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KING COUNTY EXECUTIVE

**SUPERIOR COURT OF THE
STATE OF WASHINGTON
FOR KING COUNTY**

ANNUAL REPORT 1977

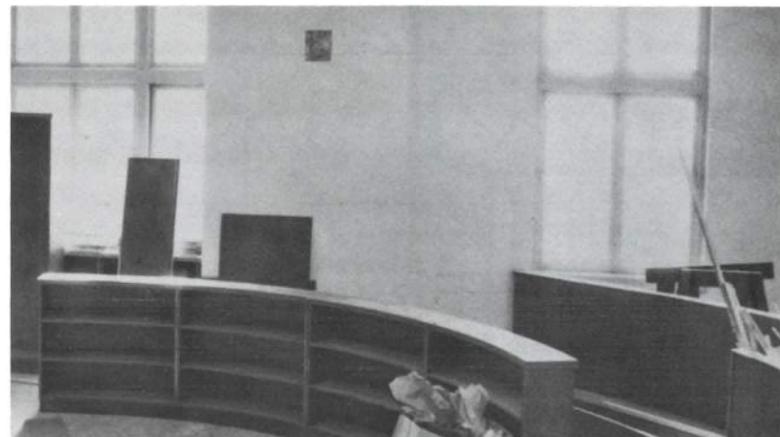




Court's Budget Committee reviewing plans for new courtroom construction. Seated left to right, Judges George Revelle, Warren Chan and T. Patrick Corbett. Standing, Court Administrator Lewis Stephenson



Computer terminal similar to one being installed in Superior Court for juror and witness payments.



Bookcase and portion of jury box.



Judge's bench - initial stages.



Judge's bench and court bookcase nearer completion.

JUVENILE COURT

Juvenile Court Calendaring. The steps taken to reduce the number of judicial offices at Juvenile Court from three to two, effective the latter part of the previous year, have continued in operation, with occasional exception when a third judge had to be sent to Juvenile Court for an overload or unusual circumstance. The transferring of all deprivation cases heard at Juvenile Court to the adult courthouse has proved successful and the practice has now been instituted permanently.

Juvenile Code. The implementation of HB 371, the Juvenile Code, effective July 1, 1978, and the potential impact of that legislation on our Juvenile Court has been the subject of a great deal of discussion and planning by court personnel. The Juvenile Code implementation will impact the court to some extent, depending upon how many resources are available to carry out the intent of the legislation. Planning is going forth to anticipate the need for a third judicial officer at Juvenile Court to answer the needs of the new Juvenile Code. If the load does not materialize from a juvenile standpoint, the requirement for the additional courtroom space created by the calendar backlog would justify the implementation of the third courtroom at Juvenile Court for the use of civil cases transferred from downtown.

Juvenile Court Personnel Relocation. With the transfer of all non-judicial functions to the executive branch effective February 1, 1977, the personnel in the Juvenile Court operations and the Volunteer Programs were consolidated in the area adjacent to the courtrooms on the first floor of the main Youth Center Building. This consolidation will provide better utilization of office support facilities and personnel.

Volunteer Programs. There are two Volunteer Programs under the direction of the Superior Court.

a. Conference Committees: Considered by the judges of the Superior Court to be an extension of their "judicial authority", the Juvenile Court Conferences Committees were not included in the transfer of the balance of the Juvenile Court Staff to the Executive's Youth Services Department that became effective February 1, 1977.

Diverting young people from the formal juvenile justice system to community based citizens groups began in 1959 with the formation of the Renton Conference Committee. In 1977, under the auspices of the King County Juvenile Judges Committee, there were 22 Conference Committees, utilizing over 350 trained community volunteers who met on a regularly scheduled basis to handle over 4,000 diverted juvenile cases annually.

These 22 Conference Committees serve in 14 communities within the county, and eight neighborhoods within Metropolitan Seattle. The boundaries of the urban and rural committees are based on neighborhood identity and/or school district boundaries.

The key role of the Committee, as a community service, is to provide a procedure whereby youth in trouble and their parents can be helped to remedy a problem in its early stages. This is accomplished through conferences held with the parents and child in their community. The goal of Conference Committees is to offer an alternative to the formal juvenile justice system by diverting those children to their own community for assistance. The objectives are: (1) to facilitate resolution of the present problem; (2) to provide accountability for the juvenile's behavior; (3) to impress upon the youth that the community is concerned with his/her conduct; (4) to increase the juvenile's awareness of the relationship between the offense committed and the people injured by his/her action; (5) to stimulate and maximize the opportunity for citizen participation; and (6) to develop needed community services.

