



Parent Pledge Project



Overview

Harlem Community Justice Center, a project of the Center for Court Innovation in partnership with the New York State Office of Court Administration, is a community-based court and resource center that works to solve neighborhood problems in East and Central Harlem, including juvenile delinquency, deteriorating housing, substance abuse, and the challenges presented by ex-offenders returning from incarceration.

With over 30 years of experience, the New York Peace Institute is one of the largest community dispute resolution centers in the United States, and a nationally recognized leader in the field of conflict resolution. The New York Peace Institute's professionally trained mediators are volunteers and mediation services are provided cost free to New York City residents in Brooklyn and Manhattan.

Under a grant from the New York City Human Resources Administration's Office of Child Support Enforcement, the Justice Center is partnering with New York Peace Institute to implement a new project, the Parent Pledge program. Parent Pledge provides free, professional mediation services for low-income parents living in Manhattan or Brooklyn who are seeking a faster, non-adversarial alternative to court as they work out child support agreements. The goal of Parent Pledge is two-fold: 1) to promote the payment of child support by non-custodial parents through formal child support agreements; and, 2) to help both parents work together to improve outcomes for their child(ren).

The Challenge: Thousands of children grow up in single parent homes where the likelihood of poverty is much higher. In New York City while child poverty rates are high in dual-headed households--19%, an alarming 45% of children in single parent homes are growing up poor. Child support payments comprise about 40% of household income for poor families.¹ New York City estimates that over 200,000 children living below 150% of the poverty line are not connected to the city's child support program.

Through Parent Pledge, New York City's Child Support Enforcement Office seeks to encourage formal child support agreements that meet the requirements of the Child Support Standards Act (CSSA). Research has shown that non-custodial parents who are subject to court-approved child support agreements are more likely to maintain child support payments over time.

How it works: Beginning in September 2014, Harlem Community Justice Center will provide free mediation services to 150 low-income parents annually who are living in Manhattan or Brooklyn and would like to establish child support and co-parenting agreements. The Justice Center will work closely with New York Peace Institute, New York City's premier provider of community mediation services. The Justice Center and the Peace Institute have a long history of collaborating to offer community mediation services to families in upper Manhattan.

The Justice Center's Parent Pledge Coordinator will work closely with a team of New York Peace Institute's trained mediators who are experienced in child support and custody and visitation. Both New York Peace Institute and Harlem Community Justice Center will use a common protocol for screening cases for domestic violence. The Coordinator, a lawyer, will review child support agreements developed in mediation to insure conformity to the Child Support Standards Act.

Mediated agreements are known to have high compliance rates since all parties have voluntarily committed to a plan and mediators have helped ensure agreements that are both realistic and durable. Mediation is a proven approach for building consensus between former partners on child support, decision-making, and co-parenting. In addition to child

¹ Sorensen, E. (2010, December) Child Support Plays an Increasingly Important Role for Poor Custodial Families, Urban Institute.



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support, mediation topics may include: parenting time and schedules, parenting approaches (e.g. discipline), communication between parents, sharing of information, and child(ren)'s relationship with other individuals, such as extended family or new partners, as well as changes to the parenting agreement.

Mediations will take place at three sites in addition to Harlem Community Justice Center: the Dempsey Center in Central Harlem, New York Peace Institute's Manhattan Mediation Center, and New York Peace Institute's Brooklyn Mediation Center. During the mediation session(s), mediators will also provide information regarding the CSSA in order to inform any decisions that clients may make regarding child support. If clients are able to reach a resolution on child support, mediators will assist clients in drafting a written agreement using a template that conforms to the CSSA. Parents may also develop co-parenting plans on visitation and/or custody matters, which can also be drafted in writing.

Parents can put the terms of their mediated agreement in writing and decide whether they wish to keep it between themselves voluntarily or file the agreement in Family Court. The parents can choose at any point to file a petition in court in order to get a formal enforceable agreement. If the parents choose to file in court, child support agreements prepared by Parent Pledge will receive expedited processing by the Court, usually on the same day if the petitioner arrives before 1 p.m. Any parent with non-compliance concerns can return to mediation at any time. The program Coordinator will also provide information to the parent(s) about filing a violation petition with the Court and/or a child support application with the Office of Child Support and Enforcement (OCSE).

Mediation is not an appropriate option for families with a history of domestic violence or with open investigations by child protective services. Parent Pledge also cannot mediation cases that are active in the Family Court (for child support, custody, and/or visitation) but we would be able to talk through various options including withdrawing a petition to allow for mediation.

The Justice Center will coordinate the project, recruit parents, and provide wrap-a-round family support services. Parent Pledge families who need housing services, youth and family case management or reentry services will be connected to the Justice Center's onsite social work clinic.

To refer a case, discuss more about how our services can help, or schedule a presentation for your organization, please contact:

Asha Sairah George, Parent Pledge Coordinator
Harlem Community Justice Center
170 East 121st Street, New York, NY 10035
212-360-8753 / ageorge1@courts.state.ny.us

REFERRAL TO MEDIATION

- 1) Fill out form and send to Harlem Community Justice Center.
Email: Ageorge1@nycourts.gov or Fax: Harlem: 212.360.4993
- 2) Call to confirm that fax was received.
Harlem Tel: 212.360.8753
- 3) Please tell the client(s) that Parent Pledge will contact them directly about mediation. If the case is determined appropriate and everyone agrees to participate, parties will receive a confirmation of their scheduled appointment.

Initiating Party(ies):	Responding Party(ies):
Address of Initiating Party (apt. # and development, if applicable):	Address of Responding Party (apt. # and development if applicable):
Phone Number:	Phone Number:
Email Address:	Email Address:
Guardian of Initiating Party (if under age of 18):	Guardian of Responding Party (if under age of 18):
Guardian's address if different from above:	Guardian's address if different from above:
Brief description of relationship and issues in dispute. Please indicate if any party will need to be accommodated for special needs, and if all parties are aware of the referral to mediation:	
Is this matter in court? YES NO Is there an Order of Protection? YES NO Is there a prior ACS case? YES NO	If yes, please indicate the stage of case proceedings (i.e. adjustment, arraignment, pending trial, post-sentencing):
Interpreter Needed: YES NO	Language:

Person Referring:		Today's Date:
Referring Agency/Organization:		
Address:		
Phone:	Fax:	Email: