



**ABOUT THE
FAMILY AND CHILDREN DIVISION**

The FCD

The Family and Children Division of the High Court of the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago comprises a Family Court sub-division and a Children Court sub-division with authority to treat with all family matters and children matters respectively.

The Family Court

The Family Court is a special court set up to administer justice in family matters in a manner that is less adversarial and more conciliatory. The Court purposes to provide families with access to specialist assistance and support while they seek solutions. In this way the Court adopts a holistic approach to resolving family disputes and embraces legal, psychological and social issues. Family matters include legal proceedings concerning maintenance, guardianship, wardship, custody, adoption, civil child abduction and matrimonial proceedings among others.

The Children Court

The Children Court is a special court which handles all matters involving children under the age of 18 who get in trouble with the law and children in need of supervision. The Children Court also hears matters where a child is required to appear in Court. This Court supports the rehabilitation of children who come into conflict with the law by providing access to an array of social and rehabilitative services. In seeking the rehabilitation of children, this Court also applies principles of Restorative Justice. The different types of matters which may be heard in the Children Court include children charge matters, children drug matters and children mental health matters among others.

The Family and Children Court Administration Department

This Family and Children Division is supported by a Family and Children Court Administration Department comprising the Central Coordinating Office, the Family Court Administrative Office and the Children Court Administrative Office.

The Family and Administration Department provides strategic direction and operational support for the Family Court and the Children Court. The responsibilities of the Department include planning, budgeting, engaging in financial planning and management, staff management and development, case flow management, and performance management. This Department also develops and implements the necessary policies, processes and systems to ensure that it operates effectively. The Family Court Administrative Office and the Children Court Administrative Office provides support to the Family Court and Children Court respectively ensuring that challenges faced by the Courts are speedily addressed and do not cause delays in the administration of justice.

Units Supporting the Children Court

Judicial Support

High Court Judicial Officers are supported by certain categories of personnel. The following support staff are required for the Judicial Officers of the Children Court–

- **A Judicial Research Counsel** - provides legal research and analysis during legal proceedings, including trials and post-trials, prepare and review legal opinions and draft judgments.
- **A Judiciary Secretary** - provides support to a judicial officer by taking dictation and transcribing notes, typing judgments and notes of evidence, maintaining records and files, making appointments, and notifying all parties involved in court matters.
- **A Judiciary Support Officer (JSO) and Assistant Judiciary Support Officer (CMO II)** - drafts all orders, assists the Judicial Officer with the management of the docket, and to be case progression officers. A Judicial Support Assistant (CMO II) will be required to assist the JSO in carrying out the duties outlined above.
- **Judicial Orderly** - monitors and controls the entry of persons to the chambers of judicial officers. Duties also include locating legal books and cases in the court's library or in the judicial officers' chambers in accordance with legal citations.
- **Marshals (Bailiffs)** – represents the Marshal in court and in the service of criminal process. The responsibilities of the Marshals includes maintaining order in the court, managing jurors and the safety of witnesses.

FCD Social Services Unit

The FCD Social Services Unit will provide support services to ensure that children who are referred by the Court are assessed, and that comprehensive evidence-based treatment plans developed and implemented. These plans will be geared towards the rehabilitation of children. Assessments will be undertaken by clinical, mental health and psycho-educational social workers and by psychologists in order to treat with children in crisis, by methods appropriate to the individual child taking into account assessed risk for re-offending levels. The unit will also be responsible for developing, managing and facilitating key rehabilitative programmes for children. They will also be required to engage in providing linkages to other support services. Weekly case conferences with social workers and other support staff will be undertaken to discuss challenges, and identify solutions for children in order to maintain service delivery standards.

The Social Service staff will be required to give evidence in court, to address the court at various stages in the process including at sentencing, and to play an active part in case conferencing with each child.

FCD Human Resources Unit

The FCD Human Resource Management (HRM) Unit will provide strategic, technical and management support to the FCD through the provision of leadership and advice in the formulation of HR management policies to guide the effective and sustainable development of the FCD. The FCD HRM Unit will be responsible for developing, directing, and implementing a full range of human resource policies and programmes in accordance with the FCD strategic and operational goals, and legal requirements. The Unit will also drive the effective implementation and management of FCD performance management processes and procedures to ensure employee engagement, and that performance expectations are established, communicated, updated and met.

