



EQUITY AND INCLUSION PLAN DANE COUNTY FAMILY COURT SERVICES

UPDATED FALL 2023

FAMILY COURT SERVICES (FCS)

- As mandated by State Statute, FCS provides education to parents living separately regarding developing a positive co-parenting relationship and how to navigate the Family Court process. We also provide mediation and evaluation services to assist parents and the Court in resolving custody and physical placement disputes. Parents are referred by a Circuit Court Judge or Commissioner.
- In addition to these services, FCS also offers a resource booklet available free online or for \$5.00 at the Courthouse, which further explains the Family Court system.
- A counselor is “on-call” daily to assist with in person or phone questions regarding family court situations.

FCS STAFF AND OVERSIGHT

- Family Court Services is located on the second floor in the courthouse. We are staffed by eight counselors, a director, two full time administrative assistants and two Limited Term Employees.
- FCS operations are overseen by the Family Section Judge, the Presiding Dane County Judge, and the Chief Judge of the Fifth judicial District.
- Our Department is accountable to the Public Protection and Judiciary Committee of the Dane County Board of Supervisors.

BRAND AND VISIBILITY

Parents access FCS services **only** via court order. This often leaves them feeling like the process is a win or lose situation. Parents who are happy with the outcome are not typically sharing the great joy they experienced working with FCS. However the unhappy parents can be quite expressive. Some biases folks walk in the door with include:

Moms are given preferential treatment

The system is stacked against them

Staff don't understand Domestic Violence dynamics

Staff are biased against, unaware of or don't consider cultural differences

FAMILY CONCERNS

- Confusion regarding the role of FCS vs Child Protective Services and/or child support
 - Continue to share process info through the required class, the FCS website and individual questions/calls [**ongoing**]
- Nothing is going to help my particular situation
 - Encourage individual family members to tend to their own physical and emotional health [**ongoing**]
- Will hurt my position to share domestic abuse, mental health or addiction issues
 - Working with community partners to insure we are understanding needs of our community and staying current with accurate data points [**ongoing**]

MORE FAMILY CONCERNS

- Immigration concerns including possible deportation and language barriers
 - Meetings by Zoom **[Advanced]**
 - Front office staff member speaks Spanish **[Emerging]**
 - Improvements include using language line for urgent matters (phone or walk in translation needed on the spot or scheduled interpreter not available) **[Emerging]**
 - Using DeepL to translate documents, appointment letters and forms into Spanish and other languages **[Emerging]**

ADDITIONAL CONCERNS

➤ EXPENSES

- Fees set by household income
- Adjustments/waivers available
- PP & J waives Tier 1 study fees for combined household incomes of \$60,000 or less

➤ Time off work for appointments, court dates etc.

- Zoom has allowed parents to attend FCS appointments while in their vehicle in the parking lot at work
- Some face to face is still necessary

AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY

➤ Organizational Commitment

➤ Leadership Development

➤ Program Innovation

➤ Collaboration

➤ Resource Mobilization

ORGANIZATIONAL COMMITMENT

We strive to ensure equal access, and the experience of fair, and respectful treatment.

We work to help parents maximize their parenting potential by creating plans that build on family strengths and address children's developing and evolving needs.

We are keenly sensitive to the stress that families may be experiencing in the court system.

FCS WELCOME

- Friendly, Accessible Reception [**Advanced**: Spanish speaker, language line assistance, knowledgeable staff at reception] & [**Emerging**: Space study included in 2024 budget]
- Office space art work/signage reflects the diversity of our county [**Beginning**]
- Water available for the comfort of families [**Emerging**]
- On-call counselor available for walk-in and/or phone questions [**Advanced**]

FCS WELCOME (cont'd)

- Informational brochures regarding immigration services, domestic violence advocacy and legal assistance, available in English and Spanish. **[Advanced]**
 - Other languages **[Beginning]**
- Spanish option (online) for the statutorily mandated Parent Education co-parenting class. **[Advanced]**
 - Other languages. **[Beginning]**

COMMUNITY LEARNING

- Fillable departmental forms that can be sent electronically in Spanish and English. **[Advanced]**. Other languages. **[Emerging]**
- Family Court Resource Booklet available in hard copy or electronically. **[Advanced]**
- Provide info about our services to upper level college students in areas related to behavioral sciences and family law. **[Beginning]**
- Provide information to other community agencies **[Emerging]** In 2023 we have presented to WISPIC (Wisconsin Psychiatric Institute and Clinics), Rape Crisis Center and Freedom Inc.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- We have positive relationships and continue to work with DAIS (Domestic Abuse Intervention Services), End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin (EDAW) UNIDOS and The Parent to Child Program through the Canopy Center. **[Emerging]**
- We hope to partner with the above and other community groups to assist in funding, developing and opening a safe exchange center to benefit parents and children in Dane County. **[Beginning]**
- We have established relationships with other Family Court Services offices around the State of Wisconsin and share learning opportunities and ideas. **[Advanced]**

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

- Conduct annual staff training featuring Equity component. **[Emerging]**
 - Training from Briarpatch regarding LGBTQ issues and programming
 - OEI regarding Neuro-divergent clients
- Staff work to incorporate racial and social equity values into our office culture through frequent discussions about bias and equity when staffing cases and proofing reports.
[Advanced]
 - Staff members are genuinely interested in understanding families and their individual cultures from the family members' own point of view.

LEADERSHIP cont'd.

- Regular diversity presentations for staff
 - Staff teams arrange one annual visit or joint meeting with differing agencies. **[Beginning]**
- Recruitment: When openings arise will work with Rodrigo Valdivia, Recruitment Specialist to find diverse candidates **[Emerging]**
 - Use phrases in position descriptions that appreciate life experiences
 - Develop position interview questions reflective of the diversity in Dane County
 - Select a diverse grading/ranking panel
 - Expand advertising beyond normal range to reach larger pool of diverse candidates
- Staff and community: Many staff are involved in community activities that provide them valuable information about the dynamic population of Dane County. **[Emerging]**

PROGRAM INNOVATION


- Continue to consider new positions or student opportunities to increase diversity of staff. **[Emerging]**
- Consider offering a brief number of supervised placement in stalled family court cases. **[Beginning]**
 - Involve other community partners in this discussion
 - Involve other County departments in this option
- Develop and implement a community based class or workshop on co-parenting or conflict resolution with a diversity lens. **[Beginning]**
- Work with community partners to open a safe exchange center in Dane County. **[Beginning]**
- Insure disability access to the FCS office. **[Emerging]**

COLLABORATION

- Continue strong relationships with: DAIS, UNIDOS, EDAW, AFCC, Dane County Judges, WIPCOD, WISPIC, the UW Law School, the State Bar, Dane County Human Services, local law enforcement. **[Advanced]**
- Strengthen and/or build relationships with: Other Dane county departments, NAACP's family advocate, Centro Hispano, Urban League of Greater Madison, LaSup, higher learning environments and others. **[Beginning]**
- Continue finding new agencies to collaborate with while learning more about the diversity of Dane County. **[Beginning]**
- **[Beginning]**
- Work with other interested agencies to open a safe exchange center.

Resource Mobilization

- When positions are open, continue to recruit and hire diverse, multi-lingual staff. **[Emerging]**
- Playroom and displays reflect population served. **[Beginning]**
- Spanish lessons for staff. **[Beginning]**
- Develop and maintain positive relationships with other stake holders who benefit directly and indirectly from a safe exchange center, including the Dane County Board of Supervisors. **[Emerging]**



People will forget
what you said.
People will forget
what you did. But
people will never
forget how you
made them feel.

Maya Angelou