

Superior Court of California County of Santa Clara

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March 6, 2008



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – MARCH 6, 2008

SANTA CLARA SUPERIOR COURT TO OPEN A SECOND DEPENDENCY DRUG COURT TO ASSIST CHILDREN AFFECTED BY SUBSTANCE ABUSE

The Superior Court of California, County of Santa Clara will begin a second Juvenile Dependency Drug Court, in a multi-agency effort designed to assist children ages 0-3 who are living in families that have been affected by substance abuse. This effort is being funded through a \$3.742 million dollar grant awarded by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services to the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency (SSA) in October, 2007. FIRST 5 of Santa Clara County will provide matching funds of \$2.591 million dollars. FIRST 5 Executive Director Jolene Smith had this comment about the new program, "Our Commission is dedicated to supporting the healthy development of children and enriching the lives of their families and communities. We are very committed to supporting this multi-agency integrated effort. This partnership provides an exciting opportunity for all of us to work together to provide children and their families with access to timely, appropriate and effective services that will ensure the best possible outcomes."

The new 0-3 Dependency Drug Court (known as the Family Wellness Court) is currently in the strategic planning phase, with implementation scheduled for March 14, 2008. The primary goal of this effort is to improve the lives of children who are already in out-of-home placement or are at risk of being removed from their homes, with the ultimate objective of keeping more families together. The five-year grant will be directed toward expanding the existing Dependency Drug Treatment Court program which has a history of success in reuniting at-risk families through the use of counseling, treatment and other support services. "This grant will respond to safety concerns, by addressing the treatment needs of these families as they enter the child welfare system," said Social Services Agency Director of Operations and Planning, Gina Sessions. "Our goal is to provide immediate assessment and early access to treatment, as well as strengthen our existing linkage with early mental health services for children." A portion of the grant is specifically for strategic planning over the five-year period to reorganize the Child Welfare System, the Courts, the Department of Drugs and Alcohol and Mental health to help these families achieve better outcomes.

This year Santa Clara County Superior Court will also be celebrating the 10th anniversary of the launch of its first Dependency Drug Treatment Court. Literally hundreds of children have been reunified with their families through the collaborative efforts of the Court, County agencies and other service providers. The new Family Wellness Court will concentrate on a target population of families with children ages 0 – 3, recognizing that early intervention is critical to overcoming the devastating effects of methamphetamine and other substance abuse on both parents and young children. “This new grant will enhance and facilitate the creation of a second Dependency Drug Court that is focused on new babies exposed or addicted to meth and other drugs and alcohol”, said Judge Katherine Lucero, Supervising Judge in Juvenile Dependency Court. Judge Lucero addressed the Santa Clara County Public Safety and Justice Committee regarding the implementation of Family Wellness Court on Thursday, February 14, 2008.

The Court will be working in close collaboration with SSA, which is the lead agency under the grant. Other participating organizations include the Department of Alcohol and Drug Services, the Mental Health Department, the District Attorney’s Office, FIRST 5 Santa Clara County, the Domestic Violence Intervention Collaboration, Juvenile Defenders, County Counsel, Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital, San Andreas Regional Center, and other community organizations.