



2007 NEWSLETTER

Issue #2

Special Points of Interest:

45th Annual Conference

*Fitting the Forum to the Family:
 Emerging Challenges for Family
 Courts*

May 28-31, 2008

Vancouver, BC, Canada
 Westin Bayshore Resort

AFCC Eighth International

**Symposium on Child
 Custody Evaluations**

September 26-27, 2008

AFCC Eighth International

**Congress on Parent
 Education and
 Access Programs**

September 25-27, 2008

Albuquerque Marriott
 Albuquerque, New Mexico

President's Note

Aaron Robb, Texas Chapter President

Wow, what a year it's been so far. As we head into the hectic fall holidays I'm looking back at not only our wonderfully successful state conference, but also the many positive changes we've seen this year to the practice of family law in Texas. As with any legislative year there were many major issues up for debate in Austin and many of our members were active in that process in their roles as individual practitioners and as representatives of their agencies. Advocates spoke on both sides of the HB 555 debate and we saw the legislature pass compromise legislation which further solidified parenting coordination services in Texas.

While the current standards for parenting coordination fall far short of the consensus best practice standards, now that the discussion has moved on from whether Texas should have parenting coordinators in statute or not, the focus seems to be turning toward how to implement best practice standards in Texas. One way Texas AFCC has been participating in this debate, and working to fulfill its mission to provide an interdisciplinary forum for the development constructive methods for resolving family disputes, is through our own statewide Parenting Coordination Taskforce.

Drawing on attorneys and

mental health professionals from around the state, the PC Taskforce took the AFCC *Guidelines for Parenting Coordination* as a starting point and looked at how we could adapt national practices to our local needs. Many meetings later we developed a general consensus, which you can find on the Texas Chapter webpage under "committees"

(<http://www.texasafcc.org/committees.html>) – scroll all the way to the bottom for the PC Taskforce Report. I would like to give a big public thank-you to the Taskforce committee members, who devoted a significant amount of time and

[Continued at "President's Note," p.2]

AFCC Trainings Coming to Texas in February

Matthew Sullivan, Ph.D., and Leslie M. Drozd, Ph.D., will present two outstanding programs in February in collaboration with the AFCC Texas Chapter. Dr. Sullivan will present "Advanced Issues in Parenting Coordination: Functional Co-parenting for High Conflict Families," February 18-19, 2008. Dr. Drozd will present "The Battle Between Abuse and Alienation: Assessment, Diagnosis and Interventions," February 20-21, 2008.

Both trainings are recommended for all professionals who work with high conflict families. Each training is eligible for 13 hours of continuing education for psychologists and AFCC members receive a \$70 discount per training. Please register early as space is limited.

The training programs will take place at the Wyndham DFW Airport North (formerly the Holiday Inn Select), 4441 Hwy 114 at Esters Road, Irving Texas, less than three miles from the DFW airport. A block of rooms has been reserved at the Wyndham DFW Airport North in the name of AFCC. For reservations at the special rate of \$119 per night, call (972) 929-8181 and identify yourself with AFCC. Any rooms remaining in the block will be released January 27, 2008, so make your reservations soon.

The training brochure, registration and more information will be available soon at www.afccnet.org/training/.

"President's Note" - continued from page 1

energy to numerous face-to-face and telephonic meetings, as well as much e-mail back and forth on the various issues we encountered.

Speaking of standards, another big issue that many of our members were involved in was HB 772 – the integration of standards for social study evaluations into the Texas Family Code. This had been an issue that I've heard talked about ever since I first joined AFCC, and thanks to much dialogue and cooperation between many professional groups these standards sailed quite smoothly through committee hearings. While there was a slight scare that the bill would meet an accidental administrative death during the upheaval in the final days of the session, it made it through and the new standards took effect on September 1st of this year. The statute provides detailed requirements regarding training and experience of social study evaluators, formal conflict of interest provisions, and requirements for the evaluation and report itself. The full text of the bill is available through the Texas Legislature Online (<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/>) using the "Bill Lookup" feature. For those of you who have access to services such as LexisNexis or Westlaw, you can find the updates in the new Texas Family Code. At some point in the future, the publically accessible version of the Texas Family Code (<http://tlo2.tlc.state.tx.us/statutes/fa.toc.htm>) should be updated, but as of this date, it did not include the 2007 updates.

