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Collaboration of Prevention Science and the Family Court

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Abstract

This paper describes 27 years of collaborative activities between a team of researchers at the Arizona State University Prevention Research Center (ASU PRC) and the Maricopa County Family Court Division of the Superior Court. The complementary goals and expertise of the family court and prevention science are described as providing the foundation in which the missions of each can be advanced through collaborative activities. Four kinds of collaborative activities are described, which are differentiated according to the initiator of the activity and the primary immediate beneficiary. Nineteen separate collaborative activities that were conducted over the 27 years are described. Finally, lessons learned from this long-term collaboration are described including; mutual benefits of each activity, the benefit of complementary perspectives, the cumulative value of collaborations over time, the key role of the local key champion, and the societal benefit from the synergistic roles of university-based research and the family courts.

Keywords

Family court; Prevention science; Collaboration

Introduction

The ability of prevention science to advance the public health is dependent on the development of productive collaborations between prevention scientists and community institutions within which people pursue their developmentally appropriate social roles. This paper will describe the history of one such collaboration; a 27 year relationship between researchers at the Arizona State University Prevention Research Center (ASU PRC) and the Maricopa County Superior Court, Family Court. The collaboration is based on their complementary interests in children whose parents are seeking a divorce or separation. The paper will first describe parental divorce and separation from the perspective of the problems and challenges it presents to American society. We will describe the agenda of both the prevention scientists and the family court in working with divorcing families and the challenges each have in carrying out their work. We will then describe each of the collaborative activities over the past 27 years. These activities advanced the priorities of both the courts and the research team. Finally, we will discuss lessons learned concerning

facilitators and barriers to long-term collaborations between the family courts and prevention researchers.

Societal Impact of Parental Divorce and Separation

Although the rate of divorce has stabilized or decreased somewhat since the 1980s (Bramlett and Mosher 2002; Braver and Lamb, in press; U.S. Census Bureau 2005), it is estimated that approximately 50% of U.S. marriages end in divorce (Amato 2010). Approximately 1 million children experience the divorce of their parents each year (U.S. Census Bureau 2010) and it is estimated that 34% of children will experience the divorce of their parents before they reach age 16 (Bumpass and Lu 2000). If one considers the dissolution of families with children where there was never a formal marriage, and the dissolution of marriages without a formal divorce, the percentage of U.S. children affected by family dissolution is considerably higher than the above estimates. Although most children adapt to divorce without experiencing serious problems, compelling evidence demonstrates that divorce does increase risk for multiple problems in childhood and adolescence, including substance use and cigarette smoking (e.g., Barrett and Turner 2006), mental health problems and disorders and increased use of mental health services (e.g., Amato 2001; Amato and Keith 1991), high risk sexual behavior (Hetherington 1999; McLanahan 1999) and physical health problems (Troxel and Matthews 2004). Further, the negative effects of parental divorce continue into adulthood. As compared with children in non-divorced families those who experience parental divorce are at increased risk for substance abuse and mental disorder (Kessler et al. 1997); poor educational and occupational achievement, marital adjustment problems (e.g., Biblarz and Gottainer 2000); and physical health problems (Sachs-Ericsson et al. 2005). Kelly (in press) estimated that children from divorced families experience approximately a doubling of the risk for a wide range of adjustment problems as compared to children from continuously married families. Research has found that multiple factors are associated with child problem outcomes following divorce, including the continuation of conflict between the parents and the quality of parenting by both the mother and father (Kelly, in press).

The high prevalence of divorce and its broad effects mean divorce's impact on *population rates* of youth and adult problems is substantial (Scott et al. 1999). The population attributable risk (PAR), which represents the percent of cases that could be prevented by completely removing the risk factor or its consequences, provides an important perspective on the public health significance of developing programs and practices to reduce problem outcomes associated with parental divorce. Using odds ratio (OR) data from Kessler et al.'s (1997) nationally representative survey of adults and controlling for demographics, prior disorders, adversities, the PAR for drug dependence associated with divorce is 20% (OR = 1.73). Using relative risk (RR) figures from a national probability prospective study of young adults and controlling for pre-divorce stressors, SES, and child vocabulary, the PARs for clinical levels of mental health problems, teen pregnancy and school dropout are also sizeable: 30% (RR = 2.08), 36% (RR = 2.38) and 23% (RR = 1.75), respectively (Furstenberg and Teitler 1994; Zill et al. 1993). Thus, society has a considerable stake in finding ways to counteract the negative impact of divorce on the public health.

