**RICHMOND COUNTY JUVENILE COURT**

**REPORT TO THE**

**COURT IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE ALL-SITES MEETING**

**Spring, 2021**

**Mission Statement**:

The mission of the Richmond County Juvenile Court is to fairly and impartially decide cases and administer justice through the comprehensive delivery of services to children and families. It is the intent of Juvenile Court to promote a juvenile justice system that will protect the community, impose accountability for violations of law, provide treatment and rehabilitation, and equip juvenile offenders with the ability to live responsibly and productively. The Juvenile Court strives to preserve and strengthen family relationships while only removing a child from his or her home when intervention is essential to protecting the child and enabling him or her to live in a secure and stable environment.

**Updates**:

We have had transitions on our bench within this last year. Judge Jennifer McKinzie retired after 13 years of service and has Senior Judge status. I am sad to report that our Chief Judge, Judge Douglas “Doug” Flanagan passed away leaving a legacy of 20 years of service on the bench. Despite the many years of experience and institutional knowledge gone from our bench, we have continued to push forward to serve the children and families of our community.

We have three new judges to our bench. Judge Kelli J. Spencer, Judge Charles “Chuck” E. Evans, and Judge William “Bill” Fleming, Jr.

Judge Keith Johnson is the new Chief Judge and Judge Amanda N. Heath continues to serve on the bench.

We continue to utilize one (1) courtroom and (1) hearing room in the John H. Ruffin, Jr. Courthouse that the judges share. We are on the ballot March 16th 2021 as a part of the next SPLOST package for our own dedicated courthouse! We are optimistic that the SPLOST will pass.

**Pandemic Court Practices/Procedure**:

We continue to press forward to work efficiently and effectively during these challenging times. We have chosen to use the zoom platform to have people appear virtually for court hearings. It was an adjustment, but we have made it work.

At this time, we have transitioned back to in person court hearings. CDC guidelines are enforced. We stagger the hearings so that there is not a buildup of parties waiting in hallway. Participants are screened upon their entry into the courthouse with temperature checks and masks are required.

We do have hybrid hearings where youth that may be in a facility far away can appear virtually. We also have foster parents that have started to appear via zoom. We plan to continue to have a virtual option so that all those that are involved in the children’s lives can stay informed on the progression of the court proceedings.

**New Initiative- AIM Project (Brochure attached)**

Our DFCS Director, Teresa Towery Hughes approached the Court in implementing the Families First A.I.M (Already In Motion) Project.

The Project targets youth who have DJJ/CHINS involvement who have behavioral and/or mental health issues that are escalating whose caretakers are struggling with continuing to meet the needs and supervision for the youth.

Erica Brathwaite, DFCS Court Liaison, will be attending DJJ and CHINS hearings and can be the point of contact to make the referral. Calvetta Wright, DFCS Family Preservation Administrator, can be a point of contact if Ms. Brathwaite is unavailable.

In Summary, DFCS will do the following:

- Immediate CPS report made which will be assigned directly to the AIM case manager.

- Immediate referral made to Pro Family.

- Contact will be made with the family within 24 hours by DFCS.

- Contact will be made with the family by Pro Family within 48 hours and assessments scheduled.

- Minimal weekly visits made by both DFCS and Pro Family in the first 81 days.

- Assessments completed and FTM held on day 21. Case plan to be developed at the FTM.

- Status/review hearing to be held in court immediately following 21 day FTM where case plan will be presented and incorporated into a Protective Order issued by the court.

- Review/Status FTM held every 60 days (following 21 day FTM) in which celebration of progress, assessment of continued challenges/needs, assessment of level of services/contacts needed for the next 60 days, etc.

- Update Court Report will be submitted to the court following each FTM.

- Approximately 6 months after the initial Protective Order Hearing a review hearing will be held with the goal of hopefully being able to dismiss the protective order as the family will hopefully have been successful in completing the AIM program.