FCD Finance, Accounts and Investment Unit

The FCD Finance, Accounts and Investment Unit will provide financial management and investment services through the formulation of sound financial policies, systems and procedures that are necessary to ensure the efficient functioning of the FCD. The Unit will be responsible for developing and implementing a system of internal control in keeping with Public Service Financial Regulations and ensuring that all financial records are accurately and securely maintained. The Unit will manage the implementation of the requirements of the Attachment of Earnings Act, the Court Funds Investment Act (as may be amended), Workmen's Compensation Act, any relevant rules of the Supreme Court, and any administrative arrangements made under those Acts and rules or as a result of any judgment of the Court.

FCD Communications and Information Unit

The FCD Communications and Information Unit will be responsible for creating and executing a broad range of communications and public information plans and programmes based on the strategic direction of the FCD to promote public awareness, understanding and confidence in the Division. Information materials will be developed and social media platforms established to satisfy the informational needs of children and other key stakeholders in an effort to advance the work of the FCD. The Unit will also develop the FCD brand and provide quality control and co-ordination for all communications.

FCD Records Management, Court and Law and Reporting Unit

- *Court Records and Court Reporting*

In keeping with the Draft Children Court Rules, staff will keep records that distinguishes one child from another. Staff will also be responsible for maintaining records and key court case information in hard and softcopy including softcopies of recordings, audio digital recordings, and audio-video recording and indexing of all matters filed or heard in the court.

Redacting

Staff activities include the specialised act of anonymizing orders, judgments, rulings and online and hard copy records. In carrying out their duties, staff will be responsible for establishing all the necessary processes and procedure and controls related to the safeguard and protection of sensitive court records.

Children's Authority Liaison Unit

The Children's Authority Liaison Unit serves as the primary point of contact between the FCD and the Children's Authority regarding child offenders who also fall under the Authority's remit. The Unit notifies the Children's Authority representative when the Authority's appearance is required before the Children Court or the Family Court, including short-notice appearance, bail hearings, etc., and forwards information regarding court orders that are for the attention of the Children's Authority. With regard to the Children Court, the Unit will ensure that pre and post-assessment reports due from the Children's Authority are received at the appropriate times, and received by the Children Court and the Family Court to enable cases to progress in a timely manner. This unit

also ensures that appropriate systems are in place to facilitate appropriate timely and efficient interaction between the Division and the Authority.

FCD Statistical and Evaluation Unit

The FCD Statistical and Evaluation Unit will be responsible for the development, establishment and maintenance of a high level of statistical and evaluation capacity within the FCD. The Unit will perform complex analytical statistical studies and evaluation of data collected over a wide variety of fields relating to the various aspects of the FCD. It will consult with key internal and external stakeholders to create a Statistical Reporting System that provides a broad range of statistics to meet the information needs of the FCD and its internal and external stakeholders. The Unit will also collect from, and share information with external departments and agencies within the justice sector that is related to children, to ensure that statistical information is comprehensive, meaningful and useful.

Peer Resolution Centre Coordination Unit

The Peer Resolution (PR) Centre Coordination Unit will be responsible for the overall management and coordination of the Court-annexed PR programme and serve as a liaison between the Children Court and respondents, children probation officers, social workers and other stakeholders. The Unit will establish all of the supporting systems, procedures and processes for the PR programme, including intake, pre-trial, trial and post-trial activities.

Children Drug Treatment Court Process Unit

The Children Drug Treatment Court Process Unit will manage the children drug treatment process to address the needs of child offenders who require drug treatment interventions. The Unit will receive orders (with summary of the case file) from the Children Court through the Auxilliary Programmes Coordination and Child Monitoring Unit, and process them within forty-eight hours of receipt of the referral. The Unit will arrange for consultations with the child and parent/guardian/person with responsibility for the child, and legal counsel. The Unit will orient, screen and interview the child and arrange for the case to be presented to the Children Drug Treatment Team, and for continuous judicial supervision through monitoring hearings with the child and his family or other systems of support.

