



MICHIGAN COURTS NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Parents and Children Involved in Child Protective Proceedings in Genesee County Benefit from Parent Representation Project

LANSING, MI, June 21, 2016 – The Genesee County Parent Representation Project was designed to improve legal representation to parents involved in child protective proceedings by providing a social worker to work with parents’ attorneys. The success of the project in speeding up family reunification was highlighted today by the Michigan Supreme Court as part of its observance of [National Reunification Month](#), an initiative of the American Bar Association to recognize efforts to help families stay together.

“By collecting and analyzing performance data, we can identify successful initiatives that might be duplicated by other courts,” said Chief Justice Robert P. Young, Jr. “Initial data indicate this project is improving outcomes for Genesee County families, and I commend the local court for taking concrete steps to promote safe, stable, permanent families.”

In noting the program’s impact in Genesee County, Family Court Judge F. Kay Behm said, “Cases in which parents are assigned a social worker are more likely to result in reunification. In addition, parents are more likely to attend parenting time with their children, more actively involved in their cases, and more likely to attend court hearings.”

The social worker acts at the direction of legal counsel to support the following goals: (1) engage parents in the child welfare process and court proceedings; (2) increase parent participation in services; (3) increase involvement in parent-child visitation; (4) accelerate reunification; (5) decrease recidivism; (6) assist the attorney in preparation both in and out of the court system to improve the quality of legal proceedings and understanding of the parent client; (7) reduce continuances requested by parent attorneys involved with the project due to lack of preparation; and (8) decrease time for parents to achieve permanency and reunification.

Judge Behm explained that by providing the parents’ attorneys access to a social worker, they are able to focus on their role of providing legal advocacy while the social worker is able to assist parents with housing, employment, benefits, mental health and substance abuse, transportation, and general support. This allows parents to be more engaged in their cases, more likely to secure services in a timely manner, and better equipped to participate fully in those services.

“The Parent Representation Project is in the best interest of both the parents and children involved in child welfare cases, which leads to reunification, permanency, and stability for families,” Judge Behm concluded.

The Court’s observance of National Reunification Month culminates on June 24 with a special event at the Hall of Justice in Lansing where families who have successfully been reunified will be honored. For more information, visit the Court’s [Family Reunification Day page](#).

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