Center for Out-of-Court Divorce Takes Holistic Approach

After completing its pilot phase, the center helps families through divorce and separation.

BY TONY FLESOR
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For families using the Center for Out-of-Court Divorce, the process of splitting up a family might leave the participants feeling like they’re part of a collaborative process rather than a competitive one.

The Center for Out-of-Court Divorce, officially opened in September, seeks to offer families a more amenable method to reach a divorce with collaborative parenting plans and emotional, mental health and financial services to ease the process. The center launched out of a two-year pilot program through the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System but is now functioning as its own nonprofit organization.

STARTING THE PROJECT

Executive director Melinda Taylor said the center is intended to offer a holistic approach to divorce with kids in the forefront. She said the center focuses on ensuring the well-being of the kids and making the parents into partners in the “business of raising kids,” despite splitting up as familial partners.

The center started in September 2013 as the Resource Center for Separating and Divorcing Families at the University of Denver as part of IAALS’ Honoring Families Initiative. IAALS describes its out-of-court model as part of an international trend, led by Australia and Ireland, of making separation and divorce processes less adversarial. The services it offers now are based off the two-year pilot project where families could use the resource center for coparent coaching sessions to help parents develop business plans and parenting plans and for discernment therapy. Taylor said the preliminary results showed the process worked.

The program is now off the ground with an established model and is working to scale with an office at Yale Avenue and Colorado Boulevard that is designed specifically with the work in mind.

The center uses attorneys, retired judge Robert Hyatt and staff that provide mediation, financial consultation and counseling services to help families in all areas of the divorce process.

In the first year of its operation, 39 families have made it through the process to their final orders hearings with Hyatt since the model was started in 2013.

A HOLISTIC ALTERNATIVE

Hyatt has been involved with the center since the idea phase when IAALS executive director and former Colorado Supreme Court Justice Rebecca Love Kourlis asked him about forming a center specifically for separating and divorcing families.

“My initial response was, ‘this was about time,’” Hyatt said.

After the program was put in place, Hyatt volunteered to be the judge who performed the permanent orders hearings. He has been doing that for the center for the past two years, putting his previous 30 years of experience as trial judge to use.

He said families using the center’s services are expected to come up with their own parenting plans, though, and described the process as therapeutic, even. Rather than receiving a parenting plan the night before an orders hearing, Hyatt said he can spend as long as he needs on a parenting plan, and he has the center’s staff as resources who can answer questions about it or the family.

And once he sees the family at the hearing, they can have a conversation about it together to make sure it’s in the best interests of the children in the family.

POSITIVE RESULTS

“I would refer anybody going through that if they don’t have the money to retain a lawyer,” Leotis Compton said. “It’s not just a divorce, they look at the whole family and make sure that everybody — the development of the family — is healthy after the process.”

Compton used the center for his divorce, which resolved in February 2014. For

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NATIVE ADS
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subheading — probably isn’t necessary.

The need for disclosure also appears to
hinge upon whether the content promotes
specific products the advertiser offers. An
advertiser can pay to have content published
on a site and with the advertiser’s brand
displayed in a “sponsored by” message, but
if the content itself doesn’t contain mes-
sages promoting the advertiser’s products,
its needn’t be identifiable as an ad, ac-
going to another example the FTC
provided.

The FTC did not accompany the guid-
ance with any announcement of new
enforcement action over deceptive na-
tive advertising practices. Prochnow said
he wouldn’t be surprised, however, if the
commission decided in the near future to
try make an example of certain companies
along those lines.

In addition to the FTC, companies
might want to be on the lookout for action
in the native advertising space taken by state
attorney general offices, which might seek
to enforce consumer protection laws. Class-
action lawsuits over false or misleading ad
vertising are also a possibility, especially in
California, Prochnow said. He added that
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American Legal System, which provides re-
search and guidance on reform in the judiciary
and the profession around the country.

Gessler, who preceded Williams in the of-
icial, echoed Boeschcer’s sentiment: he should
have nominated Moye as well, he said.

“Secretaries come and go, but John Moye is
eternal,” Gessler said.

In the 16 years since Moye started offering
his help to the office, the Colorado Secretary
of State has become a national model. Williams
said when he took office, he knew how things
worked in Colorado but hadn’t realized how
much further along the state’s office is than
others around the country.

“We were indeed leading the nation and
continue to do that because of John’s work,”
Williams said.

Davidson has decades of experience in
elections, including serving as a commissioner
on the U.S. Election Assistance Commission
and executive director of the Colorado County
Clerks Association. Most recently, she served
on the Pilot Election Review Committee,
which advised Secretary Williams on selecting
a voting-equipment vendor.

The NASS Medallion is another notch
on a long list of honors for Moye. In 2005,
he received an Award of Merit, the Colorado
Bar Association’s highest honor. In the 1980s,
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