

## Agencies vie for family counseling jobs

By Kathy Parrish  
staff writer

Can the Friend of the Court also be a friend of the family?

Confident it can, Oakland County Circuit Court officials provide counseling to divorcing couples and their children through the agency.

But four social service agencies — which do family counseling themselves — disagree.

Led by Family and Children Services of Oakland, they have asked that the court pay them instead to work with divorcing couples. Their request was turned down, and they are now waiting for a ruling from the state attorney general on the issue.

"THE FRIEND of the Court's function is to help a judge make a decision. Our counselors are there to help the family," explained William Fry, executive director of Family and Children Services of Oakland.

"We're talking about a family life experience. And it has to be done in safety and confidentiality." But court administrator Joan Young contends finances and numbers of court cases make it impossible to offer that "family life experience."

"There's nothing wrong with making counseling available to everyone who files for divorce. But I don't know if it's financially feasible."

THE JOINT proposal was submitted to Oakland County Circuit Court by Family and Children Services of Oakland, Catholic Social Services of Oakland County, Jewish Family Service and The Orchards.

The four offered to provide family counseling and educational services to make divorcing couples aware of the impact of such a decision.

Their intent is to remove the non-legal emotional issues from the courtroom. "The legal system is not

designed to deal with emotions, but is concerned first and foremost to assure that the law is applied fairly and reasonably," their proposal stated.

"Emotional conflicts do not disappear with the issuance of a divorce decree. Through a counseling process, adults would be enabled to divorce emotionally from each other, while maintaining adequate supports to their children."

AVAILABLE UPON filing for divorce, counseling would try to resolve conflicts arising with custody, visitation and support.

All private and non-profit, the agencies could provide services in a total of 11 locations. They employ more than 100 social workers, backed up by both psychologists and psychiatrists.

There would be a sliding scale for fees based on the ability of clients to pay.

The agencies also would rely on court funds available for counseling — \$18 of every \$10 marriage license fee goes into the fund under the Circuit Court Family Counseling Services Act.

BUT THE COURT, which formalized Family Counseling Services in 1980, is happy with present practice.

Through Friend of the Court, it employs 13 professional counselors including seven with master's degrees. Their jobs are both to investigate issues like custody, visitation and support and to counsel people involved in disputes.

Twice a year, there are public divorce workshops on legal and emotional aspects of divorce. Three of the five sessions are designed just for youngsters.

Arrangements are made for outside psychological evaluations and guardian ad litem for children. The court helps support The Haven, Oakland County's domestic violence shelter.

Court administrator Joan Young said \$5,000 to \$9,000 cases are handled by the Friend of the Court. During a four-month period in 1983, it got 457 coun-

selling requests.

WHILE MARRIAGE license fees bring in \$150,000 a year, the Family Counseling unit costs about \$460,000 in salaries and benefits.

Before the marriage fees became available statewide in 1980 to help out Wayne County Circuit Court, Oakland County Circuit Court paid all its own counseling costs. Some of the marriage fees go to pay research attorneys, which the court administrator said were not possible previously.

While critics object to the money going to attorney salaries, Young believes it's a proper use of the extra money. "It's not our goal to provide long term counseling and solve everybody's problems," explained Young, who said Family Counseling Services aims at providing assistance to as many people as possible.

"We don't poke our nose in all the time. Because of sheer numbers, we have to do crisis intervention."

COUPLES WHO NEED long-term counseling are referred to outside agencies. If the court orders the service, it also helps pay for it.

But the former social worker does not believe the court should tell clients where to go for counseling. "We don't force the Friend of the Court on anyone," said the lawyer, who said the agencies "provide a very good service."

"We're not prepared to designate outside agencies as counseling services for the court. Each judge and the parties involved have a right to choose counselors."

Young also has confidence in services provided by the Family Counseling Services staff. "I feel we have good people," she said.

"I don't know how you get around the fact that Friend of the Court tends to be unpopular, but they do a good job."

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## Laid-off GM workers may get OU tuition assistance

Laid-off General Motors workers may qualify for up to \$1,000 a year to take classes at Oakland University.

OU began participating in the UAW-GM tuition assistance plan in January. Eligible are laid-off GM workers and OU students laid off by the auto worker.

The UAW and General Motors developed the plan to provide financial assistance to support education, training, or retraining opportunities for certain UAW-represented GM employees now on layoff.

Sponsors say the program will allow employees to complete or continue their education and improve their opportunities for re-employment within or outside the General Motors Corporation.

A brochure on the plan has been mailed to about

65,000 laid-off employees identified as potentially eligible to apply for the tuition assistance plan. Key features include up to \$1,000 a year for tuition and fees with eligibility determined by the UAW-GM Tuition Assistance Center.

Applicants can select their courses, receive a certificate from the Assistance Center and the university will honor the certificate and bill the UAW-GM Assistance Center for the actual funds.

Qualified laid-off GM workers interested in attending OU can obtain additional information by calling the Financial Aid Office at 377-3370.

### outdoors

#### Obedience trial set

There are 228 entries in the Sportsmen's Dog Training Club of Detroit all-breed obedience trial Sunday at the Michigan State Fairgrounds in Detroit.

Judging will start in six rings at 9 a.m. and end about 4:30 or 5 p.m., according to club spokesman Mira Jilbert of Troy. She reports so many entries in the Open B class that an additional judge was required.

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