

**FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS WORKPLAN 2021**

**4 February 2021**

***“A New Tomorrow”***

**Justice Debbie Ong**



**FJC Workplan 2021**

**4 February 2021**

**Justice Debbie Ong**

Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon,  
Justice Vincent Hoong, and  
all my colleagues,

1. This is our second Workplan event to be held remotely through a zoom platform. While this mode was very new last year, it feels rather normal now, doesn't it?
2. Our Workplan theme last year was “Today is a New Day” and this year, it is “A New Tomorrow”. The year before last, our theme was “Every Outcome, a Way Forward”. These three themes are very much linked – they are words that point us to look ahead, always finding a way to move forward and not get stuck in the past or even in the difficult present. These themes are extremely important for the Family Justice Courts (“FJC”), because family proceedings are unique – even after divorce, families need to carry on life, to raise children, to grow old with family around them. Life does not stop with a court order in family matters.

## OUR FAMILY JUSTICE JOURNEY

**"Every Outcome, a Way Forward" ~ Workplan 2019 theme**

*"...High on my "wish list" is for parties to enjoy a **refreshed mindset** – that this can be **a journey of hope and restoration, a journey towards a way forward** – where adjudication is the last resort." (per Justice Debbie Ong, FJC Workplan Address 2019 at [44])*

**"Today is a New Day" ~ Workplan 2020 theme**

*"We will focus on a new mindset, a **new understanding of what it might take for families to find that way forward.**" (per Justice Debbie Ong, FJC Workplan Address 2020 at [4])*

**"A New Tomorrow" ~ Workplan 2021 theme**



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3. First, let us take a quick look at how FJC has been assisting families. We have earlier watched a short video on our case numbers – let me now make a few quick notes on that.

## How FJC has been doing – broad observations

- Caseload for 2020 fell due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Circuit Breaker: 7 April to 1 June 2020, followed by Phase 2 until 28 December)
- The proportion of divorce cases on simplified track rose slightly to reach 60% in 2020, up from 58% in 2019
- The average number of days required to conclude a divorce case decreased from 97 days in 2018 to 82 days in 2019
- The percentage of Divorce cases that went through mediation and reached either a full or partial settlement increased over the years to 90% in 2020 (from 80% in 2015)




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4. FJC's caseload for 2020 fell, and we think this is due largely to the COVID-19 ("COVID") pandemic. The Circuit Breaker period stretched over April and May last year. Caseload fell by about 60% in April to May 2020 compared with caseload the year before in April to May 2019.
5. The proportion of divorce cases filed on the simplified track rose slightly to reach 60% in 2020, up from 58% in 2019. The average number of days required to conclude a Divorce case decreased from 97 days in 2018 to 82 days in 2019. The percentage of

Divorce cases that went through mediation and reached either a full or partial settlement increased over the years to 90% in 2020. Five years ago in 2015, the percentage was 80%.

6. The next slide shows FJC's overall caseload:




**FJC - Caseload**

Caseload	2018	2019	2020	2019 vs 2020
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>27,476</b>	<b>27,953</b>	<b>25,633</b>	<b>↓ 8%</b>
Maintenance	4,700	4,413	3,198	↓ 28%
Family Violence	2,701	2,705	2,482	↓ 8%
Divorce	5,977	6,321	6,016	↓ 5%
Originating Summonses	1,318	1,406	1,148	↓ 18%
Summonses	4,971	4,815	4,512	↓ 6%
Breach of Syariah Court Orders ("BOSCO")	155	150	131	↓ 13%
Probate	6,590	7,023	7,006	↓ 0.2%
Youth Courts	1,064	1,120	1,140	↑ 2%

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7. We can see from these statistics that overall, in all categories of cases, caseload had dropped in 2020, except for a small increase in Youth Court caseload.



**FJC – Disposition Rate**

Disposition Rates (≥85%) (Calendar Days)	2018	2019	2020	2019 vs 2020
Maintenance Cases (6 months to First Conclusion)	92%	91%	88%	↓ 3%
Family Violence Cases (6 months to First Conclusion)	92%	91%	86%	↓ 5%
Youth Court (3 months)	73%	78%	81%	↑ 3%
Divorce Cases (6 months to Interim Judgment)	92%	92%	90%	↓ 2%
Divorce Cases (12 months to Conclusion)	94%	94%	93%	↓ 1%
Probate Cases (3 months)	97%	97%	96%	↓ 1%

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8. The disposition rate was generally lower in 2020, and this is to be expected in the unusual year of 2020. There was a slightly higher disposition rate for Youth Court cases as the

Youth Court was still clearing cases especially Youth Court charges during the Circuit Breaker period.