Finding Common Ground for Collaboration: Complementary Agendas of Domestic Relations Court and Prevention Science

From a prevention science perspective, working with children whose parents divorce is a major opportunity for selective preventive interventions with high public health impact (Braver et al. 2004; Haine et al. 2003). The research agenda of prevention science includes studies to identify risk and protective factors associated with child problem outcomes; the development and evaluation of preventive interventions to reduce child problem outcomes;

and studies that evaluate the effectiveness of these interventions when implemented by existing community agencies (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine 2009). Prevention research is usually conducted from a University or free-standing research center organizational base, supported by highly competitive federally or foundation-funded grants. Conducting prevention research with children from divorced families requires access to the population and collaboration with institutions that impact the lives of these children. As the domestic relations court is the institution through which families dissolve a marriage, it is the ideal collaborative institution for prevention scientists interested in conducting prevention research with children of divorce. Collaboration with the courts facilitates access to a representative sample of the defined population of interest and builds an institutional base for the development of sustainable services with a demonstrated benefit to this population.

From the court's perspective, the collaboration is viewed in terms of how it affects the goals of the institution of the court. The controlling Strategic Plan for the Maricopa County Family Court Department (2008–2013) establishes five high-level goals: providing access to swift and fair justice; protecting children and families; being accountable; promoting equality, fairness and integrity; and maintaining independence and accountability. The Plan also recognizes that processes should be monitored to deliver efficiencies without sacrificing due process and equal justice.

Although the above expressed court goals do not appear to conflict with the social scientists' interests in conducting research on best practices to improve post-divorce outcomes for litigating families, every proposed partnership raises serious concerns about the degree to which it conflicts with specific court institutional goals and priorities and thus whether it should proceed. The court considers these potential conflicts in light of the conviction that courts perform at their highest when there is a focus on purpose; a commitment to measurable results; knowledge of systems; and a commitment to innovation. If the court focused on only one or two of its stated goals, the partnerships between Arizona State University's Prevention Research Center and the Superior Court in Maricopa County would flounder and most probably one or more of the collaborative activities described in this paper would not have occurred. It is the court's continuing commitment to a focus on all of its priorities—purpose, results, systemic review and innovations—that allows for consideration of partnering with the ASU researchers who maintain a vision of improving the lives of children and adults through constant exploration via rigorous research trials.

The collaboration with the research team also needs to be viewed in the context of other initiatives and priorities of the court at specific periods of time. For example, the court undertook a complete overhaul of its case management system in 2005–2006 (Plan of Improvement—The Maricopa Model) and anything that was thought to negatively affect early resolution opportunities was suspect. The new resolution case management system included an early resolution triage process and uniform case management plan. Joint partnerships were regularly tested against these criteria. One of the strengths of the ASU research teams' projects were that they regularly guarantee that there will be no case delay for any litigant, providing consistency with this court priority. Furthermore, the ASU research is consistent with other controlling institutional goals of the court by promising the development of improved services for litigating families, and improved accountability by rigorously documenting the effects of such services. Such research also has a benefit in enhancing public trust and confidence in the courts. People do not always trust what cannot be understood, and the findings available through the research partnering heighten the public understanding of courts and the published results add clarity to work done within the courthouse and courtroom walls.

History of Collaboration Between ASU Prevention Researchers and the Maricopa Family Court

Over the past 27 years prevention researchers from Arizona State University, primarily Sandler, Braver and Wolchik have engaged in a wide range of collaborative activities with professionals from the Maricopa Family Court including court administrators, judges and Conciliation Services. While the changes in personnel at the court over time complicated the collaborative process, the continued presence of a court administrator (Knox), who was a key champion of the collaboration within the court system, was instrumental in enabling its continuity and success. The key champion played a number of roles including informing the researchers about current court priorities, linking the researchers with key court stakeholders, and clearing administrative and logistical barriers to the collaborative activities. The collaborative activities can be conceptualized to be of four types, based on who initiated the collaboration and who is the primary immediate beneficiary of the results: (1) providing court assistance to the studies initiated by the ASU research team that have direct benefits for research and only a more distant promise of benefits for the court; (2) ASU researchers assisting the court in studies that are jointly initiated and have immediate benefit to the court; (3) mutual collaboration on developing new programs that have immediate benefits to both research and the court; and (4) collaboration around an ASU research initiated study that has direct benefits to the court (see Table 1).

