

Madison County Kids' Corner

Madison County is located in southwest Illinois, approximately twenty minutes east of St. Louis, Missouri. According to the Census Bureau, the 2004 estimated population of Madison County is 264,350 with a land area of 725 square miles. In 2004, 601 Emergency Orders of Protection, 27 Interim Orders of Protection and 177 Plenary Orders of Protection were entered into the Law Enforcement Administrative Data System (LEADS).

The following information was gathered through an interview process with local key stakeholders describing the formation, procedures and needs of the Madison County Kids' Corner. The following people were interviewed for the purpose of this report:

- **Katherine Claudson**, Director, *Children First Foundation*
- **Kathy Harris**, Coordinator, *3rd Judicial Circuit Family Violence Coordinating Council*
- **Honorable Richard Tognarelli**, Circuit Judge, *3rd Judicial Circuit*

Development of the Madison County Kids' Corner

Judge Barbara Crowder, Supervising Judge in the Family Division of the Third Judicial Circuit, established a committee to assist in creating a visitation exchange program in order to provide a safe exchange environment for families with domestic violence issues or high conflict divorces. The committee included the Coordinator of the Third Judicial Circuit Family Violence Coordinating Council, law enforcement and family law attorneys. It was determined the committee should approach the Madison County Board and propose a filing fee to be assessed on each civil case filed in Madison County in order to fund a visitation exchange center.

Judge Crowder presented a proposal to the Judiciary Committee of the Madison County Board and later to the full Board. The Madison County Board approved assessing the filing fee and implementing the Madison County Kids' Corner in August 2005 and the doors opened in December 2005. Currently, the Kids' Corner serves ten families.

Program Administration

The Children First Foundation was designated to administer the program and receives funding from the Third Judicial Circuit to operate the Madison County Kid's Corner. Quarterly reports are sent to the court including financial activity and information such as number of exchanges provided by the Kids' Corner.

Site/Location

The Madison County Kids' Corner is located at a new county facility in Wood River. Previously, the facility was a hospital and now has been converted into county offices. Members of the Madison County Bar Association donated office furniture to the Kids' Corner.

The site has two separate entrances and parking lots. Exchanges are conducted on Fridays and Sundays from 5:00 p.m. to 7:45 p.m.

Security

A security officer is on site at the Madison County Kids' Corner during the hours exchanges are provided. The officer then makes sure the location is clear and the area is secured after all exchanges are completed.

Funding

The Madison County Board approved a filing fee of \$4.00 on each civil case to fund the Madison County Kids' Corner.

Staffing

There is one social worker and a security officer present during each exchange session at the Madison County Kids' Corner. The Children First Foundation hires and trains staff to oversee the exchanges. The staff receives training on policies, program rules, agency orientation as well as domestic violence education.

Protocols/Procedures

Types of cases

Parents are court ordered to use the Madison County Kids' Corner. They are given information on the Children First Foundation and told to contact them within one week to set up an intake at the Kids' Corner. The court orders are then faxed to the Children First Foundation.

Parents who wish to use the program but do not have a court order can file a motion with the court at the Circuit Clerk's Office and request a hearing. Once a hearing is granted, the judge may issue a court order for the exchange to be made at the Kids' Corner.

Procedures

Intake

Intakes are done in a group orientation session at the Kids' Corner. Parents are never in the same group and orientation sessions are provided on an as needed basis:

- The intake session is one hour and includes completing forms that include personal information, a review of rules and procedures which parents sign and receive copies.
- A picture of the parent and child is taken at the first exchange to be included in the file for identification purposes.
- Only parents can pick up the child unless additional persons are listed in the court order.

Exchange Process

- The non-custodial parent arrives through door "A" 15 minutes before the exchange.
- The custodial parent arrives with the child at the appointed time through door "B". The staff confirms that the non-custodial parent has arrived and the custodial parent leaves.
- Staff walks the child to the non-custodial parent.
- The non-custodial parent and child wait 15 minutes before leaving. There are art activities, books and child-appropriate videos for the children while they wait.
- The process is then repeated when the child is returned to the custodial parent.

Records and Reporting

Reports are prepared and sent to the judge if a parent is not in compliance with the court order or they are not following the policies and procedures of the Kids' Corner. The reports are put in the case file for the next status review. If it is a significant issue, the judge can schedule a status hearing immediately.

Other Services Provided

No other services are provided by the Madison County Kids' Corner. Referrals to other community services are shared with parents at the orientation and additional brochures for services are available at the Kids' Corner.

Data Collection

The Madison County Kids' Corner collects information on parents including name, contact information and emergency contacts.

Advisory Committee

The Board of Directors of the Children First Foundation provides oversight for the Madison County Kids' Corner. The Board includes family law attorneys, family court judges, mental health professionals, educators, and social service administrators.

Promotion/Marketing

Police chiefs throughout the Third Judicial Circuit received informational handouts about the Madison County Kids' Corner. The handouts are intended to be distributed to parents by officers at the scene of domestic disturbances. A presentation was also made at the monthly meeting of family law attorneys and the annual conference of the Family Violence Coordinating Council.