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AFCC eNEWS

MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER

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Season's Greetings

(and a year-end plea for scholarship contributions)

by Peter Salem, AFCC Executive Director

Over the past year AFCC has continued to defy the odds of a struggling economy. More than 1,700 professionals attended AFCC conferences and training programs in 2010. In the past decade, AFCC membership has eclipsed the 2,000, 3,000 and this year the 4,000 mark. One area in which we would like to see more growth is contributions to the AFCC Scholarship Fund. In a typical year, AFCC members contribute between \$20,000-\$25,000 to support conference scholarships to deserving family court professionals. Every penny of those donations goes to support registration fee waivers and a limited number of travel stipends to scholarship applicants. Last year we offered 50 scholarships but there were more than triple the number of applications. If every AFCC member donated \$10, that number would increase to more than 70 scholarships. If every AFCC member donated \$15, we could give more than 100 scholarships. Donating is easy, and tax deductible in the U.S. So before you forget, [click on this link to contribute](#) to the AFCC Scholarship Fund today.

Seasons greetings, and wishing you a healthy and happy 2011.

AFCC's 48th Annual Conference Brochure Now Available

Research, Policy and Practice in Family Courts: What's Gender Got to do with it?

June 1–4, 2011, Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort

The program brochure and hotel reservations are now available online for the AFCC Annual Conference. Online conference registration will be available in January.

[View conference brochure...](#)

[Make reservations at the Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort...](#)

[Make reservations at the Waldorf Astoria...](#)

FEATURED VIDEO

Spare the Child: Parenting During Family Dissolution

This 19 minute video, a project of the Virginia State Bar Family Law Section through a grant from the Virginia Law Foundation,

UPCOMING AFCC CONFERENCES



AFCC 48th Annual Conference

Research, Policy and Practice in Family Courts: What's Gender Got to do with it?

June 1–4, 2011

Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek Resort
Orlando, Florida

AFCC Regional Training Conference

October 27–29, 2011
Hyatt Regency Indianapolis
Indianapolis, Indiana

AFCC 49th Annual Conference

June 6–9, 2012
Hyatt Regency Chicago
Chicago, Illinois

AFCC 50th Annual Conference

May 29–June 1, 2013

helps parents navigate through family dissolution with judges, lawyers, *guardians ad litem*, counselors, teachers and adult children of divorce relating their experiences. It features AFCC member Dr. Arnold Stolberg from Richmond, Virginia.

[Watch video...](#)

ASK THE EXPERTS

Top Ten Ways to Reach Out to the Self-Represented

By Pamela Cardullo Ortiz, Annapolis, Maryland

Pamela Cardullo Ortiz is the Executive Director of the Maryland Access to Justice Commission in Annapolis, Maryland. She is co-editing, with Bonnie Hough, a new book in the AFCC *Innovations* series on *Pro Se* issues, due out in the summer of 2011. She has written ten suggestions for how to reach out to the self-represented that are brilliant in their simplicity and ease of implementation.

[Read more...](#)

AFCC Chapter News

The Ontario Chapter of AFCC is one of the newest and fastest growing chapters. It became a provisional chapter in 2008 with 152 members, received its chartered status in May, 2010 and now has almost 300 members!

[Read more...](#)

FEATURED ARTICLE

Divided Lives

By Christine Jackman, courtesy of *The Weekend Australian Magazine*

This article examines the controversies in Australia's Family Courts regarding shared parenting research and statutes. AFCC members Chief Justice Diana Bryant, Jennifer McIntosh, Bruce Smyth, and Robert Emery are featured in this interesting article about family law issues down under.

[Read more...](#)

Family Law Writing Competition Sponsored by Hofstra Law School and AFCC

Hofstra Law School and the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts are sponsoring the annual Family Law Writing Competition to celebrate the establishment of Hofstra's LL.M. program in Family Law. The competition is run in cooperation with the editorial staff of *Family Court Review*, which is the academic and research journal of AFCC. *Family Court Review* is an interdisciplinary and international journal published quarterly by Wiley-Blackwell Publishing and in cooperation with The Center for Children, Families and the Law at Hofstra Law School. *Family Court Review* contributes to and facilitates discourse among the judicial, legal, mediation, mental health and social services communities. Submissions must be received by March 15, 2011.