There is not a clear pattern of progression over time in the kinds of collaborative studies. While several of the early studies involved the court simply providing access to the population for theoretical studies that had relatively little direct implications for court services, other projects that were developed early in the collaboration involved the ASU research team being heavily involved as a resource in the development and evaluation of court services. The pattern of collaboration over time might best be characterized as the court and the ASU research team using each other as a resource to address issues of mutual interest; with the primary initiator and beneficiary of the research varying over time. A second notable characteristic of the collaboration is that, while specific activities were formalized in sub-contracts between the organizations, the collaboration was largely driven by informal arrangements based on a history of mutually beneficial work in the past and personal relationships in which the parties identified mutual interests and trust in the ability of the other to be an effective partner. We will now turn more specifically to looking at the four types of collaborative activities.

Cooperation of Court with Studies to Advance Research with Distant Benefits for Courts

The initial collaboration began with a request from the researchers to use the public records to recruit recently divorcing families for a study of the stressful events that occurred to children following parental divorce. This was the first of a series of studies which were conducted over an extended period of time in which the primary goal was to better understand factors that impact child well-being (e.g., divorce-related stressors, interparental conflict, parenting by mothers and fathers, child coping) as well as those factors that impact court related processes (e.g., compliance with divorce agreements such as child support payments and parenting plans).

The court facilitated this research by providing logistical support for the research team to gain access to public court records of recent divorces in order to invite divorcing families to participate in the studies. As described below, these studies contributed to identifying proximal targets for the design of preventive interventions for the custodial mother and children [New Beginnings Program (NBP), Wolchik et al. 2002] and for the non-custodial father [Dads for Life (DFL), Braver et al. 2005a]. While understanding these issues was of interest to the court, and might indeed impact future court policies and programs, such

potential benefits are somewhat distal and do not provide an immediate benefit to help the court respond to the pressing issues they confront on a day to day basis. Nevertheless, cooperation with this research requires relatively little effort on the part of the court, and is consistent with the broader goals of the court to reduce negative outcomes of divorce.

The court also facilitated the ASU research team to invite families to experimental trials of the effects of programs focusing on custodial mothers, non-custodial fathers and children to improve outcomes for children following parental divorce. The first such program developed by the ASU research team (NBP, Wolchik and Sandler) was a parenting after divorce program for the custodial mother. The program was designed to improve children's outcomes by changing four risk and protective factors that had been identified in the research conducted by the ASU research studies described above (Sandler et al. 1997). The two studies used court divorce records to recruit families who had been divorced during the previous 2 years. These studies were randomized experimental trials of preventive interventions teaching effective parenting after divorce skills to residential divorced mothers and coping skills to children (Wolchik et al. 1993, 2000, 2002). The results of these studies provided strong evidence that the parenting program improved outcomes for children up to 6 years following their participation in the program. Program benefits for children at the 6 year follow-up included reduced levels of diagnosed mental disorder, lower drug and alcohol use, less high risk sexual behavior, higher self-esteem and higher grade point average as compared to those in the literature comparison condition (Wolchik et al. 2007). Those who had higher levels of problems and whose families were experiencing higher conflict and stress at the time they entered the program were most likely to show benefits from participation. The effects of the program to improve child outcomes were accounted for by program induced strengthening of the mothers' parenting (Sandler et al. 2006; Zhou et al. 2008). In later studies the researchers used court records to recruit parents to test adaptations of the NBP to make it appropriate for delivery across cultural groups, across age, across modalities of presentation and for fathers as well as mothers (Wolchik et al. 2009). A third randomized experimental trial tested a program for the non-custodial father (DFL, Braver et al. 2005a, b) which built on findings from the theoretical study of factors that influence father involvement with their children following divorce, described above. The court again facilitated recruitment of fathers into the trial by providing access to computerized records of recent divorces. The results from the randomized trial indicated a positive program effect to reduce interparental conflict and improve co-parenting (Cookston et al. 2007) and to improve children's adjustment (Braver et al. 2005a, b). A currently ongoing study in which the court is helping provide access to court records is a dissertation to conduct a randomized efficacy trial of a web-based coping program for children following parental divorce (Boring 2011).

