



Mediation important in unifying families

Juvenile court focused on rehabilitation

BY MEALAND • RAGLAND-HUDGINS • February 25, 2011

MURFREESBORO — Local attorneys specializing in juvenile and family law spent Thursday learning tools to help their clients overcome stumbling blocks related to divorce, health care and drugs.

The Rutherford County Juvenile Justice League sponsored the day-long continuing education conference, which focused on unifying families. Conference coordinator Rebecca Robinson said physical abuse and drug abuse by children and parents are two of the toughest obstacles to face.

"Juvenile court deals with a huge umbrella of issues, but we're a court of rehabilitation, not punishment," she said. "The healing process is important."

In cases of abuse, Robinson said many of those children are the victims of drug users. In turn, those children may eventually look to drugs as a way to deal with their feelings. Other times, teens appear in court for possessing or selling drugs.

"We're fighting (drugs) on several different levels," she said. "Meth is making a comeback and there are other drugs out there we don't know about."

The importance of mediation, especially in cases where juveniles are involved, was the focus of attorney Bert McCarter's talk. He shared a story about how hitting the game-winning free throws at the end of a high school basketball tournament should have been a high point in his young life, but hours earlier, he watched his father get arrested as they had dinner for owing back child support.

McCarter said his parents had been through a bitter custody battle, but his father never missed one of his basketball games until that night.

"They spent more money on attorneys' fees in court than what he owed in child support," which was about \$1,500, McCarter said. "They hated each other. She decided he needed to be taught a lesson. Today, I'll never forgive my mother for that. My dad was sorry sometimes, but he loved me."

Because only two juvenile courts run each day, it sometimes takes six or seven months for a case to be heard in court. Mediation, McCarter said, can be a tool for families looking to get through legal issues sooner.

"It takes four hours of time and in the long run, you save your client money. When you're in mediation, you can work out details that a judge may not necessarily do," he said. "Without mediation, you're rolling the dice."

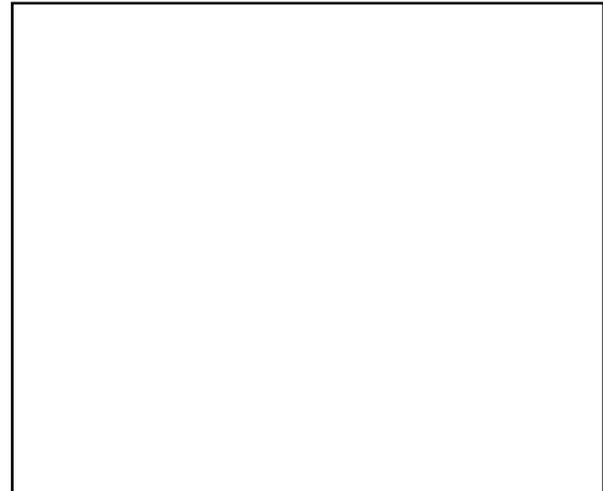
Attorney Mary Frances Parker said she often has trouble getting clients and opposing attorneys to agree to the process.

"Juvenile cases are much more heated than the divorce cases I handle. Some people don't buy it," she said.



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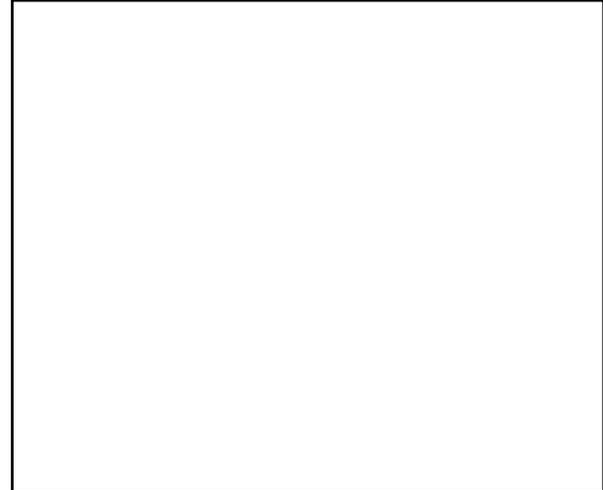


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abuse on Thursday during a Juvenile Justice conference
at the Rutherford County Courthouse.(Aaron
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