[More information...](#)

AFCC Member News

J.W. Marriott Los Angeles at L.A. Live
Los Angeles, California

UPCOMING AFCC CHAPTER CONFERENCES

Louisiana Chapter Annual Conference

January 14, 2011
Skills Training in Family Mediation
LSU Family Mediation Clinic
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Limited to 75 Attendees

[More information...](#)

Arizona Chapter Annual Conference

January 28–30, 2011
Parenting Harmony: Creating a Symphony of Resources
Hilton Sedona Resort and Spa

Sedona, Arizona

[More information...](#)

California Chapter Annual Conference

February 11–13, 2011
Times They are a-Changing
The Mark Hopkins Hotel on Nob Hill
San Francisco, California

[More information...](#)

UPCOMING AFCC TRAININGS

Advanced Parenting Coordination Practice: Working with Parents and Children

Joan B. Kelly, Ph.D.
February 1–2, 2011
Tampa, Florida

Intractable Issues in Child Custody Disputes

Mindy F. Mitnick, Ed.M., M.A.
February 3–4, 2011
Tampa, Florida

Keeping Parenting Coordinating Cases on Track: Advanced Concepts and Case Management Strategies

written a chapter titled "The Defining Ingredient: Transformative Ideology in Parenting Coordination," in a new book, ***Transformative Mediation: A Sourcebook***, published by Association for Conflict Resolution and Institute for the Study of Conflict Transformation, Inc. For more information visit www.acrnet.org.

Justice Harvey Brownstone, AFCC member from Toronto, Ontario, Canada has an online TV talk show about family law issues, *Family Matters*, that can be seen at www.familymatterstv.com. This is the first and only talk show ever hosted by a sitting judge, and the website has "gone viral" with more than 50,000 views per day.

What are you doing? AFCC members, if you have written a book, received an award, spearheaded a new project or if you have interesting news about other AFCC members that you would like to share, please send it to Leslye Hunter, editor, at lhunter@afccnet.org.

FEATURED GUIDE

Court ADR Across the US

Resolution Systems Institute (RSI) has launched *Court ADR Across the US*, a comprehensive national guide to court alternative dispute resolution, on CourtADR.org, its Court ADR Resource Center. The searchable guide features court rules, statutes, reports, studies and other resources on court ADR from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, providing a state-by-state view of state and federal court ADR.

[Access the guide...](#)

AFCC Trainings

In collaboration with University of South Florida Conflict Resolution Collaborative, Tampa, Florida, AFCC presents:

Advanced Parenting Coordination Practice: Working with Parents and Children, presented by Joan B. Kelly, Ph.D., February 1–2, 2011, will focus on understanding and dealing with high conflict parents and how to use relevant social science research to reduce parent conflict, as well as bringing the voice of the child into the PC process. Participants will have opportunities to shape appropriate recommendations and decisions, and understand the principles of drafting decisions.

Intractable Issues in Child Custody Disputes, presented by Mindy Mitnick, Ed.M., M.A., February 3–4, 2011, will focus on a number of issues by applying current research and assessment models to the following: relocation, assessing allegations of child abuse, assessing allegations of domestic violence and the appropriate roles of professionals in contested cases.

View the training brochure online to find out more, including presenter bios, daily agendas and information on continuing education: [click here](#).

Register [online](#), call the AFCC office directly, or fill out the registration form included in the brochure and mail or fax it to AFCC.

Matthew J. Sullivan, Ph.D.
June 20–21, 2011
Chicago, Illinois

Children and Divorce: The Voice of the Child and Interventions When Children Resist Parental Contact

Barbara Jo Fidler, Ph.D.,
AccFM.
June 22–23, 2011
Chicago, Illinois



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ABOUT AFCC eNEWS

AFCC eNEWS is a monthly e-newsletter published by the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (AFCC). AFCC eNEWS provides professionals with time sensitive and up-to-date topics including practice tips, research innovations and international news. Readers are welcome to forward this e-newsletter to interested colleagues.

[AFCC eNEWS archive...](#)

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Editor:

FAMILY LAW IN THE NEWS

The State of our Unions: Is Divorce Bad for the Economy?

By Amy Lee, courtesy of Huffington Post

Is divorce hurting the economy? According to "The State of Our Unions," a recent study released by the National Marriage Project assessing the health of marriage in the country, the loss of stable, successful marriages undermines the financial health of the nation.

[Read more...](#)

Children of Divorce Face Twice the Risk of Stroke as Adults

By Alan Mozes, HealthDay Reporter, courtesy of US News and World Report

Children of divorce appear to have more than double the lifetime risk for experiencing a stroke compared with those whose parents' marriage stays intact during their childhood, new research suggests.

[Read more...](#)

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AFCC welcomes your comments, questions or feedback. Please email the editor by [clicking here](#).

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Professionals dedicated to improving the lives of children and families through the resolution of family conflict



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AFCC Chapter News

The Ontario Chapter of AFCC is one of the newest and fastest growing chapters. It became a provisional chapter in 2008 with 152 members, received its chartered status in May, 2010 and now has almost 300 members!

AFCC Ontario has held well-attended conferences and trainings since its inception, including annual conferences titled, *Improving the Lives of Children and Families in Conflict*, and *The Future of Family Law*, a four-day training for lawyers who represent children in child protection cases, and various regional trainings across the province to bring family law education to those who cannot make it to one of the other events. Many of these events have sold out. The chapter has also initiated a parenting capacity assessment group, an Ideal Family Court working group, a mentoring program for new child protection lawyers, the Nicholas Bala Award for Excellence in Children and Family Law—a scholarship for students studying law and another discipline, and many more projects. A website and newsletter keep individuals in the family law system informed and educated.

