



MINNESOTA
JUDICIAL
BRANCH

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

FIFTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT EQUAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE
COMMUNITY DIALOGUE
Wednesday, October 8, 2019 - 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
St. Peter Middle School Cafeteria, St. Peter, MN

FIFTH DISTRICT REPORT

INTRODUCTION

The Fifth Judicial District's Equal Justice Committee is comprised of approximately 20 individuals who represent judges, attorneys, law enforcement, corrections, court administrators, and others involved in the judicial system.

The Fifth Judicial District Community Dialogue titled *Equal Access to Justice* was held at the St. Peter Middle School Cafeteria, St. Peter, Minnesota, on Wednesday, October 8, 2019. The focus of the dialogue was on juveniles and parents, students, and community members came together to discuss various topics relating to children in the community. Attendees came from various backgrounds. Certified interpreters in several languages, including Spanish and Somali, were available.



COMMUNITY DIALOGUE PURPOSE

The Community Dialogue provides a means for the Committee for Equality and Justice and each Judicial District Equal Justice Committee (EJC) to work together to achieve equitable treatment for all individuals in the court system. The Community Dialogue stated purpose is to:

Create a public forum for community members to describe their experiences and discuss ideas for advancing equality and fairness regarding race, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, and any other status protected by law.

FIFTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT SESSION DETAILS

Presenters at the community dialogue consisted of Judge Allison Krehbiel from Nicollet County; James Dwyer, Nicollet County Probation; Jon Hughes, St. Peter Police and School Resource Officer; Angie Obermiller, Nicollet County Human Services; Larry Nicol, southwest senior leadership attorney for Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS); Michelle Zehnder Fischer, Nicollet County Attorney; James Dunn, Assistant Nicollet County Attorney; Joseph Bergstrom, 5th Judicial District Public Defender; Ian Bratlie, American Civil Liberties Union Staff Attorney; Kelly Jensen, school social worker.

The middle school principal, Jon Graff, was present as were other school staff and student support contacts. Approximately 70 adults and 20 children from the community attended. Promotional flyers advertised the event in English, Spanish, and Somali (see attachment A). The flyers were posted throughout the community.

The attendees were provided with an agenda (see attachment). Additional informational brochures were provided by both Nicollet County Human Services and the St. Peter Police Department.



THE FIFTH JUDICIAL DISTRICT SESSION

Judge Krehbiel opened the session with an explanation of what the Equal Justice Committee is, and further explained that the purpose of this event was to offer the audience insight into how the justice system and its partners work, specifically as it relates to children.

The presenters were introduced and Judge Krehbiel informed the assembly that all shared common goals; community safety and keeping children in school and out of the court system.

MAJOR THEMES OF THE SESSION

The topics of discussion presented were accessibility to law enforcement, juvenile court processes, school attendance and truancy, as well as child protection concerns.

ACCESSIBILITY TO LAW ENFORCEMENT

Officer Hughes from the St. Peter Police Department went over the following topics:

- The differences between law enforcement agencies and their uniforms.
- St. Peter Police Department has a Facebook page. It's a good way to view community involvement.
- The difference between 911 and nonemergency phone calls and the fact that 911 calls may be transferred to an interpreter language line. The caller can remain anonymous.
- Popular phone apps used by kids, and an explanation of how they are used.
- A display case of devices seized from students at the school last year was presented. Officer Hughes talked about the dangers of vaping.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Angie Obermiller from Nicollet County Human Services talked about her role in child protection and described programs offered by Nicollet County. The guidelines for reporting abuse and acceptable forms of discipline in the United States were shared with the group.

SCHOOL SERVICES

James Dwyer from the Nicollet County Probation Department explained his role as a Truancy Liaison. If a parent gets a call about their child being absent, that doesn't necessarily mean they will go to court. If the absence continues, it could get serious enough to go to court.

Kelly Jensen, Social Worker, gave examples of services the school can provide, such as helping kids find tutors, solving problems with friends, having struggles with a teacher. Parents were encouraged to call the school social worker with concerns.

PARENT'S RIGHTS

Michelle Zehnder Fischer, Nicollet County Attorney, indicated that the goal is to provide services to families. She then went over parent's rights and explained how her office gets involved.

Joe Bergstrom described his role in representing children. What the child wants is not always the same as what the parents want.

Judge Krehbiel spoke about attorney/client privilege. Michelle Zehnder Fischer explained that when the attorneys meet with each other they are not working together, they are trying to resolve the case.

Larry Nicol from Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services (SMRLS) shared that the Open Door Health Center offers attorney assistance. There are 10 lawyers in the SMRLS Mankato office that can help if people are feeling unsafe, in danger of losing house, and different things of that nature.

QUESTIONS AND OPEN DISCUSSION

Community members asked several questions, many of which involved immigration. Some of the attendees expressed a desire to have help filling out immigration paperwork and asked if there is a fee. Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services will assist with paperwork at no charge.

There was a question about law enforcement being able to enter someone's home to check on families receiving assistance, which then lead into a discussion regarding warrants. Those receiving assistance were cautioned about signing the form before speaking with an attorney. Sometimes there is a miscommunication, which could result in someone losing their assistance.

Ian Bratlie, an attorney with American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), offered to answer questions on immigration and talk with people.

There was discussion regarding acceptable discipline in the United States. Additionally, attendees were provided with information on the appropriate age for a child to be left at home alone and the duration of time based on their age.

PROPOSED SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE COURT SYSTEM

The EJC committee did not receive suggestions from the community for improving the courts. There will be a law session included in the November 15, 2019, Tapestry Session to be held in Mankato, MN. Judge Krehbiel plans to present at that session.

EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE

PRESENTED BY THE MINNESOTA 5TH JUDICIAL DISTRICT

A Community Discussion for Parents, Students, and Community Members



TOPICS TO BE COVERED

Accessibility to Law Enforcement
Juvenile Court Process
School Attendance and Truancy
Child Protection Concerns

TUESDAY
OCTOBER 8TH @7:00PM

AT ST. PETER MIDDLE SCHOOL CAFETERIA

100 LINCOLN DRIVE,
ST PETER, MN 56082

.Equal Access to Justice
October 8, 2019
St. Peter Middle School Cafeteria

Panel of Presenters: James Dwyer, Nicollet County Probation, Angie Obermiller, Nicollet County Children's Services, Michelle Zehnder Fischer, Nicollet County Attorney, Allison Krehbiel, Maripsa Romero, Student Support Liaison, Affey Sigat, Student Support Liaison, Jon Hughes, St. Peter Police, Joseph Bergstrom, Public Defender, Jim Dunn, Nicollet County Attorney's office, Larry Nicol, SMRLS, Kelly Jensen, School Social Worker, Ian Bratlie, ACLU

Welcome: Mr. Jon Graff

Law Enforcement: Jon Hughes

- Local Law Enforcement accessibility
- 911 vs. Non-Emergency number
- Phone Apps (Applications) your kids use you should know about
- Tobacco use and vaping

Children's Services: Angie Obermiller

- Definitions of programs available
- Guidelines for reporting
- Acceptable discipline

School Services: James Dwyer and Kelly Jensen

- Truancy
- Student support services (academic, mental health, school-linked)
- Introductions
-

Parent's Rights: Michelle Zehnder Fischer and Joe Bergstrom

- Delinquency, Petty
- Child Protection
- Parent's role in court process