

**FOURTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT**

***Family Court: Initial Case Management Conference Program  
Evaluation***

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## Background/Description

In the fall of 2001, the Family Court Division of the Fourth Judicial District undertook a new initiative, whereby certain types of cases would be assigned to a team of a judicial officer and referee, with the purpose of “triaging” the case and providing a higher level of service to family court clients. The cases assigned to a team have a conference scheduled with a team member as soon as possible after the case is filed, with the hope that the entire court process can be shortened significantly. This evaluation compares results of the initial case management conference initiative with the same case types from the year before the program was implemented.

### Goals of Initial Case Management Conference Initiative, including Measurement for Each

1. Early case management conference heard before a judicial team.  
*Measurement: Time from filing to case management conference.*
2. Shorter time from filing to referral to support service or alternate adjudication programs.  
*Measurement: Time from filing to referral date.*
3. Fewer total hearings from filing to adjudication.  
*Measurement: Number of hearings between filing date and final hearing.*

## Sampling

Cases were pulled from the most recent seven month period available since the initial case management conference initiative began, September 2001 – March 2002. We restricted the data pull to the four case types which would generally be assigned to a team: Annulments, Divorces with Children, Divorces without Children, and Miscellaneous Family. We only included new cases filed in the sample, so as to be able to follow the events of each case from start to finish. Within this recent group were both cases assigned to a team and those that followed the traditional (non-team) track. For the most part, data analysis focused on the cases assigned to a team.

The comparison group was all new cases filed between the same time period one year earlier (September 2000 – March 2001). These cases were filed prior to the initial case management conferencing initiative, and thus none were assigned to a team. We expected to see a dramatic difference in timing issues between these cases and the more recent team cases.

### Numbers of Cases in Each Group

The bulk of the cases assigned to a team are in the “Divorces with Children” category, making up nearly 62% of the cases studied. Overall, 991 out of the 2,289 recent cases were blocked to a team. (See Table 1).

Table 1. Number and Percentage of Each Type of Case Filed

<i>Case Type</i>	<i>Old Cases Filed 9/1/00 – 3/31/01</i>		<i>New Cases Filed 9/1/01 – 3/31/02</i>	
	<i>Admin or Summary Dissolution or Closed at Filing*</i>	<i>Cases Blocked to a Referee</i>	<i>Non-Team</i>	<i>Team</i>
Annulments	0 0%	3 0.3%	1 <1%	0 0%
Divorces with Children	188 14.3%	823 73.7%	294 22.7%	614 62.0%
Divorces without Children	1,014 77.3%	171 15.3%	854 65.8%	301 30.4%
Miscellaneous Family	109 8.3%	119 10.7%	149 11.5%	76 7.7%
TOTAL	1,311 100%	1,116 100%	1,298 100%	991 100%

*\*Had the initial case management conference initiative been in place last year, 1,116 of the old cases would have been blocked to a judicial officer or a team. This figure is based on the number of cases that were neither an administrative nor a summary dissolution (for Divorces with and without Children) and were not closed at filing (for Miscellaneous Family cases).*

New Cases: Initial Case Management Conference Scheduled and Held

One of the primary goals of the initial case management conference initiative is to ensure that cases are heard before a team within a relatively short period of time after filing. Of those cases where a conference is scheduled, Family Court staff has worked diligently to ensure that the conference is actually held in a timely fashion. Table 2 (below) shows the percentage of cases where a conference was scheduled and held and Table 3 in the next section presents the timing indicators.

Table 2. New Cases Blocked to Team with Initial Case Management Conference Scheduled, Held\*

<i>Case Type</i>	<i>Total Cases Blocked to Team</i>	<i>Initial Case Management Conference Scheduled (by 5/17/02)</i>	<i>Initial Case Management Conference Held (by 5/17/02)</i>
Annulments	0	N/A	N/A
Divorces with Children	614	604	579
<i>% of total cases</i>		98.4%	94.3%
Divorces without Children	301	294	285
<i>% of total cases</i>		97.7%	94.7%
Miscellaneous Family	76	70	62
<i>% of total cases</i>		92.1%	81.6%
TOTAL	991	968	926**
<i>% of total cases</i>		97.7%	93.4%

*\*This analysis includes the most recent data available for cases filed September 1, 2001 – March 31, 2002. The most recent hearing dates available were as of May 17, 2002. These numbers include all initial case management conferences scheduled and held, whether or not the conference date was eventually continued or the case was closed as an administrative dissolution.*

*\*\*Of the total of 926 cases in the third column, 223 had the initial case management conference cancelled. Of those, 128 closed before the original (cancelled) case management conference date. Another 5 (out of the 223) closed after the original cancelled conference date, and another 15 had at least one new case management conference held after the original cancelled one.*

*The remaining 75 cases where the initial conference was cancelled fell into one of the following three categories: (1) the case went to inactive status, (2) the case was awaiting a judgment and decree, or (3) a small percentage of cases had data entry errors.*

