



Photo courtesy Mohave County

Doctors Alison Steier and Lorenzo Azzi (seated front, center), of Southwest Human Development, listen to Superior Court Judge Richard Weiss prior to their presentations on Infant Mental Health Wednesday, Jan. 13, at the County Administration Building in Kingman.

## Infant Mental Health is topic of seminar

KINGMAN – The issues of mental health for babies took center stage Wednesday afternoon, Jan. 13, during the Mohave County Courts COJET (Committee on Judicial Education and Training) conference at the County Administration Building in Kingman.

Two experts from Southwest Human Development, out of Phoenix, presented information, “Creating a

Positive Future for Young Children,” to close to 100 court personnel and interested members of the public.

Doctors Alison Steier and Lorenzo Azzi led the proceedings concerning infant mental health. Superior Court Judge Richard Weiss introduced the speakers and discussed the Court’s “First Things First” grant-funded efforts to “front load” mental

health assistance to children up to age five.

“We are one of the very fortunate regions in the state where there is actually dedicated money for infants’ and toddlers’ mental health,” he said. “What we really want to see is permanence for our children. We don’t want to see them in abusive or neglectful situations.” This presentation helps us get the “message out that there are things we can do in order to help our youngest population.”

Mohave County Superior Court Team, Mental Health, has an intergovernmental agreement with First Things First Arizona, Court Team Mental Health Coordinator Tonya Ford said. The funding is a three-year grant that can be renewed. First Things First funding is provided through a voter-approved tobacco tax.

Steier, who is director of clinical training at Harris Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Training Institute, said there are close to “11,000 children in out-of-home care in Arizona,” and “infants are the fastest growing population of children entering foster care in the United States.... Babies comprise more than 40 percent of children in foster care,” and “almost 80 percent have prenatal exposure to maternal drugs.”

She said, “Foster care is the most intensive intervention we are able to provide children.”

The audience for the presentation was made up of personnel from “Mohave County Courts, Probation Department, clerk’s office and a few other parts of the court system,” Weiss said. “There are CASAs (Court Appointed Special Advocates) here, Foster Care Review Board members, a few CPS (Child Protective Services) people – it’s a pretty diverse group. There are also a number of attorneys and one or two foster parents in attendance.

“This is a general session,” he said. “Everyone can get an idea where they might fit. We start with trying to get everyone on the same page and then we drill down and focus on specific groups within the system with what they can do. After Dr. Steier and Dr. Azzi finish, there will be a panel with medical doctors and public health nurses. They will come up with some of the things they think will be helpful to the system. Locally we will get use out of the things science is telling us are helpful to the zero-to-five population.”

The end result for the Court Team’s efforts with young children is “permanence,” Weiss said. “We’ve come a long way with our efforts. And I am really grateful to have this opportunity. This is a great challenge for us and we hope we can come through and show the rest of the state that things like this can happen in any community.”

Mohave County Courts’ growing efforts to assist the “zero-to-five population” come from the First Things First funding and “the guidance of Kip Anderson as our Superior Court administrator who allowed me to steal Caseflow Manager Lorrie Back to handle our budget and Tonya Ford for research,” Weiss said. “Without them, we wouldn’t be here today.”