

March 21, 2017 G.R.A.C.E. Court/Human Trafficking

Panel: Judge Sampedro-Iglesia, Yinay Ruiz, Loretta Kendregan and Natalie Freitas. You really opened our eyes to human trafficking, its victims and their families, the Court and its complement of services, and what it takes to be a GAL on these cases.

- G.R.A.C.E. Court- Growth Renewed through Acceptance, Change and Empowerment. This name was chosen to remove the stigma and shame associated with human trafficking and to encourage the girls and their families to start viewing themselves in a position of strength and growth.
- G.R.A.C.E. Court is part of the Juvenile Dependency System. It is a specialized court devoted to the needs of children who have been identified as victims of commercial sexual exploitation or labor trafficking.
- Whenever a child is identified as victim of human trafficking – whether it is a delinquency, dependency or family court case — it is transferred to G.R.A.C.E. Court.
- The children are provided with comprehensive services and support under the protection of the state’s human trafficking laws.
- The biggest challenge on these cases is the girls themselves: They constantly run away, they don’t want the help, and they don’t see themselves as victims.
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Judge Sampedro-Iglesia gave the following example of a typical case. (I don’t know if this will translate well into notes, but it was extremely powerful when presented).

Sophie” lives with her mother and siblings in extreme poverty. At age 4, her mother’s boyfriend stays over and sexually abuses Sophie. As a 4 year old, she really doesn’t know what sexual abuse is or how to express what happened. At 6 years old, she is sexually abused again. She tells her mother and is accused of provoking it, being a liar, and beaten, etc. At age 12, Sophie runs away and is put in the foster-care system. She gets bad grades, uses drugs, gets into fights, and is expelled, etc. She was begging for food at McDonalds when she meets “Ron”, age 24. He compliments her, buys her food, clothing, etc., and has a relationship with her. Then she has to do some favors to help pay for her food, shelter, etc. She tried to run away, but was tattooed (branded), beaten, and given drugs.

- There is a whole list of the challenges these cases present.
- In G.R.A.C.E. Court everyone is represented. The parents have attorneys, the child has an attorney ad litem and a GAL, the CHANCE program provides therapy.
- The average age of a human trafficking victim in the U.S. is 11 years old.
- Those who use a child and benefit monetarily can be prosecuted. Under the new Safe Harbor laws, these children are victims. There is no such thing as a child prostitute. There is no longer a need to prove fraud, force, or coercion. Anyone under age 18 cannot be considered a prostitute.
- The dependency statute was changed to include children who are sexually exploited. There are now 4 maltreatments: abuse, abandonment, neglect, and human trafficking.
- Pimps are prosecuted in criminal court. G.R.A.C.E. Court works very closely with the State Attorney’s Office (SAO), task force, and law enforcement.
- There has been much more attention paid to human trafficking and its victims. In 2011, there were 3 cases; today there are 424.
- When a child is brought in, they are seen by a doctor within 72 hours. Project THRIVE (a project of the SAO and University of Miami) has opened an outpatient clinic where

human trafficking victims can go to get access to a dedicated primary-care physician and specialists like ob-gyn and psychiatrists who can deal with mental health crises.

- Attorneys ad litem are attorneys for the child and must advocate for the child's expressed wishes. The GAL advocates for the best interest of the child. G.R.A.CE. Court is a trauma-informed court. Our Judge wants the children to be a part of the process. The victims have had no power with the pimp, and in this courtroom they feel empowered.
- CHANCE program (Citrus Helping Adolescents Negatively impacted by Commercial Exploitation) is a program developed by Citrus Health in partnership with Our Kids and DCF. Kids in the CHANCE program receive individual therapy centered around trauma-focused care and other behavioral treatments. They have specialized therapeutic homes, and they train these foster parents.
- A therapist from CHANCE is present at all hearings.
- Different language is used in this courtroom in front of the children to ensure they are not insulted or ashamed. There is no audience in these court proceedings. The Judge is very vigilant as to who comes into the courtroom (pimp, etc.).
- A key giveaway to children who are labor trafficked is they don't attend school.
- There are 15 specialized therapeutic CHANCE foster homes. There is only 1 child in each home, and the foster parent has been given specialized training. Only 1 child per home reduces recruitment by other children. Every child in the CHANCE program also has a targeted case manager and a life coach (who is a human trafficking survivor). If the children are placed in regular settings, they receive wrap-around services in their placements.
- Parents are included in therapy "rounds." They are also given family therapy by a different CHANCE therapist (not the child's individual therapist). Parents are also given psycho-educational training.
- Many of the victims of sexual exploitation are developmentally delayed because of early-age abuse and trauma.
- Within the foster care system, there is recruitment of other children
- Dependency cases go up to age 18 unless the children extend jurisdiction, but these children can receive services after 18 if they want them.
- Most of these kids are very active on social media. Although Back Page has been taken down, it redirects you to other pages. It is very difficult to identify male victims.
- Miami Cares ensures that every child who is a victim receives specialized services and that a specialized placement is ready. Communication is fundamental. All cases are staffed prior to G.R.A.CE. Court with everyone except the Judge.
- G.R.A.CE. Court cases are heard more often than regular dependency cases.
- G.R.A.CE. Court is a vigorous court and well organized. It is a team project including the parent's attorneys. The kids are really angry, and although we offer services, the children don't want them and don't perceive themselves as victims. They run away and often come back in really bad shape. It takes a long time to establish a relationship with these kids, and they tend to trust the GAL and AAL.
- The same judge hears delinquency and dependency, SIPP placements, Marchman hearings, etc. G.R.A.CE. Court Monday mornings are dependency hearings; Monday afternoons are delinquency or dependency with a delinquency component. Wednesday is a dependency day.
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In order to accept cases in G.R.A.CE. Court, there is a training that GALs must take. When there is a success story — and there ARE success stories — they are shared with everyone. This court is truly a team approach.