.** A major premise behind the project is that the people who face these delays on a daily basis are the most knowledgeable not only about the delays to permanency, but also about potential solutions. Often, these barriers will include not looking for parents early on in a case, not finding relatives for the child to be placed with, lack of written protocols and procedures, not providing services to incarcerated parents, and lack of training on basic laws and permanency planning for social workers, caseworkers, attorneys, judges, and other parties involved.

- **Establishing an advisory board that meets consistently.** The advisory board includes a variety of stakeholders, including judges, masters, caseworkers, parents’ attorneys, children’s attorneys, child welfare agency attorneys, treatment providers such as mental health and substance abuse, school district representatives, foster parents, and other child advocates. The advisory board

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identifies issues to work on, suggests reforms, and often forms smaller workgroups to tackle specific issues.

- Developing and working on an action plan that focuses on the specific barriers to permanency. This could include providing training opportunities for advisory board members and other interested parties on federal and state specific law, and creating and facilitating workgroups that address the specific issues related to permanency. The goal is to make the county or region self-sufficient, so when the project is finished, they will have the resources and expertise to continue working on their own.

- Data collection at the end of the project to see what changes have been made, and to show measurable results in terms of time and cost savings for the county or state. General improvements, such as time in foster care saved, are shared with other states and counties who are interested in the project, but otherwise, the data is not shared and published.

**Partnership in Program Planning for Adolescent Health (PIPPAH)**

Since 1996, ABA Center staff have offered technical assistance, written articles, and engaged in collaborative efforts to promote adolescent health under the PIPPAH grant from the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Maternal Child Health Bureau (MCHB). The PIPPAH partners include the ABA Center, American Medical Association, National Association of Social Workers, American Dietetic Association, American Nurses Foundation, National School Health Association, American College of Preventive Medicine and American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry.

The partners have developed coordinated, multidisciplinary programming to educate each other and other health professionals about the comprehensive health needs of adolescents, and to promote positive and healthy outcomes for adolescents. ABA Center staff have also worked with the National Association of Social Workers staff on a project geared towards addressing attorney and social work collaboration when working with adolescents. The final product will be a publication that discusses various situations where attorneys and social workers must work together in the context of adolescent health, barriers to working together, benefits of working together, and tips on how to work together successfully. More information on PIPPAH is available at: http://www.naswdc.org/pippah/home.asp?hp=yes

ABA Center staff also responds to an ever-increasing number of inquiries about adolescent health legal issues from lawyers, our partners, health care professionals, and others.

**Child Law Practice**

Finally, another integral part of ABA Center staff work is writing and publishing articles for the monthly *Child Law Practice*. This publication began in 1986 and was initially named the *ABA Juvenile and Child Welfare Law Reporter*. Since that time, it has been a consistent source of current legal and research news affecting the child welfare community and practice tips.

**Conclusion**


Althea Izawa-Hayden is a staff attorney at the American Bar Association - Center on Children and the Law in Washington, D.C. She graduated from The American University - Washington College of Law in May 2003, and began working at the ABA in August 2003.

Visit the Children’s Rights Litigation Committee online at www.abanet.org/litigation/committee/childrens_l/
in school. Consistent with ACS core principles, the provision of early intervention and special education advocacy reflects our belief in looking beyond safety to the health, development, and education of children involved with ACS. Under the leadership of an attorney director and a social work director who bring an in-depth understanding of special education law as well as the child welfare system, the Children’s Services Education Unit (CSEU) will work to ensure that children with disabilities who are the subject of active abuse and neglect proceedings receive all appropriate educational and/or developmental services. This Unit will accomplish this by providing four primary services: direct client advocacy; consultation/technical assistance; training; and systemic advocacy. I believe that the CSEU has the potential to be a groundbreaking initiative that could be replicated by child welfare systems nationwide.