The following is a noteworthy example of dedication and concern shown by conference committee members in performing their function: "After the Northeast Seattle Juvenile Court Conference Committee had completed a lengthy calendar of cases before it, three runaway girls presented themselves for help. Two had been before the Committee before and knew help was available. The Committee chose to see them, completing solutions with them and their parents by 3 a.m. the following morning."

Additional side benefits result from the Conference Committee program. The cost of administering the juvenile justice system is reduced. The current cost to the County per case handled by the Conference Committee is \$30.40 less per case than the cost per case for the initial entry in the juvenile justice system. The program also diminishes the caseloads of the court.

The overall budget approved for 1978 is \$110,000, an increase of \$28,000 to cover the increased costs of paid consultants for newly formed committees. An additional grant of \$3,200 has been obtained from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration to be used for 16 regional training workshops for Conference Committee Volunteers. Also, a third paid coordinator is authorized and will be added to the existing staff of two coordinators in 1978.

b. Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem Program: Begun at the first of 1977, the Volunteer Guardian ad Litem Program has lived up to and beyond its expectations in providing to the Juvenile Court a more comprehensive and socially oriented report for the use of the judges.

At the close of our first year, the King County Superior Court Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem Program provided 376 trained Guardians Ad Litem for 498 children. 473 of the children are classified as Dependent.

These Volunteer Guardians Ad Litem assumed their roles as advocates of the child's best interests with emphasis on providing the court with recommendations leading to long term planning for the child.

The basic assumptions of the Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem Program training and individual consultation are (1) evaluate thoroughly the child's total life sphere; (2) provide sensitive, empathetic understanding to all parties; (3) draw conclusions only when all the facts are known; (4) list stipulations for the parents which must be met within a specified time period to insure the return of their child/children and (5) to insure appropriate interim placement and provide a complete recommendation to meet the child's needs.

The program goals are twofold: (1) to provide the court with an accurate, complete and independent assessment; and (2) to provide continuing active facilitation of permanent planning for the child within the shortest time frame possible.

There have been two elements that have provided successful achievement of the Program goals. The extreme high quantity of those volunteering for Guardian Ad Litem appointment has been valuable as far as time spent investigating, and dedication to insuring permanent planning for the children. The one common factor of our Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem that differs from the other professional parties in the case, is that the Guardians strive to stabilize the children's situation within a specific time limit. They are determined to achieve a permanent plan for these youngsters as soon as possible.

The Judiciary of King County Superior Court have provided support by insuring the Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem primary party status in the courtroom. As such, the Volunteer Guardians Ad Litem have had the opportunity to prove their credibility. Initial resistance by the public and private social agencies to the concept of the Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem has diminished as Guardian credibility has increased.

The first year of operation has allowed assessment of actual, rather than theoretical needs for a functional Program. There are three areas that are in the process of change.

Initially, it was felt that a part-time legal consultant would provide all consultation to the Program staff and Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem prior to the time cases were set for Fact Finding or Termination hearings. At the time a case was set for an evidentiary hearing, attorneys are selected from a roster of private legal counsel to represent each Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem in the courtroom. As the Program developed, there was less need for legal counsel prior to the setting of an evidentiary hearing. More importantly, the roster system did not provide consistency of advice to the Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem or develop expertise in handling dependency cases among the private attorneys being utilized.

The Program Director will award a contract to one law firm for 1978 to represent all Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem Program legal training consultations, and courtroom representation. It is essential to provide the Volunteer Guardians Ad Litem readily available, consistent legal advice, and expert, experienced legal counsel in the courtroom. It is felt that this revised system will insure that all other parties in the case grant primary party status to the Volunteer Guardians Ad Litem.

At first, the Program Director recruited and provided training for about 100 Volunteer Guardians Ad Litem one month prior to the Program's implementation. After that time, operational demands precluded active, ongoing recruitment. Additional Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem were recruited by community newspaper coverage and word of mouth. The demand by the court exceeded the supply provided by the Program which resulted in the overuse of some Volunteer Guardians Ad Litem.

Now one Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem has assumed the task of ongoing recruitment. The goal is to provide about fifteen to twenty Guardians Ad Litem to the Program for orientation training every six weeks.

Experience has shown that the original job description of the Program Director was too all inclusive and did not provide for training another person capable of assuming responsibility for the Program in the Director's absence. Funding has been assured for such a position in the 1978 budget for a competent, trained Program Assistant who will assume some of the initially stated duties of the Director, plus conducting ongoing research and evaluation.