

Eldercaring Coordination

DEVELOPMENT

- Developed by the Association for Conflict Resolution (20 organisations in USA & Canada), in collaboration with the Florida Chapter of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts (FLAFCC).
- Eldercaring Coordinators trained in Toronto and 8 US states.
- Stark County, Ohio, reports: of 36 cases referred, 20 cases have avoided guardianship; in 2 cases appointment was limited to a Guardian of the Estate, due to the appointment of an Eldercaring Coordinator; referrals to Eldercaring Coordination led to the termination of 3 of the Court's existing Guardianship cases.

THE MODEL

- Families in high conflict are assigned to Eldercaring Coordination by Court/Tribunal Order.
- An Eldercaring Coordinator (EC) is assigned for **up to 2 years**.
- The EC helps the family with:
 - managing relationships - communication, negotiation, problem-solving skills;
 - education about eldercaring resources;
 - creation, modification, or implementation of eldercaring plans.

Eldercaring Coordination is designed to compliment, not replace, other services, such as legal representation, financial services, family/individual therapy; medical, psychological, psychiatric help; and mediation.

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DATA & ANALYSIS

Pamela Teaster, Ph.D., Director of the Center of Gerontology and Megan Dolbin-MacNab, Director of the Doctoral Program of Marriage and Family Therapy, both of **Virginia Tech University**, conducted independent research on Eldercaring Coordination. The preliminary case study involves **102 subjects: elders, participants, judges, general magistrates, and ECs.**

Indicators of success identified by participants:

- Elder wellbeing (most prominent)
- Reducing family conflict
- Avoiding/reducing litigation: fewer, shorter & more focused hearings
- Making decisions on care issues and non-legal issues
- Reaching agreements related to the general welfare of the elder.

Elders and family members identified the following non-legal issues to address in Eldercaring Coordination:

- General family conflict
- Who makes decisions
- Living arrangements (where, with whom)
- Social contact
- Finances
- Caregiving (who, how much)
- Medical treatment
- Reducing the elder's exposure to family conflict
- Material possessions.

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Success of EC reported by Judiciary:

- 100% of Judges reported that EC was "**very effective**" overall, as an intervention for high conflict families.
- 81% of Court Administrators/Magistrates reported EC was "very effective" (18% reported it was "somewhat effective").

Outcomes reported by Judiciary, Administrators & ECs:

- Significantly fewer motions to the court.
- When motions were filed, they were more focused on legal (rather than non-legal) issues.
- Shorter, more streamlined hearings.
- Almost no emergency hearings.
- Reduction of family conflict, minimising risks and abuse, neglect and exploitation; respect and preserve dignity and quality of life for elders.
- Fewer cases needed final determination of capacity.
- Reduced need for guardianship.
- Elder and family can respond to emotional issues quickly and privately.
- Awareness and appreciation for elder mediation and general need for conflict resolution options for elders and families.
- Recognition that high conflict in families is a health issue for elders.
- Multiple generations benefit from the modeling of collaboration, understanding, tolerance and support.

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Feedback from Judge Michelle Morley (Florida Circuit Court):

"Instead of coming back to court when disagreements erupt, they can turn to the Eldercaring Coordination process."

I have seen the Eldercaring Coordination process help to:

- redirect the family's attention away from their hostility and disagreements and get them to focus on what their elder loved one needs.
- amplify the elder's voice so that the elder is heard above the conflict.
- get the family to talk about their individual strengths.
- get them to step up for their ageing loved one and do what needs to be done to keep that loved one safe and taken care of.
- stop the family members from blaming each other.
- give them tools to communicate with each other better and negotiate more effectively.
- **reduce the number of hearings** that the judge has to have.
- **streamline hearings** so that all the judge has to decide are legal issues because the family learns to decide the emotional issues themselves.
- **practically eliminate emergency hearings.**
- identify potential risks of abuse, neglect or exploitation.
- reduces unfounded [allegations] because it is a non-adversarial process that is fueled by transparency.