

Juvenile Court of Geauga County, Ohio Judge Timothy J. Grendell

VICTOR Y. MATTHEWS FAMILY LIFE IMPROVEMENT RESOURCE CENTER

The Victor Y. Matthews Family Life Improvement Resource Center provides early evaluation and assistance to both court-involved and non-court-involved families with navigating child custody and parenting time issues, and helping connect them with necessary services. The Resource Center creates an environment that encourages family participation and self-determination, with the goal of helping families remain child focused and achieve positive outcomes while navigating the court process. The Resource Center offers a variety of services available to parents and non-parents who would like guidance through the changes in their family's circumstances, such as referrals for mental health and substance abuse assessments and treatment, referrals to the Court's Help Center, supervised parenting time, mediation, co-parenting education and support, parenting education and support, school programming, and the Court's Post Adjudicatory Support System (PASS) Program.

1. Referrals: Case Managers screen client parents and other caregivers to determine the family's treatment needs, then make referrals to community partners who are able to meet the needs of the family, which can include mental health and substance abuse treatment, the Court's Help Center, and/or other community partners who can further assist the family. The Resource Center also makes referrals to the Court's Help Center, which provides free legal education and assistance to those who wish to handle certain legal matters without legal representation

2. Supervised Parenting Time: Geauga County Juvenile Court is committed to providing opportunities for parenting time (formerly referred to as visitation) to ensure that families have the best possible chance of addressing conflict and working toward reunification. It is important that children have the opportunity to have a healthy, safe relationship with both parents when possible. The Resource Center works with trained, qualified professionals who monitor parent-child interactions for safety issues and compliance with court orders. Supervised parenting time can be scheduled any day of the week at hours that are convenient for the family and child(ren)'s schedule, and is therefore able to give parents who otherwise would have little or no time with their children the opportunity to safely visit children for extended periods in a variety of public spaces or the parental home.

3. Mediation: In order to offer families an alternative to the formal court process and provide a vehicle for self-determination, Judge Grendell implemented a new mediation program in 2020. Mediation is a process in which a mediator facilitates communication and negotiation between parties to assist them in reaching a voluntary agreement regarding their dispute. Parents who are able to reach an agreement in mediation have the ability to structure the agreement to meet the needs of their unique family situation. Agreements reached in mediation often provide a long-term benefit to the family because families are more likely to follow the agreement and parents are more likely to have healthy communication. Mediation utilizing Ohio Supreme Court trained mediators is now offered at no cost to families.

4. Co-parenting Education and Support: Every parent will say that they want to do what is best for their child(ren), but at times, their actions and words do not demonstrate this. This leads to frustration and conflict between parents and stress for the child. The Resource Center offers CoParenting education and support to encourage and empower parents to reach their goals of doing what is best for their child(ren). Co-parenting education is offered in the form of either a group class or individually with the parent(s). The 5-session group class is based on Isolina Ricci's book *The Coparenting Toolkit*. Individual education occurs in a private setting to encourage cooperative co-parenting by focusing on appropriate communication, problem solving, and unresolved co-parenting issues between parents. The Resource Center provides ongoing co-parenting support by monitoring communication between parents and providing feedback and support as needed.

5. Parenting Education and Support: Taught by a certified provider, the Triple P (Positive Parenting Program®) is a parenting and family support system designed to prevent, as well as treat, behavioral and emotional problems in children and teenagers. It aims to prevent problems in the family, school, and community, before they arise, to create family environments that encourage children to reach their potential. Triple P draws on social learning, cognitive behavioral and developmental theory, as well as research into risk factors associated with the development of social and behavioral problems in children. It aims to equip parents with the skills and confidence they need to be self-sufficient and to be able to manage family issues without ongoing support. Triple P is available for parents of children up to 12 years old. The Resource Center offers one-on-one ongoing parenting support, including development of appropriate routines, behavioral management strategies, and answering child development questions.

6. School Programming: The Resource Center works with the Geauga County Education Service Center (ESC) to design and implement social emotional curriculum-based programming in local schools.

7. Post Adjudicatory Support System (PASS): The PASS program supports families involved with the Court due to parental abuse, neglect or dependency cases. When a case closes, families often find that many of the supports that were put in place by the Court and its community partners during the pendency of the case abruptly ends, making it more difficult for them to maintain their newfound stability. PASS is designed to help families maintain this stability after their formal case closes, by providing a well-structured, gradual wind-down of services, through the provision of monitoring, support, and guidance to families by the Resource Center.

8. Launchpad: Launchpad was implemented by Judge Timothy J. Grendell in December 2015 and is run by the Court's CASA program. Launchpad directly addresses careers and life plans for children aging out of foster care in Geauga County. At the age of 14, children in foster care are identified as Launchpad candidates. This allows for review of the child's academic performance to make adjustments where needed to serve the best interest of the child. At 15 ½ years old, a questionnaire is completed to give the Launchpad coordinator an idea of the wants and needs of the particular child. At 17, a Federal Financial Aid Form must be completed and all testing completed with scores given to the court for college or vocational entrance. If a child elects to consider the military, a non-recruiter will present them options. If the child wants to go directly to work, various opportunities are presented to the child to give the child a broader exposure to

possibilities. The child at the age of 16 ½ is asked if they would like a sponsor family for a home to come to for the holidays or maybe just someone to call in times of need after the child ages out of foster care. The Court's CASA Program Director has families waiting to embrace these young adults as if they are their own college kids. Background checks are provided on all sponsor families and a basket is available for any child aging out of foster care. In 2020, 2 children participated in the program. The CASA Launchpad children have been given baskets of supplies upon graduation from high school, connections to host families, and assistance in securing transportation for jobs and careers. This program allows for the children aging out of the system to still have a support system they are comfortable approaching even years after a case formally closes.