CSEU Services

Direct Advocacy Services: Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) children with developmental delays or educationally-related disabilities are entitled to a “free appropriate public education” from birth through the age of 21 that is tailored to their identified areas of need. The IDEA can be a powerful tool in advocating for appropriate special education services. However, to utilize it, the child’s advocate must be familiar with Federal and State laws, school district policies, and, as is the case with New York City, numerous regulations, stipulations, memoranda, and agreements that permeate the special education system. Unfortunately, the many demands placed upon these individuals make it very difficult for them to find the time or develop the expertise to advocate effectively with school systems and provider agencies.

The majority of the CSEU’s personnel resources will be dedicated to filling this gap. CSEU attorneys and social workers will be trained by the Unit’s co-directors to develop a comprehensive understanding of special education law and policies, with a particular emphasis on their application to children in care. CSEU staff will then be assigned to work on specific cases, and will meet with children and caregivers, conduct classroom observations, and speak with teachers, related service providers, and other collaterals to determine outstanding problems, and formulate an effective advocacy strategy. Attorneys and social workers will request and participate in Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings where they will advocate for appropriate developmental and educational services. By incorporating the caseworker and caregivers (including the biological and foster parent when the child is living in a foster home) into the advocacy work, CSEU staff will enhance the ability of the adults involved in the child’s life to identify when his/her child requires services or when a child is receiving inadequate or inappropriate services, and will also empower them to address some of these concerns.

In developing the CSEU, we have had to take into consideration New York City’s child welfare structure. Our system is heavily reliant on private agencies to provide foster care. While the Administration for Children’s Services investigates reports of abuse and neglect and makes the decision whether or not to remove a child from his/her home, ACS contracts with multiple private, non-profit organizations who recruit, train, and supervise the actual foster boarding homes. The vast majority of children who require an out-of-home placement are placed through one of these private contracted foster care providers. Accordingly, to reach the children who are already placed in foster care through these agencies who are experiencing difficulty accessing special education services, we had to create a model that would extend the provision of direct advocacy services to the contract agencies.

To accomplish this, we will be implementing two models. In the first, the CSEU will be building upon ACS’ Neighborhood-Based Services model. Initially, the CSEU will be co-located with child protective staff in one or two of ACS’ field offices. CSEU staff will identify between three and five contract foster care agencies serving the neighborhood in which the field office is located. Working in coordination with the leadership of each identified foster care agency, the CSEU will develop a referral process that will give the agencies access to the CSEU’s direct advocacy services.

Our second model, which we are developing with generous support from the J.E. & Z.B. Butler Foundation and the Joseph LeRoy and Ann C. Warner Fund, will allow the CSEU to hire and place an attorney on site at a voluntary agency, Jewish Child Care Association to advocate for children placed in care through the association. As we develop the Education Unit, we will assess which model allows us to best serve children and families, and support casework staff.

Consultation/Technical Assistance: Since the Education Unit will be launching with a limited number of staff, we will not be able to provide
Education Advocacy for Disabled Children in Foster Care (continued from page 7)

direct advocacy services to all of the children who need its valuable services. In order to make the expertise of the CSEU available to as many people citywide as possible, CSEU staff will respond to questions from ACS and contract agency caseworkers, preventive service staff, and caregivers who are not part of the field offices or foster care agencies served directly by the CSEU. By providing guidance to these individuals, the CSEU will enable them to take steps to resolve issues independently. When appropriate, the CSEU will also be able to refer individuals to other community-based organizations that provide education advocacy services for in-depth assistance.

Training: Agency staff and caregivers alike vary in their level of comfort when it comes to raising concerns about a perceived developmental delay or disability. There is often fear of stigmatizing the child, combined with the hope that he/she will “grow out of it.” Lack of knowledge about the availability of services or how to access services can also result in adults setting aside their concerns. For example, a survey of parents of children involved with the foster care system revealed that only 11 percent were aware of the New York City Early Intervention Program, and only half of the foster parents surveyed knew about early intervention services. The CSEU will play a critical role in getting information out to the people who need it the most; frontline agency staff and caregivers. Training will also be made available citywide to ACS staff, law guardians (lawyers who represent children), parents’ counsel, contract agency staff, community groups, foster parent organizations and parent groups. We are also working internally with our Office of Youth Development to see how we can present information about school-based services to adolescents involved with ACS. We will provide audiences with tips on identifying educational and developmental red flags, information on the services available through early intervention and the special education system, and guidance on how to initiate referrals for service and troubleshoot common problems that can arise in the evaluation and eligibility determination process. While we are not trying to turn every caseworker or every foster parent into an educational expert, we are providing information, select pieces of policies and regulations, and practical suggestions that these individuals can use as tools to negotiate these overwhelmingly complex systems.