Auxiliary Programmes Coordination and Monitoring Unit

The Unit will serve as a clearing house for all Court Orders from the Children Court involving child offenders and Children in Need of Supervision who require interventions and the development and execution of care treatment plans. The Unit will receive Court Orders from the Children Court and process them within twenty-four hours; make contact with respondents and their parents/guardians/persons with the responsibility for the child to explain Court Orders and next steps. The Unit will also interview them before processing; identify internal and external programmes approved by the Court and develop comprehensive intervention plans geared toward the rehabilitation of child offenders. Cases can also be referred to the Social Services Unit for assessment and relevant interventions. The Auxiliary Programmes Coordination and Monitoring Unit will be responsible for monitoring each case to ensure auxiliary programmes are effectively executing intervention plans, and standards are being maintained.

Children Court Information Technology Unit

The Children Court Information Technology Unit will be responsible for providing the necessary information and communications technology (ICT) support and services to facilitate the work of the Children Court. The ICT requirements will be driven by the strategic direction of the FCD and the judicial processes, workflows, procedures and systems. The court's business processes include its internal practices and how it plans on managing the sharing of information internally and with its strategic partners.

A new Court Case Management Software (CCMS) will be introduced in the Division to support its operations. This will require review, learning and customization of processes to meet the needs of the Court. This unit must also support remote online transcription and remote hearings.

Children Court Witness Support Unit

The Children Court Witness Support Unit will provide support services for witnesses, including provisions arising out of special arrangements orders. Arrangements for vulnerable witnesses will also be within this unit's ambit. For vulnerable child witnesses, the unit will arrange acclimatization visits to the court orienting them to the court processes and the role of different actors in the Court. The Unit will provide witnesses requiring special arrangements with any relevant information, keep them informed about the progress of the case, and provide referral information for ongoing support. It will also manage other court services including, customer service, youth and child care support and judicial operational support to ensure that the Court's internal and external customers experience a high level of service. The Unit will be responsible for establishing customer services standards, designing and implementing customer feedback mechanisms and ensuring that judicial officers are assigned the appropriate level of support staff.

Court Systems Audit and Quality Compliance Unit

Audit and quality compliance is integral to the Court's operations and will contribute to the achievement of the FCD goals and objectives. This will require the establishment and maintenance of a robust monitoring and compliance system to ensure adherence to policies, procedures, systems and performance standards for service delivery by all Units and staff of the Division. Staff operating in this area will provide the FCD Deputy CEA with regular reports regarding compliance related activities and initiatives relevant to units and their operations, and will monitor to ensure the implementation of action plans to address compliance deficiencies. The staff will also review non-compliance issues and make recommendations for remedial action plans.

Youth and Children Waiting Areas

Youth and Child Officers of the court will be responsible for supervising children in the youth and child waiting areas. They will ensure the protection of children while in the care of the court and engage them in meaningful activities.

General Administration Unit - FCD

The staff of the General Administration Unit will provide services to the entire Division including, administrative services; the coordination and management of purchasing and distribution; driver/courier services; hospitality management; facilities monitoring and maintenance; and fleet coordination.

Office Management Units – Court Locations

Office Management Units will be situated at all court locations and will provide administrative services, mailroom management, courier services, hospitality management, fleet coordination and facilities monitoring and maintenance.

Sub-Court Security Unit

Court Security will be responsible for the overall day-to-day supervision of the security operations at Court locations, and for providing direction to contracted security personnel.

Working with Our Partners in the Justice Sector

The Judiciary has been working with all our justice sector partners in order to ensure the alignment of the new Children Court system with international standards guaranteeing the rights of children in Trinidad and Tobago. The package of Children’s Legislation and the International Treaties and Standards have led to several changes in the system used to address children in both the Family Court and in the Children Court. Pursuant to the substance of the package, the Judiciary has drafted and promulgated new Judges’ Rules for Children, 2016 and new Children Court Rules. To enable the new laws to work, it is necessary for all the relevant ministries, departments and agencies to determine new procedures and protocols for treating with children and interacting with the court. The Judiciary has provided the opportunity for all relevant ministries, departments and agencies with key responsibilities in the criminal child justice system to get together and work out detailed policies, procedures and protocols for collaborative partnerships between and among themselves.