The collaboration between ASU researchers and the Maricopa court on studies of factors that contribute to better outcomes for children following divorce and the randomized experimental trials involved the court as facilitators of the prevention research agenda of the ASU research team. The studies required no commitment of court resources. The court made it easier to access participants for these studies, but the research agenda was primarily that of the research team, and while relevant to the court, had little immediate implications for the work of the court.

Collaboration on Studies that are Jointly Initiated and Have Immediate Benefit to the Court

A complementary set of collaborative studies involved the ASU research team in activities that directly advanced the goals of the court. Two types of activities were conducted, the evaluations of existing court programs and collaborating with the court on the development of new court services. In both of these cases the collaboration involved the use of considerable court resources as well as considerable effort on the part of the research team.

The benefit to ASU researchers was to contribute to their graduate training mission or to advance their agenda of developing and evaluating programs that improve outcomes for children and families following divorce. These collaborative studies were conducted simultaneously with the studies of divorce processes and of intervention trials described above. Three examples illustrate these studies.

The first study is an evaluation of the mandated mediation services being provided by the courts. This research was conducted by a graduate student intern in the Conciliation Services, supervised by the ASU faculty member, and in collaboration with the head of the Court Conciliation Services. Four years prior to this study the court had initiated a mandatory mediation program for families in conflict over custody and visitation issues. The expectation was that the new program would achieve several desirable outcomes for the court system: an increase in couples reaching their own agreements without judicial order, a decrease in the number of custody trials and a lower average time from the petition to the final dissolution decree. The study used a non-equivalent control group design in which measures of each of these court outcomes were obtained from archival records 6 months prior to and following the introduction of the mandatory mediation program within the Maricopa Court and in a comparable court in a neighboring urban county. The results indicated that mandatory mediation reduced the number of settlements by judicial order and that divorcing couples took less time for their divorce to be processed following the introduction of mandatory mediation (Trost et al. 1988). Both outcomes supported the value of mandatory mediation to improve court goals of providing swift and fair justice and being accountable.

A second collaborative project involved one of the researchers collaborating with the court in the development of a mandated short parent education program in the court. In the early 1990s a national movement was gaining momentum for the domestic relations courts to offer short parent education classes to divorcing families (Salem et al.1996; Schepard 2004). The ASU researchers collaborated with two conciliation staff employees of the court to develop a model of a short parent education program to be used in the court, and to test its' feasibility and acceptability to parents. The pilot test, which was conducted at the ASU PRC, found that the program had high levels of acceptability to parents. Partially based on these findings the state of Arizona later passed a law (ARS §25–352) requiring parents across the state to attend a short (4 hour) parent education program upon filing for a divorce. Subsequent to this law going into effect, a dissertation conducted by a graduate student under the supervision of Braver (DeLuse 1999) used a regression discontinuity design and found that the program significantly increased the amount of parenting time for fathers as compared to equivalent families who did not participate in a parent education program.

A third collaboration involved an ASU researcher conducting a study to evaluate a course being given by court conciliation services for high conflict divorcing families. High conflict divorces are a particularly vexing problem for the courts in that they require the courts to use a great deal of their resources to deal with complicated and emotionally-charged issues between the parties and because these cases often lead to repeated litigation over time. The evaluation was done in the context of a graduate practicum in evaluation research, which was led by the ASU researcher with sessions co-led by a professional court administrator and conciliation counselor. The project involved a review of the curriculum of the conflict resolution course (including student observation of program sessions), and the development and conduct of a follow-up evaluation of participants in the course. The results indicated that, similar to other parent education courses, there was a high level of consumer satisfaction. Parents reported that the program increased their awareness of the effects of conflict on their children, but they reported much smaller effects of the program to change their actual behaviors in resolving conflicts with their ex-spouse or to improve their ability

to work out their disagreements without going back to court. Because issues facing the court are often polarized around the interests of mothers and fathers, the evaluation was particularly interested in assessing differential effects by gender. No differences were found in program satisfaction between mothers and fathers or as a function of whether parents had reported involvement in domestic violence at the time they entered the program.

