

Oakland County Psychological Clinic

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With the merger of our courts and creation of the Family Division, opportunities and programs have developed within our Probate Court that were not previously available. One such service is conducted by our Psychological Clinic with respect to guardianship files.

The Clinical Services Unit (or Psychological Clinic) of the Circuit Court, Family Division, can be called upon to perform psychological evaluations in guardianship cases. In many instances, individuals involved in a guardianship case experience emotional and/or psychological difficulties or have psychological needs. Experience has shown us that if these types of needs are not met, the guardianship relationship oftentimes fails.

Concerns may also exist regarding an individual's appropriateness as a parent or guardian, or regarding whether the individual has completed a court-sponsored plan. In such cases, psychological evaluations can be requested to assess and describe the intellectual and emotional functioning of the individuals referred, and that information used to develop a set of recommendations to the court which address the guardianship issues at hand.

Psychologists use a number of methods to do these evaluations which include: review of the records (court file, school records, reports from prior psychological or psychiatric treatments, or records from other relevant prior interventions); gathering of third-party information (usually interviews with family members and other interested parties); in-depth clinical interviews; administration of psychological tests; consultation with other professionals (CASA workers, guardians ad litem, or treating therapists); and behavioral observations. The Psychological Clinic staff, all of whom are licensed psychologists, is familiar with services available in the community and through local and

statewide private and public agencies and can, therefore, make recommendations that are practical and realistic to the case at hand. It should be noted that because the evaluation is court-ordered, the individuals being assessed are informed of the non-confidential nature of the evaluation. The court recognizes that these reports contain highly confidential and sensitive information, and must therefore be very carefully monitored and handled.

If a party or an attorney believes that a psychological evaluation is indicated, the request must be made to the judge, who will enter an order for the evaluation to be done at Oakland County's Psychological Clinic. The referral is then sent to the Clinic or, preferably, brought directly to the Clinic after a hearing by the attorney and the referred parties, if available, so that complete referral information can be collected immediately by Clinical Services Coordinator Kristin Meekhof (248-858-0087). The prompt collection of intake information after the order is entered greatly facilitates the evaluation process and ensures the timeliness of the completion of the evaluation. The individuals referred for evaluation will be seen during the next three to four weeks and a written report will be prepared for the court by the designated court date.

If you are unsure as to whether requesting a psychological evaluation is the most effective course of action, you may contact Clinical Services Coordinator Kristin Meekhof (248-858-0087) or Clinic Chief Dr. Bernard Gaulier (248-858-0066) to discuss your concerns in more detail.

I should note that the Psychological Clinic also prepares many reports on juvenile delinquency and neglect cases and domestic relations cases. I would like to thank Dr. Gaulier for his invaluable assistance in gathering this information and writing this article. Stay tuned!