

Truancy Task Force Meeting Summary
Children's Court
June 6, 2011

Attendees:

Courts: Michael Nash, Donna Groman, Margaret Henry, Jack Furay, Sherri Sobel, Hilary Rhonan, Sandra DeLong, Arnold Mednick, Shep Zebberman, Terri Johnson
Law Enforcement: Donald Graham, Kristen Byrdsong, Ellen Craswell
Legal: Ariel Wander, Carol Richardson, Nancy Theberge
LA County Chief Executive Office: Trish Ploehn, Vincent Holmes
LA County Youth Departments: Jeremy Nichols, Greg McCovey, Patty Armani
Schools: Elmer Roldan, Laurel Bear, Ray Vincent, Rick Tebbano, Maria Espinoza, Marynell Masciel, Dionne Ash
Community/Advocacy: Miller Sylvan, Michelle Newell, Keith Gibbs, Michael Mahone, James Huettig, Lynne Lyman, Zoe Rawson, Barbara Lott-Holland, Eugenia Wilson
Education Coordinating Council: Sharon Watson, Helen Chavez

Welcome and Introductions:

Chair Judge Nash: welcomed everyone to the meeting and provided an overview of the Los Angeles County court system.

Juvenile Court Panel on Truancy Approaches:

Informal Juvenile and Traffic Court: Supervising Referee Jack Furay outlined the work of the IJTC and how it deals with truancy cases. Each IJTC referee in attendance talked about the importance of determining the reason(s) for each youth's truancy and described what variables contribute to their sentencing decisions. Jack reported that: (1) in his years with the court, he has never seen a youth return to court with his/her school attendance record; (2) 70% of youth who return have not complied with the conditions set; and (3) 50% prefer to pay a fine (which must be paid before they can obtain a CDL) than perform community service or go to a program. He would very much like there to be a school representative in each of his courts or at least a designated school contact for the court to confer with about their truant students. One of the best options would be to have arrangements with schools for these youth to attend Saturday schools. Ray Vincent (LACOE) invited Jack to attend a meeting with area school representatives to see what can be worked out to strengthen communication between schools and the IJTCs and create a more effective way of helping truant students make up lost school time.

Delinquency Court: Supervising Judge Donna Groman reported that 25 of the approximately 30-40 youth seen every day at the Kenyon Juvenile Justice Center have poor school attendance. She tries to avoid sending truant youth to Juvenile Hall, as that

results in their missing even more school. Instead, she looks at each youth's situation to see what can be done to help. Groman frequently sends them to Public Counsel's Education Clinic, which is conveniently located across the street from the court. There, Ariel explained, clinic staff look at the youth's entire school history (including pre-school) to try to determine the core problem, and then talk with parents about solutions. In Groman's opinion, parent involvement is the most important factor to changing the youth's situation. She suggests parents have their youth obtain a daily sign-in check for every class their youth takes, and then impose consequences when they are truant or miss a class. Stability is the key and Groman refers to a variety of community programs to keep the youth at home, such as tutoring, substance abuse prevention, mentoring, wraparound, etc. She also uses community detention programs as a low level sanction. In Shep's opinion, attendance is even more important than grades, and he often refers truant youth to the Parent Project mentoring program. When necessary, he uses graduated sanctions (up to 5-10 days in Juvenile Hall) to avoid taking youth out of school for long periods, and he requires youth to do something to help themselves, such as obtaining a GED, participating in a vocational program, or obtaining a job training certificate.

Dependency Court: Supervising Judge Margaret Henry explained that her court works a little differently, as it doesn't really have parents to deal with. The Dependency Court relies on 6-month court reports for school attendance information and expects children's social workers to find out why their caseload youth are not attending school. Drugs are a big issue, and a lot of youth are afraid to go to a new school as the curriculum may be different or they fear being bullied or beat up, etc. Independent study is an option when youth aren't able to cope with school. Sherri Sobel asks for 30-day reports on education for all of her cases. Her biggest concern is with AWOL youth who are missing school for periods of time. She sees this as a community issue, not a children's issue and, therefore, the support of adults is needed to resolve this problem. Also, there is a "big disconnect" between parents' expectations (almost all want their kids to go to college) and their behavior (not getting their kids up for school every day, for example) that must be addressed.

Q & A Summary:

- Nash confirmed that the court has a standing policy that foster youth may not be fined and Jack explained that the IJTC routinely asks youth if they are foster youth.
- Although the IJTC holds youth and their parents accountable, does the juvenile court hold others accountable as well? For example, how well are truancy laws being applied by police officers and the schools? Nash agreed that this question is a good one, particularly about schools.
- After exploring the reasons for a truancy, if a police officer believes that "there is something more here than daytime truancy" and, therefore, traffic court might not be the right venue for helping a youth, what other options exist? Filing a 601? Nash responded that there are probably some options, but they aren't being used.
- Parents need more resources at their disposal before their youth become a part of the system. They are pleading for help and don't know where to turn.

Next Meeting: Sharon reminded task force members that there will be no meeting in July and that the meetings for the rest of 2011 will be held on the second Tuesday of each month instead of the first Monday. The next TTF meeting is scheduled for: **Tuesday, August 9** at the usual time (12 noon to 2 pm) in the Judges Conference Room at the Children's Court.