

# SURREY COURT PROJECT

## (Child, Family and Community Service Act)

### Backgrounder

## Facilitated Planning Meeting

### Rationale: Inter-Ministry CFCSA Caseflow Study Committee

The Surrey Court Project was an initiative of the Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA) Caseflow Study Committee. The committee was established at the recommendation of the Ombudsman, Dulcie Macallum. In her 1998 report "Getting There: Response to the Recommendations of the Gove Inquiry into Child Protection," the Ombudsman recommended that the Ministry of Attorney General and the Ministry of Children and Family Development strike a committee to explore the reasons for delays in court decisions regarding children and youth.

The CFCSA Caseflow Study committee had representatives from both ministries. The Office of the Chief Judge of the Provincial Court also sent a representative to the meetings. The purpose of the committee was to:

- investigate the causes of delay in CFCSA cases,
- make recommendations respecting possible solutions, and
- test or pilot any specific options.

With regard to the project being piloted in Surrey, the committee was mindful of the report of the Chief Judge Robert Metzger's "Delay and Backlog in the Provincial Court of British Columbia, 1998." Concerning CFCSA matters, the Chief Judge specifically cited delays in the resolution of cases being heard in the Surrey Provincial Court:

"A child who is apprehended in Surrey may have to wait a year for a decision about whether or not he or she should have been taken from his or her parents. If it is decided that a child needs to be taken from his or her parents it may take years before the future case of the child is finally decided. Some of that delay is the responsibility of the overloaded court. There are 1,000 children in care in Surrey and each of them requires court hearings and conferences, some multiple hearings, many of which are lengthy." p. 16

## Surrey Court Project

A working group of representatives from the Ministry of Children and Family Development South Fraser Region and the Ministry of Attorney General's Dispute Resolution Office planned and implemented the Surrey Court Project to pilot the concept of a Facilitated Planning Meeting.

The prime objective of the Facilitated Planning Meeting is to make effective decisions for children as soon as possible. It provides an opportunity, early in the court process, for parents and social workers to meet and, with the help of an independent mediator, resolve as many issues as possible in a collaborative manner. The social worker is accompanied by a Court Work Supervisor who has the authority to agree to a service plan and approve allocation of resources.

The basic steps of the Facilitated Planning Meeting process are:

- Step 1:** Invitation/referral. Parents are invited to participate in the project
- Step 2:** Setting up an orientation session for parents
- Step 3:** Orientation session for parents and a separate meeting with the social worker
- Step 4:** Information exchange prior to the Planning Meeting
- Step 5:** The Planning Meeting
- Step 6:** Where all or some issues are agreed to, formalizing the agreement.