

At that point those involved sent her to an inpatient rehabilitation facility. She completed the program and has been clean ever since.

“I was committed; I had to be. I knew I was dying, and it was either keep going the way I was or change. I opted for change.”

Arnold was required to go before the drug court judge in four phases: weekly in phase one, bi-weekly in phase two, and monthly in phase three. In phase two she was taken off of house arrest while continuing the other requirements of the program. In phase three the drug monitor was removed and her counseling and probation contacts were decreased.

Finally, with a clean record, she graduated.

“It was tough, but it was worth it. I’m not there yet. Progress, not perfection.”

Where would she be today without drug court?

“I would have gone away to prison. I’m not sure how much time I would have done. I guarantee you, I wouldn’t be sitting here today, with a full-time job, a part-time job, visitation with my kids, clean, sober, a member of society. I can guarantee it.”

Protecting the Child

The Supreme Court created the Office of Children and Families in the Courts (OCFC) in 2006 to achieve better outcomes for foster children.

The OCFC’s goal — working within the AOPC and partners in local courts and the Department of Public Welfare — is to minimize the time abused or neglected children spend in temporary living situations and maximize their opportunity to be in permanent, loving homes.

“We bring the family together to ferret out their issues and come up with a plan to meet the concerns. And that’s what it’s all about.” Bill Cisek

The results tell the story:

In 2007 more than 21,000 abused and neglected children were living temporarily in foster care homes. By 2013 the OCFC and its partners had reduced that number to 14,000 — a 34 percent reduction, saving an estimated \$117 million tax dollars each year.

Better yet is that the lives of children are improved by being reunited with family wherever possible.

Bill Cisek knows the value of the work of the OCFC and its partners. He has lived in Venango County most of his life and as solicitor to the county’s Children and Youth Services Agency, has seen the value of changes in the way Pennsylvania approaches issues of child dependency.

“They’ve made a huge impact,” he said. “Prior to OCFC, on a scale of one to 10, we were probably operating at a one. Now, children and youth agencies are operating between eight and 10 — it’s that much of a difference. And if you’re a child that has been positively impacted by this, it means the world.

“Who better than family to raise a child? A child should be where their roots come from, not with someone else, unless warranted.

“Prior to the work of OCFC, the agency in our county was known as the ‘Evil Empire’ — the agency that went and snatched babies and didn’t work with people. It was the dark agency that did what they thought was right and didn’t seek input from anyone else.

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Justice

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Justice

“Today, there’s a night-and-day difference. We bring the family together to ferret out their issues and come up with a plan to meet the concerns. And that’s what it’s all about. A family who comes up with their own plan is more likely to follow that plan, to become successful and to do it on their own with the handholding of the agency.”

Being a Judge

Why does a person want to become a judge? What it is like to be one, and how do judges view their role and the role of the judiciary in our society?

Philadelphia Common Pleas Court President Judge **Shelia A. Woods-Skipper** said being a judge “is the best job I’ve ever had, a wonderful experience, and I would not trade it for the world.”

She was first appointed to the bench in 1998, then elected the following year to a full 10-year term. She was retained by voters for another term in 2009.

“We pride ourselves on knowing the law, applying the law equally and providing access to justice.” President Judge **Shelia A. Woods-Skipper**

“As a judge, I have the ability to make a difference,” she explained. “To show that everyone has the right to have access to justice, to know that there is an even playing field and that you will have the opportunity to have someone listen and give you your day in court. It doesn’t matter whether it is civil, criminal or family court; everyone has the right to be heard.”

President Judge Woods-Skipper says that one challenge of being a jurist is the isolation that comes as one takes

on an entirely different role among colleagues. Sometimes even friends look at you a little differently.

“I remember being in the deli line in the supermarket and someone turned around and said, ‘Judge, what are you doing here?’ And I laughed and I said, ‘I have to eat, just like you do.’”

She said that people often think judges only sit and hear cases and render decisions, but in actuality they do so much more in the way of programs to help people who come before the courts.

President Judge Woods-Skipper talks with pride and passion about presiding over Philadelphia’s mental health court – one of the judiciary’s many problem-solving courts operating across the state with the assistance of the AOPC’s Judicial Programs Department. She said there is great satisfaction in providing support that allows participants to achieve goals ranging from reconnecting with family to learning how to take medications, to finding jobs or volunteer opportunities.

“We need resources to be current and relevant. For example, on the criminal side, most of the individuals we sentence are not spending a lifetime in prison. If we want them to be successful and not repeat offenders, there need to be resources available to make sure they are getting things they need — education, training, housing — so as judges we need to be sure there is re-entry planning. You need funding to do that.

“I would like the public to recognize the importance that judges place on the administration of justice and that they are really committed and dedicated to doing that. We pride ourselves on knowing the law, applying the law equally and providing access to justice. We just need to make sure we have the appropriate resources to do that.” **AOPC**

more INFORMATION

on how the judiciary impacts Pennsylvanians
<http://www.pacourts.us/judicial-administration/budget>

Newly elected judges: Class of 2014

New Pennsylvania judges gathered in January for a week-long orientation session presented by the AOPC’s Judicial Education Department. This year’s New Judges School program drew 39 attendees whose areas of study included criminal and civil process, family law, juvenile law, evidence and orphans’ court law. Programs on professional development explored topics designed to help the new judges make a smooth transition to the bench. **AOPC**

