



July 2023
VOL. 18 No.7

President's Message: *AFCC at Sixty*

Stacey Platt, JD



In June 2023, we gathered together in Los Angeles, the birthplace of AFCC, for our 60th anniversary as a multi-disciplinary, multi-national organization dedicated to improving the lives of children and families. Our focus continues to be improving evaluation and family dispute resolution through high-quality research, training, and policy initiatives. Our membership continues to be awe inspiring: experts and new professionals looking deeply at the hardest questions we face – from the impact

of conflict on co-parenting, to the pros and cons of child participation, to the ethical questions facing mental health professionals, to the challenges of complex cases.

As a clinical law professor, I got involved in AFCC almost twenty years ago, when AFCC took the lead in re-examining how family law should be taught. AFCC's plenaries and workshops transformed my approach to representing children in high-conflict cases, infusing my work as a child advocate with a more conscious approach to procedure and a deeper understanding of substance. I passed these lessons on to my students and together we applied them in our cases. I see my former students frequently in zoom court rooms. Many of them are now leaders in family law, in AFCC Illinois and bar association service, child advocacy training, and clinical teaching. I am proud of them and I am grateful to AFCC for giving me knowledge to share and demonstrating the training tools I use in class.

AFCC's greatest strength and contribution in our field is its ability to identify the most difficult issues and bring together experts of differing perspectives to dive into them, working together to understand one another's views and develop solutions. In this way, AFCC has examined infants and overnights, the use of research in family dispute resolution, family evaluation in cases involving domestic violence, and more. And we will not stop. At our keynote address in Los Angeles, we learned about the work of Braver Angels, a nonprofit dedicated to depolarization – also known as peace building --

in a time of intense political polarization. Building on their work and adding it to AFCC's direct approach to polarizing issues, this coming year we will begin an intensive exploration of parent-child contact problems, calling on experts with differing views to engage in an open examination of the issues, with the goal of building understanding and developing safe strategies for improving parent-child contact. We expect to share the ongoing work of this initiative next year at our 61st Annual Conference in Boston, June 5-8, 2024. The theme of the conference will be Coping with Transition: Individual, Family, and Beyond.

This year, we also search for a new executive director, as Peter Salem plans to retire next June. We hope you will be in Boston to celebrate Peter, welcome our new executive director, and enjoy the impressive quality of work we have counted on for decades from the AFCC staff, leadership, and presenters. In the meantime, join us for the AFCC-AAML Conference on Advanced Issues in Child Custody: Evaluation, Litigation, and Settlement, September 28-30, 2023, in Washington, D.C., and the AFCC Fall Virtual Conference on Addiction, Family Violence, and Mental Illness: Assessing and Managing Challenges to Contemporary Co-Parenting, November 1-3 and 6-7, 2023.

Finally (and speaking of transitions), I want to express my gratitude to Judge Linda Fidnick, who served as AFCC President for the last twelve months. Linda has graced AFCC with her thoughtful leadership and generous spirit. I will strive this year to follow her example in finding the positive in every situation. We wish Linda well in her retirement from the bench and we are delighted to have her continue this year on the board.