

## **2009 Family and Juvenile Court Highlights**

### **Detention Population**

For the past decade, the Juvenile Department has been moving toward less reliance on juvenile detention as the means of providing punishment and accountability for youth, particularly in addressing probation violations. The county's budget constraints caused the Court and the Juvenile Department to take an even closer look at probation sentencing policies during 2009 to reduce expenditures. The efforts resulted in use of alternative strategies and a drop in average daily population in detention to 31 youth a day. The previous year the average daily population was at 41 youth a day. Just ten years prior, the average daily population was 52 youth per day.

The reduced use of detention stays for probation violators has had no evident effects on public safety or recidivism. The new probation casework is expected to help probationers follow their probation rules and do better in their families, their schools, and the community. The Department continues to look for dollars to bring better program alternatives to the youth on probation.

### **Family and Juvenile Court Treatment Courts**

The treatment sales tax approved by the 2008 Legislature and the Thurston County Commissioners brought new revenue to Thurston County in 2009, specifically earmarked to address chemical dependency problems and their treatment. Therapeutic treatment courts were identified in the legislation, and by the County taskforce working on implementation, as intended recipients of a portion of these dollars. In September 2009, Family and Juvenile Court hired its first Treatment Court Coordinator, at half-time, to coordinate Dependency Treatment Court.

The position will expand to full-time in mid-2010 to also coordinate the Family Treatment Court and Juvenile Treatment Court. The addition of the Coordinator is a much-needed boost for all treatment courts operating at Family and Juvenile Court.

### **Parenting Coordination for High-Conflict Families**

A new Local Court Rule was adopted to better serve high-conflict families subject to parenting plans. The Court may appoint Parent Coordinators to provide timely intervention in parenting disputes and to assist parents in following parenting plans without going to Court. When appointed, a Parenting Coordinator will serve for no more than ten hours without returning to Court for additional authority. It is expected that the Parenting Coordinator will help families develop habits and communication patterns that allow smooth transitions and access between parents.

### **CASA Program**

Thurston County's CASA program passed the National CASA Standards Assessment in 2009 and is accredited by National CASA. During the year, 86 active volunteers served 247 children in Dependency cases. Two volunteers, Tracy Brune and Sue Anderson, received special recognition as the Olympian's Volunteers of the Week.