Systemic Advocacy: Certain obstacles are encountered repeatedly by children in foster care who are eligible to receive early intervention or special education services. For example, delays in transferring records from the sending school or district to the receiving school or district frequently leads to children being placed in inappropriate settings or going without mandated services. Caseworkers and caregivers who attempt to identify school-based resources for children are sometimes given incorrect or misleading information. A great deal of confusion exists over who is authorized to consent for evaluations and services when a child is in foster care and, as a result, cases often get closed and children do not get served. As the CSEU identifies systemic concerns through its direct advocacy and consultation functions, and draws from the experiences of the special education advocacy community, it will reach out to the New York City Department of Education and the New York State Education Department to revisit existing policies and procedures and generate new policies that reflect the needs and realities of children involved with ACS. The CSEU will work closely with the Early Intervention Program to strengthen interagency relationships and together address the barriers that uniquely impact children involved in the foster care system.

Conclusion

A disproportionate number of children entering the foster care system suffer from developmental delays and disabilities that, left unaddressed, will place them at increasing risk for school failure. Ensuring the receipt of appropriate early intervention and special education services is one vital component in meeting the needs of these children. Without access to knowledgeable advocates, children with disabilities involved in the child protective system remain at risk for being inappropriately or inadequately served by the early intervention and special education systems. The New York City Administration for Children’s Services recognizes this critical need and has assumed responsibility for addressing this gap in services by creating the Children’s Services Education Unit. As an in-house advocacy and training unit within a large, urban child welfare agency, we believe that this innovative approach has real potential to be replicated in small and large jurisdictions nationwide.

John Mattingly is Commissioner of New York City’s Administration for Children’s Services. Prior to assuming his position in August of 2004, Mr. Mattingly served as Director of Human Services Reform at the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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Social Workers As Expert Witnesses (continued from page 8)


2 See generally Sheryl Dicker et al., Improving the Odds for the Healthy Development of Young Children in Foster Care (2001).


4 Katherine Locker, the attorney director of the Unit, and Nellis Kim, the social work director, were the former co-directors of the Kathryn A. McDonald Education Advocacy Project, hosted by the Juvenile Rights Division of the Legal Aid Society.

The IDEA was reauthorized in December of 2004 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act and contains several revisions that will impact the ability of children in out-of-home care to access special education services.

ACS has a total of 14 field offices located throughout the five boroughs of New York City and contracts with 34 private agencies that provide foster boarding home and case planning services.

Child Advocacy Practice Groups (continued from page 1)

sory Group in September 1997 with a memo to ten Child Advocates volunteers from his firm. He invited his colleagues to “band together as an informal ‘practice group.’” We can provide one another with legal, practical and moral support, by covering each other at court hearings and helping each other when a crisis arises in our individual child advocacy cases.”

Hawn also established a Reference Binder of case law, articles and other developments in the field. Now there are 43 Cozen lawyers and paralegals from their Philadelphia and West Conshohocken offices, working with Child Advocates and the new Montgomery Child Advocacy Program in Norristown. Hawn expects the group to incorporate at least 12 lawyers from their other offices who are representing children.

In Philadelphia, the idea of children’s law practice groups has its roots in a small group of Blank Rome lawyers, led by Lawrence Beaser and Francis Crawley, representing youths in juvenile justice cases in the early 1980’s. The current group of child welfare volunteers at Blank Rome meets quarterly, with sessions often staffed by social workers and staff attorneys from Child Advocates.

