ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
OF THE COURTS
455 Golden Gate Avenue
San Francisco, CA
94102-3688
Tel 415-865-4200
TDD 415-865-4272
Fax 415-865-4205
www.courtinfo.ca.gov

FACT SHEET

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Effective Court Practice for Abused Elders

The Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC), of the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), conducted a research project designed to document innovative practices in handling cases of elder abuse, as well as to assess the needs of abused elders and the barriers they face when coming to court to seek protection. The project, which began in early 2006 and completed in early 2008, focused on a variety of courts, including criminal, civil, family, domestic violence, and probate court, where elders or their caregivers come to seek the court's protection through restraining orders or conservatorships.[1]

Goals and Outcomes

The principal outcomes of the project are training and technical assistance materials for California courts—including a written report summarizing elder abuse issues for the courts and highlighting related court initiatives, as well as a basic elder abuse curriculum—to help them both understand the needs of abused elders and replicate effective practices in serving this population. Ultimately, the goal is to improve the quality of justice for abused elders accessing the court system. Training and technical assistance materials will be disseminated through the AOC's existing network for court training and publications and are available on the CFCC Web site at www.courts.ca.gov/7871.htm#acc12615

Court Involvement

The study design incorporated qualitative and quantitative approaches and included a statewide survey of whether courts have adopted practices to address elder issues generally or elder abuse specifically, as well as more in-depth analysis with courts chosen for this part of the study (the "study courts"). The four study courts included in this project were Superior Court of Alameda County, Superior Court of Orange

[1] This project has been supported by a grant from the Archstone Foundation as part of their Elder Abuse and Neglect Initiative.

County, Superior Court of San Francisco County, and Superior Court of Ventura County. The criteria for choosing the study courts included whether a court had an established program or services for abused elders or wanted to assess the needs of abused elders and how effective their current response, such as collaborations and innovative partnerships in the community, has been.

Research Design

The research involving the study courts proceeded in two general phases. The first phase was focused on understanding court operations and the perspectives of judicial officers, court staff, government agencies, and community stakeholders. Research methods for this phase included site visits, interviews, and observation of court or program operations. The second phase of the research emphasized assessing the characteristics and needs of elderly litigants and their cases, and included case studies, court file review, and review of existing administrative data.

Next Steps

CFCC has received continuation funding from the Archstone Foundation under phase II of its Elder Abuse and Neglect Initiative. The project will continue through the end of 2010 and focus on replication of innovative practices studied in phase I. CFCC staff will begin phase II with education and outreach to make courts aware of the project, and then move on to providing technical assistance to courts wishing to implement specialized programs or services designed to address elder abuse issues.

Contact:
Center for Families, Children & the Courts collaborativejustice@jud.ca.gov
415-865-7739