9. The next slide shows statistics on the Divorce cases.

FJC – Divorce				
	2018	2019	2020	2019 vs 2020
Caseload				
Number of Divorces	5,977	6,321	6,016	↓ 5%
- % on Simplified Track	55%	58%	60%	↑ 2%
- % with Children less than 21 years	50%	52%	51%	↓ 1%
Disposition Rates				
Divorce Cases (6 months to Interim Judgment)	92%	92%	90%	↓ 2%
Divorce Cases (12 months to Conclusion)	94%	94%	93%	↓ 1%

10. We see that the disposition rates for Divorces were slightly lower in 2020. Again, this is not surprising in 2020.
11. This is a picture of how many divorces come through our courts. How do we help these divorced families to have “A New Tomorrow” that is filled with hope even after divorce?


<div><h3>What is a New Tomorrow after a divorce?</h3><ol style="list-style-type: none"><li><b>Successful Transitions to post-breakdown life</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Overcoming trauma – letting go and moving on</li><li>Minimising parental conflict – flexibility and graciousness</li><li>Financial needs addressed</li></ul></li><li><b>Discharge their Parental responsibility</b> which is <b>a personal responsibility</b><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><i>“What would significantly affect C’s welfare is the parents’ conflicts and the spirit in which they carry out the orders. If the arrangements are carried out by each parent with the intent to ruin the time that the other parent has with C, then C’s welfare is being undermined. On the other hand, either of the arrangements proposed by the parents, if carried out with a supportive and cooperative spirit, could and would go well, and promote C’s welfare.” (VDX v VDY [2021] SGHCF 2)</i></li></ul></li><li><b>Able to problem solve; manage future issues or conflicts:</b> <i>“Parties should be assisted with developing their skills to resolve their own disputes, to co-parent after divorce, to be familiar with how to access appropriate support services.” (Workplan 2020) – Be enabled and empowered.</i></li></ol></div>	<div></div>
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12. What is “A New Tomorrow” after a divorce? I focus on three aspects.

13. First, we can help families with their transitions into post-breakdown lives. This may involve supporting them in overcoming the trauma that usually ensues after breakdown, and this in turn may involve parties “letting go and moving on”. We want to support the parties in minimising parental conflict, and have the flexibility and graciousness in working out new child arrangements. We want to help parties have assurance that their financial needs will be addressed – that there is certainty in living arrangements and their needs are going to be provided for in post-divorce life. We endeavour to help families achieve a smooth transition into the next phase of life that can be filled with hope.
14. Second, parents must focus on their child, on discharging their parental responsibility. They should properly understand the needs of the children after divorce, including the children’s need to build strong relationships with both parents as well as having other healthy social relationships around them. We will emphasise that parenting is a personal responsibility.
15. In the case of *VDX v VDY* [2021] SGHCF 2, the parents were litigating over how their son should spend Chinese New Year’s Eve with each parent. The Father disagreed with the judge’s decision for the son to have an early dinner with the Mother and a later dinner with him and the paternal grandparents; the Father submitted that the Mother should have CNY’s Eve lunch while he had CNY Eve dinner with their son. The Mother on the other hand, wanted each parent to have Chinese New Year’s Eve Dinner with the son on alternate years. Each said that their proposal was in the welfare of the child.
16. I held in that appeal (at paragraph 29):

“The present issues, whether resolved in the way the Mother proposed, or in the manner the Father sought, would not significantly affect the welfare of C. What *would significantly affect C’s welfare is the parents’ conflicts* and the *spirit* in which they carry out the orders. If the arrangements are carried out by each parent with the intent to ruin the time that the other parent has with C, then C’s welfare is being undermined. On the other hand, either of the arrangements proposed by the parents, if carried out with a *supportive and cooperative spirit*, could and would go well, and *promote C’s welfare*.”
17. Because such court orders essentially touch on how parties should conduct their family relationships, a subject matter that is personal and complex, there will be limitations on what these court orders can control or resolve. The success of any court order in having a positive effect on the child depends on the parents carrying out the orders in a cooperative spirit. It would be more effective for parents to learn good parenting skills and let go of hurts they may carry, for these emotional issues get in the way of responsible parenting.
18. Third, parties should be supported to problem-solve and manage future issues and conflicts. I had said in last year’s Workplan address: “Parties should be assisted with developing their skills to resolve their own disputes, to co-parent after divorce, to be familiar with how to access appropriate support services.” We want to enable the parties to be able to problem-solve without coming to the courts to litigate. “A New Tomorrow” must be a future where they can sort out parenting matters as reasonable and responsible parents would.

