

Community Practice / Peer-to-Peer Panel Summary

Title: Peacemaker Court Practice

Presenter: Judge Joann Battise

Brief summary of the program or service:

The Alabama-Coushatta Tribe has long been in need of its own court system since the tribe's reinstatement by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in August 1978. Prior to its establishment of the court system, the Tribal Council was the governing body overseeing all legal and day-to-day operations.

The Tribe applied for a Department of Justice grants program which offered this tribe to plan and develop its own legal system. A grant was awarded in 2007. The Alabama-Coushatta Tribe opened its court doors in June 2009. The grant was awarded to the Alabama-Coushatta expired after two years. The Court system is now fully funded by Tribal funds.

The tribal community was skeptical in the beginning. However, the cases that the Peacemakers have handled have been done through understanding and respect for those that we serve. Word of mouth have been positive and community support is tremendous.

Services

The caseload that the Peacemakers have held hearings in the areas of Adoptions, Child Custody Hearings, Probate, Placement of children with extended families, Foster Care, Divorces, Juvenile issues.

Innovative Ideas

The Alabama-Coushatta Court is still in the development states of becoming a full-fledged court operations. Recently, a Civil Court judge was appointed. Next will be the installation of an Appellate Court/Board and finally a Criminal Court. We have worked hard to establish an understanding with the State of Texas Courts, local Courts and Law Enforcement. Just recently, the Peacemakers and Court Clerk hosted a Symposium and invited all local agencies, local judges in and surrounding areas, Advocates, and had a successful event.

The Peacemakers feel that in order to help the tribal members that we serve, using culturally and traditional customs is beneficial to the outcome. All the Peacemakers speak fluently the Alabama-Coushatta language, and can explain courtroom procedures in our own way. We use a Pineneedle basket made by our own elder as our speaking tool, and this basket requires honor and respect at all times.

What are the Keys to Success for this program?

Our program is successful today and will be more so in the coming future because of our Peacemaker Court is the beginning of healing among our tribal members. The Peacemakers work toward a health community. A difficult caseload is managed by our Court Clerk, but every consideration is provided by the Clerk, Peacemakers and Civil Judge to those who come into our Court with their complaints or concerns.

For more information, contact:

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