*\*\*Thirty of the 926 cases had their initial case management conference continued. Of those, 14 had a new case management conference held, and another 8 closed before the last case management conference date.*

### Timing Indicators

Comparing the time to initial case management conference for new cases blocked to a team with the time to the initial hearing for old cases (see Table 4) shows that we have dramatically improved in terms of case processing efficiency. In the past, it took approximately a month, on average, to schedule the initial hearing on a case, and nearly three months for the hearing to occur. With the new case management conference initiative, the initial case management conference is scheduled approximately one week after filing, and the conference occurs, on average, within 6 weeks. For those cases where a referral (to court services, private mediation, and settlement programs) was made, the time to referral is about a month faster. The number of hearings has increased slightly but remains very low (1-2 hearings per case) under the initial case management conference program.

Table 3. Timing Indicators for New Cases Blocked to a Team and With a Final Adjudication\*  
*For Total Cases Filed and Blocked to a Team 9/1/01 – 3/31/02 \*\**

**991 CASES**

<i>Case Type</i>	<i>Average Number of Days from Filing to Scheduling of Initial Case Management Conference</i>	<i>Average Number of Days from Filing to Initial Case Management Conference Date***</i>	<i>Average Number of Hearings from Filing to Final Hearing For All Cases***</i>	<i>Average Number of Days from Filing to Referral++</i>
Annulments	N/A (0 cases)	N/A (0 cases)	N/A (0 cases)	N/A (0 cases)
Divorces with Children	7 days (243 cases)	43 days (243 cases)	2.0 hearings (243 cases)	52 days Std. deviation=23.6 (38 cases)
Divorces without Children	7 days (147 cases)	39 days (147 cases)	1.7 hearings (147 cases)	52 days Std. deviation=22.7 (15 cases)
Miscellaneous Family	8 days (30 cases)	46 days (30 cases)	1.5 hearings (30 cases)	61 days+++ Std. deviation=61.5 (7 cases)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7 days</b> <b>(420 cases)</b>	<b>42 days</b> <b>(420 cases)</b>	<b>1.9 hearings+</b> <b>(420 cases)</b>	<b>52.8 days++++</b> <b>Std. deviation=29.3</b> <b>(60 cases)</b>

\*This table only includes cases that had a final adjudication as of May 17, 2002.

\*\*This table includes all cases coded as having an initial case management conference held, regardless of whether or not that conference was eventually continued or cancelled because of an administrative dissolution.

\*\*\*Cancelled and continued hearings are not included in the average **number of hearings** per case, nor are entries for the education program or other non-hearing events.

+Out of the 420 cases, 17 had zero hearings, and 184 had one hearing, meaning that nearly half the cases closed in one hearing or less.

++There were 58 cases where the referral date was different from both the first and the last case management conference date. After the initial case management conference initiative began, the data entry procedure for referrals changed, which would account for most of this discrepancy. There were six cases where a referral was made without an initial case management conference being held.

+++One of these cases took 193 days from filing to referral, which has an enormous impact on the average since the total number of cases in this category is so small.

++++Out of the total of all cases (not just closed cases) there were 198 cases with a referral, and the average length of time from filing to referral was 49 days.

Table 4. Timing Indicators for Old Cases, By Case Type

*For Cases Filed 9/1/00 – 3/31/01*

**2,427 CASES**

<i>Case Type</i>	<i>Average Number of Days from Filing to Scheduling of Initial Hearing</i>	<i>Average Number of Days from Filing to Initial Hearing</i>	<i>Average Number of Days from Filing to Referral</i>
Annulments	N/A (0 cases)	N/A (0 cases)	N/A
Divorces with Children	41 days (83 cases)	84 days (79 cases)	97 days Std. deviation=46.4 (91 cases)
Divorces without Children	28 days (29 cases)	97 days (28 cases)	84 days Std. deviation=33.6 (51 cases)
Miscellaneous Family	22 days (23 cases)	73 days (30 cases)	125 days Std. deviation=43.9 (12 cases)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>35 days</b> <b>(135 cases)</b>	<b>84 days</b> <b>(137 cases)</b>	<b>95 days</b> <b>Std. deviation=43.4</b> <b>(154 cases)</b>

*\*This table only includes cases that had a final adjudication as of May 17, 2001.*

Case Outcomes, New vs. Old Cases

There seems to be a shift in the types of referrals made, between old cases and new cases blocked to a team. Referrals to court services are currently up nearly 30% for cases blocked to teams, whereas referrals to settlement programs are down nearly 30%. There were no referrals to private mediation for either of the samples.