### Getting to a New Tomorrow?



- 1. Successful Transitions to post-breakdown life**
  - Adoption of Therapeutic Justice
  - Enhancing access to justice, court users sufficiently guided throughout their journey, all touchpoints between users and the court are user-friendly
  - Upstream and downstream therapeutic support services, multi-disciplinary team (“MDT”) (overcoming breakdown trauma, letting go and moving on; minimise parental conflict)
  - Panel of Financial Experts “POFE” (financial needs addressed)
- 2. Discharge their Parental responsibility**
  - MDT; working with stakeholders to connect or refer users to sources of help, whether within or outside the legal system
  - Therapeutic support services – parties learn to ‘problem-solve’
- 3. Able to problem solve, manage future issues or conflicts:**
  - MDT, connecting with resources that assist, counselling etc., knowing where/who to reach out to

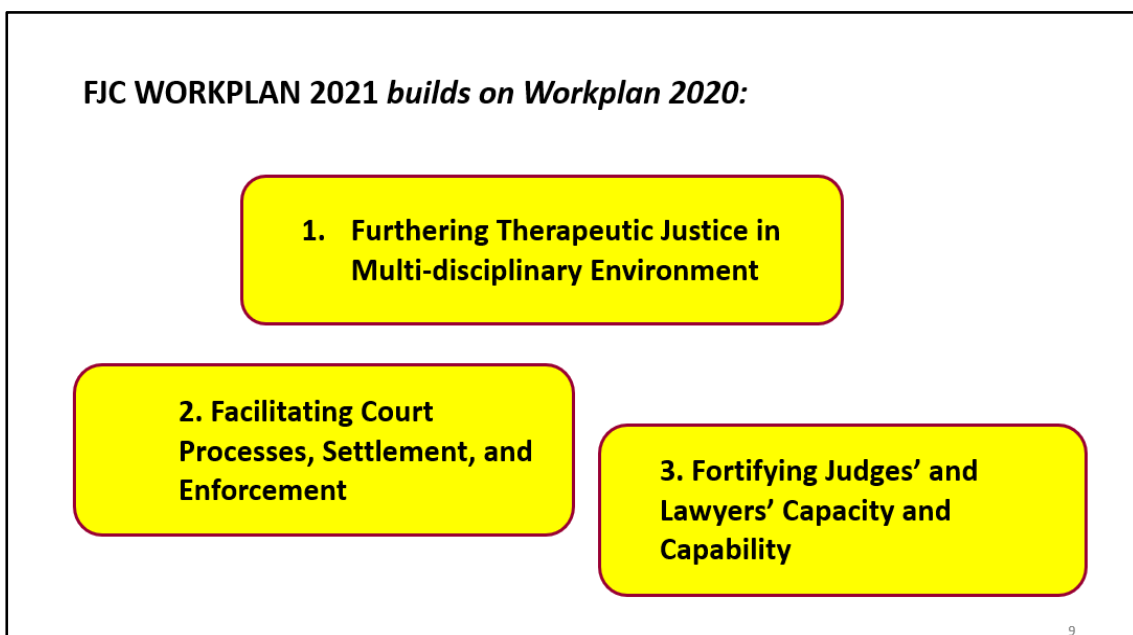
**The 3 aspects require 3 groups of workplans:** 1. Adopt TJ and bring in therapeutic assistance for parties in a multi-disciplinary environment 2. Make the journey and processes simple, navigable and do-able and 3. Ensure the legal professionals – family judges and lawyers are equipped to deliver TJ.

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19. How do parties get to “A New Tomorrow”? Our workplans go towards achieving this, hopefully, in three aspects. Workplan 2021 builds on Workplan 2020. This slide is an overview map of our broad approach. The points in red ink are plans that respond to the three big points. I will share more detailed workplans listed here later.
20. The three aspects involve three groups of workplans – the red-inked responses can be grouped into these three categories: (a) Adopt Therapeutic Justice or “TJ” and bring in therapeutic assistance for parties in a multi-disciplinary environment; (b) Make the journey and processes simple, navigable and do-able; and (c) Ensure the legal professionals – family judges and lawyers – are equipped to deliver TJ. The common denominator in all these is a focus on problem-solving instead of adversarial litigation.
21. Let me give a hypothetical example: Suppose a couple is discussing whether the Husband’s elderly mother should be invited to live with them. The Husband feels strongly that this was the right thing to do, as his mother was recently widowed and may be lonely. The Wife resists this as she thinks that her mother-in-law is overbearing and would meddle in their domestic lives and cause stress and strife in their home. The couple is unable to agree and are quarrelling over this issue. