
COLLIN COUNTY, TEXAS YOUNG LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

KIDS IN COURT PROGRAM

I. Project Description

Kids in Court is a program that offers children who will be testifying in a civil or criminal proceeding in Collin County Courts, and their parents, an opportunity to see and learn about the courtroom and the events that will occur when they testify. The program introduces children to judges, lawyers and others they may see in and around the courtroom. In addition, parents are invited to attend the program and to ask questions about the legal process. Collin County Kids in Court was initiated to help alleviate the fear, stress, anxiety and other concerns children have about testifying in the courtroom. In a mock setting, each participating child gets an opportunity to sit in the witness chair and testify about non-case-related issues, such as a favorite color, ice cream, class, etc., under direct and cross-examination. After each child has had the opportunity to testify, the program is concluded with the distribution of coloring books and crayons that facilitate a review of the lessons learned during the program.

II. Project Planning/Development

A. Identification of need

Collin County Assistant District Attorneys who are also active with the Collin County Young Lawyers Association (“CCYLA”) concluded that there are many children who could benefit from an introduction to the judicial system before being called to testify in court. It was also clear to the CCYLA lawyers that the parents, and the party on whose behalf a child may testify could also benefit from the program. Collin County Kids in Court was implemented to help bridge the gap between the need for public education concerning the legal process, particularly for children, and the resources and talents of the CCYLA.

B. Determination of Project Goals and Design

1. Decisions to be made

The Kids in Court program is extremely flexible and can be tailored to fit the needs and desires of the implementing affiliate. A smaller affiliate may decide only to work with the local prosecutor’s office to help prepare children who will be called to testify in a prosecution. This implementation approach is easiest

when participating members of the affiliate are prosecutors or have a close relationship with the prosecutor's office. A broader implementation approach could include working with Child Protective Services, the office of the clerk of court, the trial court administrator's office or district clerk's office to identify all cases in the jurisdiction involving children witnesses. In any event, the affiliate's time commitment is self-controlled by the frequency of presentations and the number of children invited to attend attending the program.

2. Decision-making process

An important decision is whether to involve volunteers affiliated with other organizations that are involved with child services. For example, the local Children's Advocacy Center was crucial to the success of this program in Collin County - the clinical therapist from the Children's Advocacy Center was present to answer questions and provide guidance to participating parents and children. The therapist also provided valuable assistance in designing the program and program materials. Refreshments were also provided by center volunteers who wished to bake.

3. Considerations in project planning

The Kids in Court program is exceptionally low maintenance; however, it does require a coordinated commitment from trial participants, the judge, bailiff, court reporter, prosecutor/plaintiff and/or defense attorney. The cost of advertising, pamphlets and review materials (coloring books were an effective tool) must also be considered. Refreshments such as cookies and punch is also an option for socializing after the program. However, these costs for smaller affiliates could be defrayed by contributions from local child advocacy groups.

III. Implementation

A. Timetable

A Kids in Court Program can be implemented at the affiliate level in about sixty days. Less time would be required if review materials/coloring books are rush ordered or are not offered at all.

B. Recruitment and Training of Volunteers/Personnel

There is minimal recruitment and no training of volunteers needed for this project.

C. Publicity

Publicity concerning this program in newspapers is an excellent opportunity to get the word out to the community that your affiliate is an active, public service group.

D. Day-to-Day Operations

There are no Day-to-Day Operations of the Kids in Court program. However, a few hours a presentation are required to successfully present the program once the materials and format are decided upon.

IV. Evaluation and Impact

The impact of this program has been positive in Collin County. The gratitude of the parents and the sense of relief that the program has brought to children has been significant. The CCYLA has received numerous calls inquiring about future Kids in Court presentations. The CCYLA plans to continue this program and make presentations quarterly.

V. Bibliography/Other Resources

Affiliate Contact: Danette Alvarado
5800 Grantie Parkway, Suite 300
Plano, Texas 75024
972-731-2515
Dalvarado9@cs.com

Coloring Book Utilized: Getting Ready for Court
Criminal Court Edition: A Book for Children
by Lynn M. Copen/Linda M. Pucci
Sage Publications