Table 5. Number of Referrals by Case Type

<i>Case Type</i>	<i>Referral to Court Services</i>		<i>Referral to Settlement Programs</i>		<i>TOTALS</i>	
	<i>Old Cases</i>	<i>New Cases Blocked to Team</i>	<i>Old Cases</i>	<i>New Cases Blocked to Team</i>	<i>Old Cases</i>	<i>New Cases Blocked to Team</i>
Divorces with Children	75 44.9%	113 71.5%	92 55.1%	45 28.5%	167 100%	158 100%
Divorces without Children	0 0%	1 3.4%	77 100%	28 96.6%	77 100%	29 100%
Miscellaneous Family	14 100%	11 100%	0 0%	0 0%	14 100%	11 100%
<b>TOTALS</b>	89 34.5%	125 63.1%	169 65.5%	73 36.9%	258* 100%	198** 100%

*\*Of the old cases, 258 out of the 1,116 cases blocked to a referee received a referral (23%).*

*\*\*Of the new cases, 198 out of the 991 cases blocked to a team received a referral (20%).*

Guardian Ad Litem Assigned

Eleven of the new cases blocked to a team had a guardian ad litem referral within the seven month period, as compared with only three of the old cases.

Table 6. Guardian Ad Litem Assigned

<i>Case Type</i>	<i>Old Cases</i>	<i>New Cases Blocked to a Team</i>
Divorces with Children	2 66.7%	9 81.8%
Divorces without Children	0 0%	1 9.1%
Miscellaneous Family	1 33.3%	1 9.1%
<b>TOTALS</b>	3 100%	11 100%



## Closed Cases

The overall percentage of cases closed within nearly 9 months has increased by almost 4%, from 53.5% in the old data to 57% in the new data (including both team and non-team cases).

Table 7. Number of Closed Cases with Various Outcomes\*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Case Type</i>	<i>Administrative Dissolutions</i>	<i>Cases with Default Hearing</i>	<i>All Other Case Closings</i>
2000-2001	<i>Annulment</i>	0	0	3
	<i>(3 cases)</i>	0%	0%	100%
	<i>Divorces with Children</i>	81	262	43
	<i>(1,023 cases)</i>	7.9%	25.6%	4.2%
	<i>Divorces without Children</i>	808	10	30
	<i>(1,206 cases)</i>	67.0%	0.8%	2.5%
	<i>Miscellaneous Family</i>	2	4	75
	<i>(231 cases)</i>	0.9%	1.7%	32.5%
	<b>TOTAL**</b>	<b>891</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>151</b>
	<i>(2,463 cases)</i>	<b>36.2%</b>	<b>11.2%</b>	<b>6.1%</b>
2001-2002 Cases Blocked to Individuals	<i>Annulments</i>	0	0	1
	<i>(1 case)</i>	0%	0%	100%
	<i>Divorces with Children</i>	67	147	6
	<i>(307 cases)</i>	21.8%	47.9%	2.0%
	<i>Divorces without Children</i>	680	12	8
	<i>(904 cases)</i>	75.2%	1.3%	0.9%
	<i>Miscellaneous Family</i>	6	3	12
	<i>(150 cases)</i>	4.0%	2.0%	8.0%
	<b>TOTAL**</b>	<b>753</b>	<b>162</b>	<b>27</b>
	<i>(1,362 cases)</i>	<b>55.3%</b>	<b>11.9%</b>	<b>2.0%</b>
2001-2002 Cases Blocked to a Team	<i>Divorces with Children</i>	48	149	39
	<i>(631 cases)</i>	7.6%	23.6%	6.2%
	<i>Divorces without Children</i>	86	43	20
	<i>(312 cases)</i>	27.6%	13.8%	6.4%
	<i>Miscellaneous Family</i>	2	2	28
	<i>(78 cases)</i>	2.6%	2.6%	35.9%
	<b>TOTAL**</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>87</b>
	<i>(1,021 cases)</i>	<b>13.3%</b>	<b>19.0%</b>	<b>8.5%</b>

\* Only those cases closed by May 17, 2001 for old cases or May 17, 2002 for new cases.

\*\*Data had to be re-pulled for this table, which increased the total number of cases slightly from what was reported in prior tables.

## Conclusion: How We Are Doing With Respect to Our Goals

### **Goal 1: Early initial case management conference heard before a judicial team.**

- *Over 97% of cases had an initial case management conference scheduled and 93% had an initial case management conference held during the sample period.*
- *The time between filing and initial case management conference was six weeks, as compared with three months to initial hearing prior to the program for these types of cases.*
- *Overall Administrative Dissolutions have increased 25% as a direct result of early scheduling of the initial case management conference.*

### **Goal 2: Shorter time from filing to referral to support service or alternate adjudication programs.**

- *Referrals for new cases blocked to a team took slightly longer than 7 weeks, as compared with three months for old cases.*
- *There are 3% less referrals for recent cases blocked to a team, as compared with old cases blocked to a referee. Of the 991 recent cases blocked to a team, 198 (20%) had a referral to court services or settlement programs.*

### **Goal 3: More cases closed quickly.**

- *The percentage of new cases closed within the snapshot time period is up 4%.*

In short, we have met some of our goals, but are still striving to meet them all. We can say without hesitation that the initial case management conference initiative has increased timeliness and case processing efficiency, which ultimately better serves all parties involved in family court cases.