

**SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
COUNTY OF MARIN**



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Innovative Training Program Creates Additional Family Court Resources to Help Young Children

California Family Courts are charged with making custody orders that are in the best interest of the child. The primary concern is to assure the child's health, safety and welfare. Family Code Section 3020(a). The Legislature finds and declares that it is the public policy of this state to assure that children have frequent and continuing contact with both parents (except where such contact would not be in the child's best interest). Family Code Section 3020(b). When there are facts, or even allegations, of neglect or abuse the dilemma is how to meet these twin goals.

One mechanism used by the courts is to have the parenting time supervised by a third party. This ensures the child's safety while keeping contact with the parent under scrutiny. Family members and close friends may be able to meet that need, but often they are not available, unwilling, or the issues are such that a trained, professional supervisor is required to insure a child's safety. Private visitation supervisors have been in short supply and high demand. Their fees have been out of the reach of most families and the goal of frequent and continuing contact has been sacrificed.

In an effort to address this need for low income families, Marin Superior Court together with a dedicated committee of attorneys, mental health experts, experienced professional supervisors, the Marin Family Law Facilitator and the two family law judges created a 24 hour course meeting the state standards for training of professional supervisors. The course was offered over a three day period at the courthouse-free of charge. In exchange for this free course, the graduates agreed to provide a significant number of free hours and/or low cost supervision for Marin Families. Marin County went from having a handful of professional supervisors to having over 20, with hundreds of hours "in the bank" available to families in crisis. Special thanks to Alexandria Quam the Family Law Facilitator and Stephen Sulmeyer, JD. PhD who headed the education committee and to the many professionals who gave their time and expertise. Marin is the only Superior Court in California to create such a program.