

**COURT IMPROVEMENT AND THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES**

Juvenile and Family Court judges are becoming more involved with court improvement. At no time in my memory have more new practices been implemented in our courts throughout the state. Our Chief Justice encourages innovation and creativity in our juvenile and family courts. The Judicial Council gives out awards recognizing innovations in them. Our local court executives and court staff are fully engaged in assisting judges in these efforts.

My experience has been that most innovative ideas for court improvement come from colleagues who have had successes and are now ready to speak and write about them. The main source of new ideas for California juvenile and family court judges has been the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) with offices in Reno, Pittsburgh, and Washington, D.C.

The NCJFCJ brings together lead judges from around the country and has them work together to develop and publish best practices. It was the NCJFCJ that produced the Resource Guidelines: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse & Neglect Cases, the Delinquency Resource Guidelines, and The Greenbook (Effective Intervention in Domestic Violence & Child Abuse Cases: Guidelines for Policy and Practice) among the many practice guides that the organization has written. The NCJFCJ policy and practice guides have had an enormous impact on our juvenile, family, domestic violence, child support, mental health, and drug courts to name the most prominent. Many of the recommendations from NCJFCJ publications have become California law while others have become acknowledged best practice in our state.

The NCJFCJ also provides technical assistance on line as well as in person. I can't remember all of the times I have called or emailed the main office or the National Center for Juvenile Justice (their research arm in Pittsburgh) for help on a problem. From evaluating our juvenile hall, to case management, to creating a problem solving court, the NCJFCJ can help you make the changes you want to make.

Why is this important to us? Because in our efforts to improve juvenile and family court practice it makes sense to become a member of the NCJFCJ. Membership brings with it so much. The NCJFCJ publishes TODAY magazine and the Juvenile and Family Court Journal, both critical to learning the latest about what lead juvenile and family court judges are doing around the country. These publications keep members up to date on grant opportunities, conferences around the country, and other events of interest to our judges. Membership also includes the opportunity to participate in committees with members from other states as well as affords access to news from the NCJFCJ.

Moreover, I have found that membership in the NCJFCJ has brought with it connections to some of my best friends.

Colleagues from other states face the same problems you face. Friendships are easy to form and long-lasting since you are meeting judges who share your interests in juvenile and family court law, domestic violence courts, drug courts, or court administration.

All this for only the price of a membership!!



My recommendation is that if you are assigned to juvenile or family court, you should become a member of the NCJFCJ. Further, if you rotate out of that position, you could pass the membership and publications onto your successor, or you could remain a member and persuade your successor to become a member also. No matter what, however, every Superior Court in California (even the most rural court) should have a membership for the judges of that court. So another way to get access to NCJFCJ information and benefits is to insist that your court executive apply for at least one membership and that the publications be kept in your local court law library.

Finally, as a matter of pride, you should become a member of the NCJFCJ.

One of our own has been elected to the position of Secretary of the NCJFCJ. Judge Mike Nash (Los Angeles County) will be the President of the organization in a few years. In the meantime he is in a leadership position. Judge Katherine Lucero (Santa Clara County) is a member of the Board of Trustees of the NCJFCJ. As a matter of pride and local support, it behooves you to become a member for your own benefit and to show support for your California colleagues.

My call is to

- I. Juvenile Court Judges (Dependency and Delinquency),
- II. Family Court Judges,
- III. Judges hearing domestic violence cases,
- IV. Judge hearing Drug Court Cases, and
- V. Court Administrators (Court Executives)

to become members of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.

Membership will greatly support your efforts to improve court operations in juvenile and family matters as well as in specialty courts such as drug courts and domestic violence dockets.

And how do you become a member? You can go to [NCJFCJ.ORG](http://NCJFCJ.ORG) and click on Membership. The rest is easy.