Another big thank-you goes out to the conference committee for again bringing us a wonderfully informative conference. As most of you know, this year we focused on litigated cases involving child custody evaluations. I got some flack for proposing this focus, given how in the past several years we have sponsored conferences focusing on co-parenting, therapeutic jurisprudence, parent education, parenting coordination, and interdisciplinary collaboration. Pointing out that life is not all conciliation and alternative dispute resolution may not be popular, but the above average attendance figures reflect that we cannot lose focus on

what happens for those families who are unable to resolve their disputes, and who move forward with a final hearing.

As I said in the conference opening, while we might hope for a time where families are able to resolve their issues without surrendering their autonomy to the state, the reality that we deal with is that many families will ask the courts to make parenting decisions for them. The families that travel to this final destination in the family court system deserve the highest level of professional services that can be provided, both from attorneys and from the many other professionals who they may interact with.

That also seems like a good note to close on – that families, and in particular the children in question before the court, deserve the highest level of professional services that can be provided. It takes more than dialogue and debate to see that such services are in place. It takes action at local, state, and even the national level. I've had the great pleasure during my tenure as president to work with many, many dedicated professionals who have volunteered literally hundreds of hours towards these issues. As the state Chapter continues to grow and flourish I hope to see even more of our membership take an active role in shaping what is happening in our great state. Only by being involved as participants – whether that is serving on a committee, hosting local dialogue sessions, speaking to your representatives in government, educating practitioners, or in some other format – can we effect positive changes. By keeping the Chapter actively involved in such issues we can serve as an interdisciplinary voice, tied not to the interests of one profession or geographic region, but speaking to best practices for the system as a whole. I hope as my own role with the Chapter now diminishes each of you reading this column will step up and do your part to continue to build on what we have already accomplished.

Aaron Robb, M.Ed., NCC, LPC
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Professional Announcements

As a new feature for our readers, we are offering you space to let your colleagues know about professional accomplishments. We will give you a couple of sentences in this section to announce speaking engagements, changes to your practice information, articles and books authored, awards received, or other professional recognition.

To take advantage of this service, email your announcement to info@bexarfamilyolutions.com. No advertising, please.

Acceptable:

Mary Smith will address the Houston Bar Association Family Law Section's monthly luncheon on December 7, 2007.

B. Imprezzed's article "Don't Drink the Bathwater – How to Avoid Boundary Violations in High Conflict Cases" will be published in the January 2008 edition of *Family Court Review*.

Not Acceptable:

Mary Smith is offering a two-day seminar on parenting coordination and domestic abuse allegations for only \$225.

B. Imprezzed will have a book signing at Billy's Bookstore in San Angelo on January 6, 2008.

Dear AFCC Texas Chapter Members,

Below is the slate of officers and directors that are returning to complete unexpired terms or have been nominated to serve on the AFCC-Texas Chapter Board for next year. In order to be counted your vote must be received by December 15, 2007. To vote, mark the ballot below and return it to the 2007 Nominating Committee Chair, Trevor Townes, via:

Fax: 713-755-7150, **Email:** trevor_townes@co.harris.tx.us, or

Mail:

Harris Co Family Court Services
1310 Prairie, 6th Floor
Houston, TX 77002

Thank you so very much for your participation.

