

May 24, 2022 -- Judge Caballero & the Early Childhood Court (ECC) Team

We are looking forward to the success of our newest court. -- **Early Childhood Court (ECC)**

History:

- Back in 1990, a collaborative “Miami Child Well-Being Model” was created for children under age 3, where any family with a child under 3 could be referred to Linda Ray for dyadic therapy.
- A national organization began the safe-babies court-team approach for children 0-3 years old.
- In 2014, Florida’s Early Childhood Court emerged and is the primary initiative within the Dependency Court Improvement Program. Early Childhood Court addresses child-welfare cases involving children under the age of three. It is a problem-solving court where legal, societal, and individual problems intersect.

Goals:

- Alter the trajectory of maltreated children and their families -- reduce re-abuse and recidivism.
- Improve child safety and well-being.
- Heal trauma and repair the parent/child relationship.
- Promote timely permanency.
- By providing services and interventions, the goal is to learn to break the cycle and promote long-term stability.

This court will address the root causes of the reason why the case came into the system. They have a specialized docket, a MDT (multi-disciplinary team), use a non-adversarial approach, evidence-based treatment, and individual treatment -- all under judicial supervision.

- The primary initiative of the Court is to improve treatment of children ages 0-3 and provide better services.
- It is a problem-solving court that utilizes best practice standards and therapeutic programs. All members of the team are trauma informed.
 - All GALS should participate in trauma-informed training.
- Healthy attachments and early brain development are important to overall, lifelong well-being, future social-emotional health, and school-readiness.
- Infants and toddlers in the child-welfare system are at an extraordinarily high risk for developmental delays, non-optimal attachment relationships, trauma, and toxic stress that can affect their adjustment and well-being.

Best-Practice Standards:

- Target population -- children ages 0-3 in the dependency system.
- Disadvantaged groups -- those who have been discriminated against or have had reduced opportunities receive the same opportunity in ECC.
- Roles and responsibilities of Judges and Magistrates: must have trauma and early-childhood training; establish continuity for the Court; frequency of hearings (monthly); decision making process --- making informed decisions based on MDT and observations and evidence-based studies.
- Child/parent therapy: evidence-based interventions; child/parent psychotherapy based on assessment and attachment relationships.
- Additional treatment and social services -- receive a comprehensive assessment; can include housing, employment, training, co-parenting, etc.

- Family time -- more than just the court-ordered 2 times per week for 1 hour. Meaningful family time takes place and may include medical appointments, day-care activities.
- Multidisciplinary team -- includes the Judge, all the attorneys (parents', CLS, GAL), case manager, mental-health specialist, community coordinator, monthly family team meeting.
- Caseloads -- 20 families per community coordinator.
- Monitoring and evaluation -- effectiveness of EDD, 5-year evaluation by the state.

Disqualifiers for referral to ECC:

- Severe mental illness
- A parent criminally charged with aggressive child abuse
- Sexual abuse cases

High priority qualifiers:

- Substance-exposed children when family refuses drug court.
- High priority for teen moms in the system.

Team members:

- **Community Coordinators** -- attend every shelter to determine if case should be ECC; act as liaisons between the court and service providers:
 - **Courtney Hill** (chill@citrusfcn.com; 305-505-7223)
 - **Karem Rodriguez** (krdriguez@citrusfcn.com; 786-742-6640)
- **Specialists:**
 - **Yani Sanchez**-- **FRC & Wesley House**, (ECC feeling in drug court) ysanchez1@citrusfcn.com; 786-562-8793
 - **Daisy Vexlund** -- **FRC** (dvexlund@citrusfcn.com; 786-510-5764)
 - **Richard Moran** -- **CFCE** (rmoran@citrusfcn.com; 786-810-8432)
 - **Mary Whebley** -- **Team Coordinator** and temporarily, until someone is hired, for **CHS** (mwhebley@citrusfcn.com; 786-375-0048)

Child/parent psychotherapy not completely in place currently. There is an 18-month training involved. Services are currently being referred to other community partners.