

Superior Court of California County of Santa Clara

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Santa Clara County Superior Court Program Wins Top Award

***Judicial Council Honors Collaboration Between Superior Court and FIRST5
for Innovative Approach to Serving the Public***

San Jose, California—The Judicial Council of California presented the 2008–2009 Ralph N. Kleps Award for Improvement in Administration of the Courts on Tuesday, November 10, 2009, to the Superior Court of Santa Clara County’s *Giving Families a Chance: The Collaboration between Family Court Services and FIRST 5* program.

The Kleps Award is the highest award given to state courts by the Judicial Council, the policymaking body of state courts chaired by Chief Justice Ronald M. George. Created in 1991 in honor of Ralph N. Kleps, the first Administrative Director of the Courts in California, the biennial awards program recognizes innovation in the state’s courts.

“This spirit of innovation is among our most treasured resources as we face unprecedented economic challenges,” stated Chief Justice Ronald M. George and Administrative Director of the Courts William C. Vickrey. “State court systems throughout the nation, including California’s, have been forced to make difficult decisions about court closures, furloughs, layoffs, and reductions in services. Finding ways to minimize the impact of these and other reductions on the communities we serve is the challenge presented to each of us during this crisis.”

The Court serves many families engaged in chronic litigation that are unable to access needed services because of income constraints and the lack of programs that meet the unique needs of separated parents and children living in two households.

A 2002 needs survey, administered by Superior Court Family Court Services and the FIRST 5 Santa Clara County Commission, identified violence, abuse, and language barriers as major issues facing these families:

- 51% of the 1,300 families surveyed were experiencing physical, sexual or substance abuse, child maltreatment and/or domestic violence;
- Children were often caught between their parents' disputes;
- 20% of the families had a family member apply for a domestic violence restraining order; and
- More than one-third of the parents did not speak English and over two-thirds were involved in the criminal justice system.

The Court approached the FIRST 5 Santa Clara County Commission in the Fall of 2002 to seek assistance in addressing these problems. The resulting partnership is specifically aimed at addressing the needs of high-risk children under the age of six and their families involved in child custody litigation or other court actions. The *Giving Families a Chance* program provides priority access to an extensive network of county services aimed at the common underlying problems that can often lead to unnecessary litigation. Evaluation of this program has shown significant impact on the families and the Court. Families have successfully recovered from substance abuse, gained parenting skills and mended relationships. The Court has observed a marked decrease in the number of re-filings, restraining orders and orders to conduct a lengthy custody evaluation.

Subsequent research indicated a large number of crossover cases with dependency, probate, unified family and criminal domestic violence courts. The scope of *Giving Families a Chance* has increased over the past six years to assist the families of high risk children in these divisions.

The Judicial Council selected 8 exemplary programs from a field of 17 statewide nominations. Summaries of all the awarded programs follow.

2008–2009 KLEPS AWARD RECIPIENTS

Online Procedural Manual: Superior Court of California, County of Amador

This Web-based collection of job aids outlines most court procedures and includes links to applicable rules and forms. It helps court staff share accurate and consistent information with the public and within the court and is particularly useful in a small court where clerks are called on regularly to work outside their assigned subject matter area.

Binational Justice Project: Superior Court of California, County of Imperial This binational collaborative network with justice partners from Mexico provides free legal services to self-represented litigants, public education, community outreach, and an internship program for Mexican law school students.

Self-Help Online Workshop Registration: Superior Court of California, County of Monterey

This online module allows the public to register for self-help center workshops and make appointments for individual review of documents, eliminating a time-consuming trip to the courthouse for residents of this geographically large county. It also automates the process for court staff.

Multi-Option Appropriate Dispute Resolution Project (MAP): Superior Court of California, County of San Mateo This is a broad array of dispute resolution options and educational outreach sessions in family law, juvenile dependency and delinquency, small claims, probate, complex litigation, and civil calendars brought together under one roof and conducted in partnership with the local bar and community mediation center.

Online Probable Cause: Superior Court of California, County of Contra Costa This computer application allows a judge on magistrate duty the ability to approve or deny probable cause declarations in real time from any Internet connection. It significantly improves communication with arresting officers, expedites probable cause responses, and improves the processing of judicial workload.

Online Juror Orientation: Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles This fully customized and interactive online program offers the 10,000 people called to jury duty each day in this county an opportunity to complete jury orientation at their convenience and report later on their first day of service. It accommodates the schedules and personal demands of prospective jurors and helps streamline the orientation process, increasing the effectiveness of court staff.

Giving Families a Chance: The Collaboration between Family Court Services and FIRST 5: Superior Court of California, County of Santa Clara Aimed at children under the age of six and their families, this program addresses the common underlying problems that create unnecessary litigation. Participating families are given priority access to an extensive network of county social services, community support, and pro bono legal services, with the court serving as the hub and entry point.

Appellate Self-Help Clinic: Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District This free self-help center provides self-represented civil litigants a better understanding of Court of Appeal practices and procedures. It offers assistance in filling out court forms; an opportunity to review paperwork before filing; and information about procedures, filings, and deadlines in the appellate process.