2007 AFCC Texas Nominating Committee,
Trevor Townes, Chair

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2008 AFCC Nominations for Board of Directors

Officers

Martha Musselman of Houston will serve as the President
Aaron Robb of Ft. Worth will serve as the Past-President

President-Elect: Louise Lee, JD, Houston	YES _____ Write-In _____
Treasurer: Patricia Barrett, CFP, CDFA , Houston	YES _____ Write-In _____
Secretary: Mardi Winder-Adams, M.Ed., Naples	YES _____ Write-In _____
At-Large Directors (serving 2 year terms) Gilda Bowen, LMSW, Mission Mary Fogel, MS, Austin Vicki James, MS, Dallas Hon. Frank Rynd, Houston	Term expires 12/31/2008 Term expires 12/31/2008 Term expires 12/31/2008 Term expires 12/31/2008
Jack Bannin, MS, San Antonio David Eaker, JD, Austin Stephanie Hall, JD, Woodlands Alissa Sherry, Ph.D., Austin	YES _____ Write-In _____ YES _____ Write-In _____ YES _____ Write-In _____ YES _____ Write-In _____
Bylaws Changes: Downsizing the Board from 17 to 13 members. Details at http://www.texasafcc.org/board_info.html	YES _____ NO _____

TEXAS ADR PROVIDER OPPORTUNITY

Online Access & Visitation Directory

Texas OAG Office of Family Initiatives

By Anita Stuckey

The Family Strengthening Initiatives Section of the Office of the Attorney General (OAG) has compiled an online directory of services available to families to facilitate shared parenting after separation or divorce. The online directory includes co-parenting education providers and supervised visitation/neutral pick-up and drop-off centers throughout Texas. Mediators, collaborative law attorneys, parenting coordinators, and legal services for enforcement are also listed. The federally funded Access & Visitation (A&V) grant, operated by the OAG, sponsors the programs discussed in this article.

OAG staff, court personnel, and other professionals serving families want to provide appropriate referrals to parents needing visitation services. This directory allows A&V Hotline attorneys to direct callers to services in their area. The A&V Hotline gives parents toll-free phone access to family law attorneys who provide legal information in English and Spanish. They answer questions about child access and visitation issues as well as paternity and child support. The six attorneys receive over 1,300 calls per month but cannot offer legal advice or representation. The companion web site, www.txaccess.org, offers legal information and forms for parents. The toll-free A&V Hotline number is 1-866-292-4636, available Monday-Friday, 1-5 p.m.

OAG staff and the A&V Hotline receive numerous inquiries from parents requesting help with a wide variety of parenting issues.

We need your help to provide accurate information on dispute resolution providers and other services to parents in conflict.

OAG staff, A&V Hotline attorneys, and the public viewed the A&V online directory over 10,000 times in a sampled 10-week period.

To sign up, go online to www.oag.state.tx.us.

- Click on child support and click on the A&V Directory, listed in the quick links column to the right. Click on the “may register with us” section. Complete all the information requested at the registry section and submit.
- Email to anita.stuckey@cs.oag.state.tx.us:
 - a. current professional organizations (such as Texas Association of Mediators, AFCC (state or national)); and
 - b. number of years in operation in Texas.

Your information cannot appear in the directory until approved by an online administrator. Listings for posting are reviewed as rapidly as possible. Once posted, an email will be sent to you *annually* to verify that your information is current. Failure to respond to that e-mail can result in removal of your information. The OAG does not endorse any provider listed on the A&V directory.

If you have questions, please contact Anita Stuckey, Shared Parenting Program Coordinator at (512) 460-6437 or at anita.stuckey@cs.oag.state.tx.us

New Independent Adoption Social Study Rule Changes in the Works

Heather Goetz, Government Relations, Texas Department of Family and Protective Services noted that the department has been following HB 772 and will be drafting rule changes regarding independent adoption social studies in response to HB 772. Ms. Goetz reported that they are planning to propose the rule changes to the DFPS Council this month. Marianne McDonald, Texas Register Liaison at DFPS Legal Services reported that the new regulations will be published for public comment in the Texas Register on November 2nd as part of the larger revisions to Texas Administrative Code Chapter 745. Ms. Goetz encouraged those interested to review and comment on them when they are proposed. She indicated the notice of the Council meetings and rule proposals will also be posted on the DFPS website: <http://www.dfps.state.tx.us>.