The enthusiasm and energy that exists in the Ontario Chapter (led by its first President patti cross and its current President Justice Craig Perkins) is evidenced not only by its enormous productivity and growth, but by the level of participation of many of its members in the AFCC parent organization and its activities. Several of AFCC's past presidents, Justice Emile Kruzick and Justice George Czutrin; several of AFCC's current board members, Wendy Bryans and Justice John Harper; and frequent contributors to *Family Court Review*, including guest editors Barbara Jo Fidler and Nicholas Bala; hail from Ontario and are active chapter members.

Congratulations and best wishes on your continued success!

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ASK THE EXPERTS

Top Ten Ways to Reach Out to the Self-Represented

Pamela Cardullo Ortiz, Executive Director, Maryland Access to Justice Commission

1. Use a variety of means and media

The self-represented come from all walks of life, with a range of experiences. Whether you are a court, an attorney or a service provider, they will seek your assistance through a variety of media. Some are low-income individuals with limited access to technology; others have the means and inclination to seek information over the web or via text. Provide information through a variety of delivery mechanisms to reach potential beneficiaries of all ages, education levels and income.

2. Consider technology with which you may not be personally adept

Ask an intern or a teenager at home what they do first when they have a problem. My children have learned everything on YouTube, from how to make paper machine guns to how to play the theme from *Benjamin Button* on the piano. My teenager uses Facebook to collaborate with friends on math homework. Many seek social networking groups before turning to the web. This year's teenager may be a respondent in a juvenile matter with appointed counsel, but 2 to 5 years from now may be an unrepresented parent in a custody or child support matter. Continually reinvest in emerging technologies for your court or court-related business to address the needs of ever-evolving court users.

3. Provide a tool to aid users in identifying the forms they will need

A list of forms by number or name, in legal terminology, is not enough to guide non-lawyers. Provide an interactive tool, or even a list of scenarios users can scroll through to identify which fits their situation, so they can identify the group of forms or written materials they need. Online survey tools, like SurveyMonkey.com, can be used to develop a simple decision tree to guide individuals looking for forms or other materials.

4. Pay attention to the physical environment from the perspective of the uninitiated or those new to the culture or language

When you walk in the door of many fast food restaurants, the floor plan physically channels you precisely where you need to go to order that burger. I visit a well-designed museum where everyone has an identical, comprehensive experience because you are physically required to follow a particular path as you go through the building. Most courts are a free-for-all where bewildered individuals gaze about for room numbers and signage. Consider building a physical interface that guides visitors to key locations. Provide signage that is designed to guide users in plain English and in key languages.

5. Ensure online resources are in a screen-readable format

The blind use screen reading software to make full use of the Internet, a real world-expanding resource for the otherwise sensory impaired. Unfortunately, ordinary web-content, including PDFs, may not be readable by most screen reading software. Consult with organizations serving the blind to ensure your documents are screen readable. And don't forget to post descriptions of photos and scripts to accompany videos and audio material online to ensure they are accessible to all.

6. Run a usability and accessibility software tool to verify online resources are indeed accessible

There are software tools you can use to check materials before posting to ensure that they meet readability guidelines and to improve their accessibility.

7. Investigate providing online chat for your court or business

Improve the experience of web users by answering questions in real time, through online texting. There are several low-cost easy ways to provide this through your site. A number of statewide legal content websites provide legal advice online. It can also be used to answer simple questions or direct users to appropriate sections of the website. Do you offer a hotline? Consider expanding the service to answer inquiries via online chat in addition to the phone.

8. Reiterate in writing what was discussed to aid those who are stressed or have memory limitations or impairments

Many disabilities are “invisible.” Individuals may have memory impairments as the result of injury or illness. Others may be on medication that affects their cognitive functioning or ability to remember temporarily. All of us are more prone to forget things when stressed; and pretty much everyone involved in a family court case is stressed. After providing information orally, give the user a reminder in writing of what was discussed to aid them in following through.

9. Provide a feedback loop for clients, court users, including use of an ombudsman

Listen continually to those who use your services. Provide an online survey on your website for feedback about the site. Provide post cards in your office or at the counter users can pick up and drop off or mail in later. It does not have to be a scientific survey and you do not need to publish the results. Just listen and be aware of the issues your clients or court users face every day and how your service is perceived. Courts might consider providing an ombudsman who can field concerns confidentially. Newspaper ombudsman often maintain a blog where they respond on behalf of the organization to debunk myths and reflect back to the community how the organization plans to respond to genuine issues. Courts might emulate this practice.

10. Institutionalize, rather than educate, for change

Often we hear, “If only we could train our staff,” or “If only we could educate our judges” how to better deal with the self-represented. The truth is, if we have to depend upon education to affect meaningful change, we will have to do it over and over again, every few months, to reach new employees and to reiterate the culture we are trying to build. If there is a procedure or practice that can be mandated to support that culture, that is more likely to be uniformly adopted and to support a meaningful improvement in the way the “system” interacts with the self-represented.