Last year, firm Pro Bono Coordinator Kathy Ochroch invited Family Court Administrative Judge Myrna P. Field to address members of the Blank Rome group and other Practice Groups from around the city. The session identified problems experienced by volunteer lawyers, and helped to encourage development of Dependency Court’s new block scheduling program.

Child Advocates’ Managing Attorney Merrilee Weiss is impressed that the firm is developing in-house expertise in key areas such as confidentiality and access to treatment records and notes that at Blank Rome, they chart cases and issues in the office, so that group members have a sense of what is going on. Kathy Ochroch has organized several substantive programs for group members, including an ethics training which included the firm’s Wilmington office connected by teleconference. Blank Rome anticipates providing CLE programs for future group meetings.

The practice group can be an effective pro bono recruitment vehicle. In his initial memo, Cozen’s Hawn invited each attendee to “recruit a prospective child advocate and accompany your recruit to this meeting.” Blank Rome’s Ochroch creates separate child welfare orientation sessions for their summer law clerks and first-year associates.

Hawn observes that the “growth in numbers of volunteers and continuing involvement results from the reinforcement that they get personally and professionally from the Practice Group.”

Practice groups focused on a specific area of pro bono work offer interdepartmental connections, and even attract non-litigators to fields like child advocacy that might ordinarily be pitched only to trial lawyers. Like many of the practice groups in Philadelphia, Morgan Lewis' Child Advocates Group includes attorneys from many practice areas, including intellectual property, real estate, business and finance, and litigation. The Group’s Coordinator Susannah Henderson observes that the Group “provides a forum to discuss case issues and to receive infor-
Child Advocacy Practice Groups (continued from page 9)

Firms are beginning to create pro bono practice groups in other areas of law, and the affinity groups help to support practice in legal areas that are not traditionally within their expertise. At Dechert, the child advocacy practice group has been meeting for over a year and plans are in the works for as many as 12 different substantive practice groups. Pepper's di-corporations and micro-businesses to work with community development on tax, real estate and transactional group in the coming months, to focus hope to start a community development advocacy, and tangled title, and they groups in child advocacy, homeless and plans are in the works for as many at Duane Morris. Friant reports

Mary Gay Scanlon, Executive Director of the pro bono program at Ballard Spahr Andrews & Ingersoll, notes that her firm has identified child advocacy as an area of practice that has firm-wide interest. “We have connected attorneys across offices as well as within offices. We have about 50 people in 6 or 7 offices representing abused and neglected children.” One Ballard colleague in Salt Lake City served on the Governor’s Child Abuse Prevention Task Force in Utah to make recommendations for systemic reform. Their Washington D.C. office recently hosted a presentation by the local Children’s Law Center. Ballard’s Colorado lawyers work with the Rocky Mountain Children’s Law Center, a pro bono agency in Denver that is also a Partner in the National Children’s Law Network coordinated by the Support Center for Child Advocates. “We are connecting people in different departments who ordinarily don’t have contact … it’s good on a personal and a professional level,” said Scanlon.

Picture a parade of dozens of legal secretaries, librarians and support staff, marching down the 1800 block of Cherry Street in Philadelphia from Blank Rome’s building toward the Support Center office, arms and carts filled with wrapped gifts in the week before Christmas. With this scene replicated several times this past holiday season, one can imagine the broad and diverse impacts of intra-firm presence and exposure. Added to the hundreds of children represented by volunteer lawyers in child abuse prosecutions and other protective cases, the benefit to the community and goodwill within the law firms are making Child Advocacy Practice Groups the gift that keeps on giving.

Finally, the Practice Group creates a profile for the non-profit agency within the firm, helping to involve the firm’s many employees in the mission of the agency. The groups facilitate connections between paralegals and attorneys for work on individual cases. In addition, Child Advocates’ Holiday Toy Drive, which collects and distributes gifts to thousands of needy children in the region, gains exposure with its linkage to the Child Advocacy Practice Group. Recently Ochroch and firm partner Ron Fisher hosted an after-hours social event at the firm for their Practice Group members and Child Advocates’ staff. Ochroch said that the celebration allowed the firm “to thank staff members who are involved in the Toy Drive and in the case work.”

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