



Domestic violence court keeps families from getting 'lost in the system'



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AUBURN | One family, one judge.

That's the idea behind integrated domestic violence court, a special courtroom model that New York state created to allow families involved in multiple legal battles to meet in a single courtroom.

In IDV court, judges deal with a range of matters at once, deciding criminal cases, custody battles and matrimonial decisions

under one roof.

Judge Thomas Leone said IDV court consolidates cases, allowing judges to monitor domestic violence and keep families from getting "lost in the system."

"It's one judge, one family, so you don't use lose track of what's going on. We know what's going on with the entire family unit," he said. "I think conversely, it also assists the families."

Judge Mark Fandrich said that although it is sometimes challenging to keep cases separate, IDV court allows judges to reduce appearances for those involved and ensure there are no conflicting orders of protection.

He added that the families who make their way to IDV court tend to have ongoing issues.

"Some families come back on a regular basis. Some we see again," he said. "We get to know families in depth."

Since Cayuga County's IDV court opened its doors in 2004, judges have handled 200 families with 1,413 dockets. The dockets have included 343 criminal dockets, 1,055 family dockets and 15 divorce dockets. The court no longer handles divorce cases, though.

The county is currently monitoring 33 families with 94 dockets.

Along with IDV court, the county's judges have other legal remedies to help combat domestic violence, including mental health counseling, substance abuse treatment and the RESPECT Program, where defendants learn how to establish healthy relationships.

In his experience, Fandrich said counseling options like the confidential RESPECT Program do make a difference.

"Generally, the participant gains a better understanding of the causes of domestic violence and how he should — it's usually a he — properly interact with his partner," he explained. "Some participants get it a lot faster than others."

During his years on the bench, Fandrich said he has seen that domestic violence touches every gender, race, religion and sexual persuasion.

"Domestic violence effects families in all walks of life," he said. "It's not limited to one economic strata."

But there is much those outside the courtroom can do to help combat the often-silenced brand of abuse.

"Encourage victims to get help," Fandrich said. "If they won't, report it yourself."