In summary, these three activities involved a higher degree of resource investment on the part of the court, but also involved a higher level of immediate benefit in addressing the goals of the court. More specifically the activities provided evaluation of court services, thus addressing the goal of the court to be an accountable institution and the activities also helped promote the development of a new service that was seen to benefit families, and potentially make the court system more efficient. It is notable that these collaborative activities likely also strengthened the collaborative relationship between the researchers and the court, strengthening the likelihood of successful future collaborations.

Mutual Development and Evaluation of New Programs that Address Problems of Joint Interest to the Court and to ASU Researchers

A third kind of collaboration is one in which the courts and ASU mutually develop a new program to address an issue of equal interest to both parties, specifically high conflict divorces that cause serious problems to the court as well as to parents and children. In this mutual collaboration both parties invest considerable resources to the effort. Each brings unique expertise and perspective to bear on defining the problem and designing the intervention and a joint decision making structure is instituted to guide the work. We have previously fully described this mutual collaboration around the development and evaluation of a program for high conflict divorces (Hita et al. 2009), and will summarize this process here. The collaboration was initiated in response to a grant announcement from NIMH for funds “to create or expand partnerships between centers and community clinical or service systems” (<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-01-089.html>). A planning group from the court (including the presiding judge, court administrator, and director of conciliation services and two ASU researchers developed a proposal which described a joint planning process by which evidence-based prevention programs would be made available to high risk families in the courts. The proposal that was funded described a program development process in which a Joint Planning Committee (JPC) would be established consisting of the above court professionals, ASU researchers as well as numerous community stakeholders including representatives of mothers and fathers, professional who provide services to divorcing families (psychologist, lawyer and clinical service providers) and ethnic minorities. The proposal stated that the JPC would work over 5 years to identify evidence-based programs to import that meet the needs of divorcing families and the priorities of the court, and to help plan and monitor the process of implementation and evaluation.

The proposal envisioned that families would become involved in these programs through a multi-step process. All families who attend the universally mandated short parent education program would be identified as “high risk” based on their score on a validated screening measure. Those who screened as high risk would be sent a letter by the judge inviting them to attend two meetings with a Family Transitions Guide (FTG). In these meetings the FTG would use motivational interviewing to help parents identify areas where they saw a need to change. Parents would then be referred to an evidence-based program to address these needs.

Several years elapsed between writing the proposal and when funding was received, during which time there was a change in the presiding family court judge, as a function of the normal rotation of judicial assignments in the court. After the proposal was funded the

dynamic process of program development described above was put in place involving the JPC, the court and the researchers. This dynamic process involved ongoing negotiations between all parties which significantly changed the design of the program and the evaluation while adhering to the core goals of bringing evidence-based programs to high risk divorcing families. Two of these changes were initiated by the new presiding family court judge to be more consistent with his perspective of the problems confronting the court and of how the court would be used to respond to these problems. The judge was very concerned with a subset of parents who were involved in a high level of dysfunctional interparental conflict and who were returning to court following their original divorce decree to petition for changes. The program was redesigned in three ways to focus on these, high conflict, relitigating parents. First, rather than identify parents for the program based on their scores on a screening measure, judge would identify parents as being in high conflict over parenting time issues based on their interactions with the court (e.g., relitigation of agreements, behavior in court). Second, rather than parents being invited to see the FTG the judge would order them to attend a high conflict class. Third, those parents who were ordered to attend a high conflict class would be randomly assigned either to receive the FTG program or to attend a comparison program for high conflict divorces that was currently being implemented by the court. The court and the JPC were not interested in selecting the specific evidence-based programs to which parents would be referred. They saw the ASU researchers as expert on the content of these programs. They identified the components that should be included in a program and requested that the ASU research team identify evidence based programs that had these components. An experimental evaluation design in which all families who were randomly assigned to the two programs and who provided informed consent would be assessed at pre, post-test and 9 months later. This final program design was arrived at by mutually refining the definition of the problem and involved considerable investment of court and researcher resources. Because of the investment of all parties we were also able to implement an experimental design which would have power to detect a broad range of outcomes including mental health of children and effects on family relitigation and other use of court resources to deal with their disputes.

