MODEL COURT SUMMIT

Improving the Courtroom Experience: Building Hope and Engagement through Intentional Court Culture

Friday
December 11, 2026
8:30 AM - 3:30 PM
Virtual

Register Here

The Model Court Summit is designed as a multidisciplinary, cross-system training.



Questions? Contact: Heidi Moon
heidi.moon@ojd.state.or.us
Visit webpage for more information

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FRIDAY DECEMBER 11, 2026
8:30 AM - 3:30 PM
Virtual Conference

Bookmark Model Court Summit webpage for updates and materials.

All model court team members and court and community partners (e.g., ODHS, tribes, CRB, CASA, DOJ, defense attorneys, parent mentors) and community partners involved in the child welfare system are invited to attend.

Register

AGENDA

8:30 AM - 8:40 AM	**Welcome & Intro Video**
8:40 AM - 10:10 AM	**An Introduction to Hope Science** Dr. Chan Hellman, Director, Hope Research Center, and Professor, University of Oklahoma
10:10 AM - 10:15 AM	**Break**
10:15 AM - 11:15 AM	**Building a Hope-Centered Dependency Court System: Washington's Journey** Sarah Burns, Statewide Innovation Coordinator, Family and Youth Justice Programs, Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts
11:15 AM - 12:15 PM	**Hope-Centered Leadership** Dr. Christopher Freeze, Professor, University of Oklahoma
12:15 PM - 1:00 PM	**Lunch**
1:00 PM - 1:10 PM	**Welcome Back & Video**
1:10 PM - 2:25 PM	**Introduction to Human Centered Court Practices** Judge Gayl Carr from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) Fairfax Circuit Court, Virginia (retired)
2:25 PM - 2:35 PM	**Break**
2:35 PM - 3:15 PM	**Practical Communication Skills** Judge Gayl Carr, Fairfax Circuit Court, Virginia Ref. Kristine Almquist, Multnomah County Circuit Court, Oregon
3:15 PM - 3:30 PM	**Bringing it Together: Overview of Model Court Team Projects and Closing** Jayne Cooper, Juvenile Programs Manager, Oregon Judicial Department

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Session Descriptions

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An Introduction into Hope Science by Dr. Chan Hellman

The “Science of Hope” is a field of study that focuses on how fostering hope can lead to improved mental, emotional, and physical well-being. It’s based on research showing that hope is more than just an emotion. It’s a measurable and teachable mindset that can help people set goals, find ways to achieve them, and maintain the motivation to reach those goals, even in the face of challenges.

Navigating the child welfare and dependency court system can feel overwhelming and stressful for families. Many parents, family members, and youth become discouraged and lose motivation. Hope can change that. Hope helps families and professionals identify goals and the steps to reach them. It strengthens resilience and builds the confidence needed to keep going. When everyone understands the same goals and how to achieve them, progress becomes possible.

Building a Hope-Centered Dependency Court System: Washington’s Journey with Sarah Burns

What does it take to build momentum for hope across a dependency court system? This session shares how Washington’s Family & Youth Justice Programs (FYJP) is bringing the Science of Hope into training, ongoing learning, court improvement projects, leadership, and collaborative spaces. Participants will hear how these connected efforts, along with statewide partnerships, are helping build readiness, buy-in, and shared direction. The session offers practical lessons from Washington’s approach and possibilities for bringing hope into everyday practice to strengthen hope for families, court communities, and system partners.

Hope-Centered Leadership by Dr. Christopher Freeze

This session introduces the principles of Hope-Centered Leadership and explores how judges, attorneys, and court partners can use hope as a practical, measurable tool to strengthen outcomes for children and families. Drawing on the Science of Hope, participants will examine how goal-oriented communication can improve engagement, reduce stress, and support procedural fairness. Hope-Centered practices can enhance decision making, build stronger relationships with system partners, and create a more supportive, effective environment for youth and families navigating the juvenile court system.

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Introduction to Human-Centered Courtroom Practices by Retired Judge Gayl Carr, NCJFCJ

Juvenile court practice is built on relationships—between professionals, children, youth, and families. Yet most training focuses on procedure, compliance, and technical skills, leaving the "human work" underexplored. This session will highlight the human-centered approaches that complement procedural and technical skills. Judge Carr will introduce the NCJFCJ bench card and discuss how emotional intelligence, tone-setting, trauma-responsive communication, and productive teamwork can transform the experience of court-involved children, youth, and parents.

Communicating with Purpose: Practical Skill Building by Retired Judge Gayl Carr and Multnomah County Referee Kristine Almquist

The panelists will highlight the practical, everyday communication skills that build trust, reduce conflict, and support meaningful engagement. Panelists will offer concrete examples, strategies, and reflections from their own practice: navigating tense hearings, supporting families through crisis, preparing children and youth for court, communicating with compassion under pressure, and creating a courtroom climate where people feel heard and respected.

Bringing it Together with Jayne Cooper, Juvenile Programs Manager

Introduce tools and resources to support inclusive, trauma-informed, and hope-centered juvenile court practices. Model Court Teams will be invited to integrate these tools into local practice and explore opportunities for collaborative projects.