Collaboration Around ASU Initiated Dissemination Research that has Direct Benefits to Bring New Sustainable Services to the Court

The ASU researchers were interested in collaborating with the courts to test whether the NBP that had previously demonstrated positive impact on children when delivered by the ASU researchers could be equally effective when delivered to divorcing families under natural conditions of community-based service delivery. The court administrator at the Maricopa Court (Knox) provided essential consultation throughout the development of the proposal on processes for involving the courts. Although the research was initiated by the ASU researchers (Sandler and Wolchik), the collaboration differs from the earlier described group of studies in two ways: (1) the intended outcome was to bring a new and hopefully sustainable resource to the court; and (2) the court would be actively involved in critical aspects of implementing the study. The researchers saw the court as an ideal institution with which to partner to deliver the NBP because it had access to the population of divorced families and because the courts have developed an array of non-judicial program for divorcing families including short, parent education programs. Furthermore, the ASU researchers had already conducted a study in collaboration with the Maricopa court to test a DVD which would invite divorcing parents who were attending a mandated short (4 hour) parent education class to participate in the longer (ten session) NBP on a voluntary basis. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to describe the results of that study in depth, it is notable that two factors that predicted parents' voluntarily attending the NBP in response to the invitation were gender (mothers more than fathers) and rating themselves high on a risk

index which assessed their perception of the problems being experienced by their children and family problems following the divorce.

From a court perspective the study would further their goals of protecting children and families (making a service accessible that has been demonstrated to improve outcomes for children) and accountability (this service was supported by evidence of efficacy), and would not interfere with other court goals (i.e., access to fair and timely justice). Participating in the study was also consistent with the court's national reputation and self-perception as an innovative court. This study would involve a collaboration between the court, community service providers and the ASU research team, and the collaboration would extend beyond the Maricopa court to include the courts in five other counties in Arizona. One key role of the courts in the proposed study is to facilitate recruiting parents to attend NBP, both by providing access to the short parent education programs to show a DVD informing parents about the program and inviting them to attend and more directly by referring families who court professionals (e.g., judges, mediators, lawyers) believe could benefit from the program. A second key role of the courts is to provide over-sight of the trial by participating in semi-annual meetings in which problems of implementation are discussed and the court helps trouble shoot solutions to make the program compatible with court functioning and community needs.

Discussion

This collaboration between the Maricopa Family Court and the ASU researchers involved 19 distinct projects and multiple key participants working together over a period of 27 years. On the court side seven presiding judges were involved in the collaboration, each of whom had somewhat different priorities for the court and styles of collaborating. From the side of the ASU researchers, the projects involved different aspects of their academic work, including conducting funded research, training of graduate students, and participating in community or professional service activities. Many of the lessons learned from the experience are similar to those that have been previously articulated in literature on community-based research (e.g., Israel et al.1998), although the long-term nature of the collaboration provides additional perspective on these lessons.

Mutual Benefit of the Collaboration

Each of the projects that were undertaken had a positive cost–benefit ratio for both the court and the researchers. The positive cost–benefit ratios are due in part to areas of overlap in the goals of the court and of the researchers. From an organizational perspective, the court views each activity in relation to its multiple goals and the priority of other projects being conducted by the court. Researchers view the activities in terms of advancing their research, teaching and community service interests. The family court routinely deals with questions that have both a legal and a psychological component: How to apportion parenting time in the best interests of the child? How to facilitate conflicting parties to come to an agreement that they will live up to? How to deal with issues such as domestic violence and parental competence that potentially threaten the well-being of all parties? The court and the researchers have complementary expertise relevant to each of these issues, so that collaboration has benefits for both parties.

Importance of Different Perspectives on Dealing with Family Problems

One of the strengths of the collaboration is that the courts and the researchers bring complementary perspectives to the problems of families being seen in the court. The court has the responsibility of providing services to the large numbers of families who come before it, and has relatively few resources to provide these services. It is under pressure to

solve problems in real time, and to innovate out of necessity in dealing with new problems as they arise. The short-term time perspective is exacerbated by a system of rotating leadership in which the term of a presiding judge is every 2–3 years, so that the judge must institute his/her priorities in a relatively short time period. The researchers have the luxury of selecting the problems of interest to them from the perspective of their view of their long-range prevention science agenda. They can develop a programmatic series of questions on risk and protective factors, design and evaluation of intervention models and dissemination. As long as they can receive grant funding to support the studies and can maintain their collaborative relationship with the court they are able to carry out this agenda.

Cumulative Value of the Collaborative Relationship Over Time

We described the various collaborative activities in categories defined by who initiated the activity, who receives the immediate benefit, and the level of effort required of each party. There is no clear progression from one type of collaboration to another in that one of the earliest projects was initiated by the researchers and provided no immediate benefit to the court, while another early activity provided a great deal of benefit to the court. The success of each one built a tradition of working together, trust, open communication, collaborative problem solving when confronted with difficulties and a recognition of shared values and goals. The success of later collaborations in which there was a high level of effort and resources expended by each, was greatly facilitated by the relationships built through the earlier collaborations.

Central Role of Key Champion Within the Courts

The presence of a local champion of the collaboration who has an influential position within the court system was an essential element for the success of the collaboration. The key champion was committed to the collaboration because he saw the research as advancing key goals of the court and as providing resources that were otherwise not available to the court. The key champion played a critical role in ensuring that the researchers were sensitive to the priorities of the court, and that lines of communication across all parties remained open to work through the issues that inevitably arise in the conduct of collaborative studies, be they administrative, logistical or programmatic.

Societal Benefit from Synergistic Roles of University Based Research and Family Courts

Juxtaposed with institutes of higher learning, courts share some similarities with universities as both are traditional organizations with layers of bureaucracy. A synergy can be realized when prevention scientists within a university partner with administrators or other professionals within the court who are able to explore opportunities that might lead to optimal service levels for litigant customers. The vast numbers of litigants that find their way into the family courts come at a time of transition in their family structure and could potentially benefit from the prevention services being developed by the research community. These families have but one source to turn for the resolution of legal disputes—the court, and the actions of the court have important effects on their later well-being. The collaboration between the court and prevention researchers has great potential to enable the court to respond and for prevention scientists to test programs to help families better meet their needs.

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Table 1

Collaborative projects of the ASU Prevention Research Center and the Maricopa Family Court 1983–2010

Year	Project	Type ^a
1983	Development of the Divorce Event Schedule for Children (Wolchik et al. 1986)	1
1984	Evaluation of Maricopa Court mandated mediation program (Trost et al. 1988)	2
1986	Collection of data for the Study of Separating Families—evaluation of factors that father involvement with children following divorce (Braver et al. 1993)	1
1987	Recruitment of families for the first experimental trial of the NBP (Wolchik et al. 1993)	1
1988	Collection of data for the study of risk and protective factors for children following parental divorce (DAP) (Sandler et al. 1994)	1
1988	Recruitment of families for the second experimental trial of the NBP (Wolchik et al. 2000)	1
1994	Collaboration on the development of court based short parent education program—study of feasibility and acceptability of the short parent education program. Followed by Braver involvement in the Domestic Relations Reform Subcommittee for the development of a statewide short parent education program and the development of standards for these programs	2
1994	Evaluation of the effects of the short parent education program on court settlements (Braver et al. 1997)	2
1994	Recruitment of fathers for an experimental trial of a prevention programs for divorced fathers, DFL (Cookston et al. 2007)	1
1998	Pilot test of recruitment of parents from a short mandated parent education program to a longer evidence-based voluntary program	1
1998	Collection of data for the study of a theoretical model of why parents enroll in a voluntary evidence-based parenting program	1
2003	Evaluation of a long-term follow-up of a Court based program for high conflict divorces	2
2006–2008	Recruitment of families for cultural adaptation of the NBP—focus groups and pilot tests (Wolchik et al. 2005)	1
2006–2008	Experimental evaluation of alternative approaches for recruitment of families from short parent-education programs to a long voluntary evidence-based parenting program	1
2006–2008	Collaborative ASU/Court development of an alternative intervention model for high conflict divorcing families (FTG/PaCT) (Hita et al. 2009)	3
2008–2011	Experimental evaluation of the FTG/PaCT program	3
2010	Pilot test of adapted version of NBP in preparation for court implementation trial (Advanced Practicum)	4
2010	Randomized trial of a web-based coping program for children whose parents are divorcing	1
2011	Projected experimental evaluation of the delivery of the evidence-based NBP to divorcing families in collaboration with the court	4

^aType of collaborative activity: 1, court assistance to the ASU research team initiated studies that have direct benefits for research and only a more distant promise of benefits for the court; 2, ASU researchers assisting the court in studies that are jointly initiated and have immediate benefit to the court; 3, mutual collaboration on developing new programs that have immediate benefits to both research and the court; 4, collaboration around ASU initiated study that has immediate benefits to the court and to research