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Local Strategic Planning

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Model Court Teams are encouraged to set aside time for Local Strategic Planning during or soon after the Model Court Summit. Here are some options:

1. Use the sample agenda to discuss hope in dependency cases and brainstorm actionable steps.
2. Host a watch party during the Summit, followed by in-person strategic planning.
3. Create a virtual meeting space for your team to connect during the Summit and for planning afterward. Invite members early and share the link in advance.
4. Use your next Model Court Team meeting to focus on strategic planning.

Reminder: For teams wanting assistance with projects, there is a Model Court Team SharePoint site for judges and OJD staff. Any team member can also reach out to JCIP.

Sample Agenda

Key Takeaways from Today's Presentations:

- What resonated with our team?
- How does hope show up to the families we serve, as well as to ourselves and each other? How can we build on our strengths?

Areas for Improvement:

- Where can we implement hope, both as a system and in individual roles? For example, what would leading with hope at shelter hearings look like? Consider what this might look like for judges, attorneys, and other roles.

Commitments to Change:

- What specific changes can we commit to? Consider both systemic and individual actions.

Next Steps:

- Who else should join this discussion?
- Identify next steps and assign tasks.

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Referee Kristine Almquist

Referee Kristine Almquist serves as a Juvenile Hearings Referee and Judge Pro Tem for the Multnomah County Circuit Court, where she presides over juvenile and family law matters. Prior to joining the bench, she practiced law with Multnomah Defenders, Inc., representing clients in juvenile and criminal cases and developing extensive experience in child welfare and youth justice issues. Referee Almquist earned her bachelor's degree from Loyola Marymount University and her J.D. from Lewis & Clark Law School. Throughout her career, she has been committed to ensuring fair, thoughtful, and trauma-informed court processes for children and families. At the Model Court Summit, she brings a wealth of practical judicial experience and a deep commitment to improving outcomes for youth involved in the court system.

Judge Gayl Branum Carr

Gayl Y. Branum Carr has been a Judge of the Commonwealth of Virginia's 19th Judicial District since 1994, serving in the Fairfax Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court. She was elected Chief Judge in 2004. She is also the past President of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, and she serves as a mentor for newly elected Virginia judges. She has actively collaborated with local, state, and national agencies and organizations, including the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the National Association of Women Judges, and the American Bar Association. Judge Carr is a master of the George Mason American Inn of Court and has played a pivotal role in the Fairfax Best Practice Court since 1997. Additionally, she has held positions as adjunct faculty at George Mason University, Northern Virginia Community College, and Strayer University, where she taught criminal justice and forensic social work. Early in her career, Judge Carr's positions included assistant attorney general for the Commonwealth of Virginia, representing the Virginia Department of Corrections and the Virginia Parole Board, and assistant county attorney for the County of Fairfax. In recognition of her achievements, Judge Carr was inducted into the Virginia Lawyers Hall of Fame in 2023. Previous honors include Judge of the Year, the Ebone Image Award, the Law Service Award: Inspiring the Youth of Fairfax County, and induction as an honorary member of the Chi Chapter of the Phi Alpha Honor Society at George Mason University. Judge Carr holds a bachelor's degree in social work from Virginia Commonwealth University, and earned a law degree from the University of Richmond School of Law.

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Sarah Burns

Sarah Burns, BSW, MBA, is the Statewide Innovation Coordinator for Family and Youth Justice Programs at the Washington State Administrative Office of the Courts and a Hope Ambassador. Her background in early childhood development, trauma-informed organizations, and research on adverse childhood experiences has shaped her approach to dependency court improvement. Sarah's current work focuses on partnering with Lived Experts, applying the Science of Hope, strengthening parent engagement, and making court information and processes more accessible. She develops practical tools and resources that help local court communities improve their practices and advance their own dependency court improvement efforts.

Dr. Christopher Freeze

Dr. Christopher Freeze is an Assistant Professor of Cybersecurity at the University of Oklahoma–Tulsa whose career has been dedicated to public service, leadership, and organizational development. He began as an auditor for the State of Tennessee before serving 23 years as an FBI Special Agent, ultimately retiring as the Special Agent in Charge of the FBI's Mississippi office. He later served as Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Human Services, where he led the agency during a major fraud investigation while advancing programs to help residents achieve self-sufficiency. Drawing on his Ph.D. in Organizational and Community Leadership, Dr. Freeze developed the concept of Hope-Centered Leadership, which combines trauma-informed practices with strategies to help individuals and organizations set goals, identify pathways to success, and sustain motivation. Today, his teaching and research focus on cybersecurity, leadership, risk management, and workforce development, with an emphasis on the human dimensions of cybersecurity and leadership.

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Dr. Chan Hellman

Dr. Chan Hellman is a nationally recognized researcher, speaker, and educator whose work has transformed the understanding of hope as a powerful driver of resilience and well-being. A professor in the Anne & Henry Zarrow School of Social Work at the University of Oklahoma and Founding Director of the Hope Research Center, Dr. Hellman has dedicated more than two decades to studying how hope helps children, families, and communities overcome trauma and adversity. His research has been featured nationally and internationally, including TEDx presentations, the American Psychological Association convention, and Jane Goodall's Activating Hope Summit. He is the co-author of the award-winning book Hope Rising: How the Science of Hope Can Change Your Life and co-founder of Hope Rising Oklahoma. Through his groundbreaking work on Hope-Centered and Trauma-Informed practices, Dr. Hellman has helped organizations across the United States build stronger, more resilient systems that support positive outcomes for children, families, and communities.

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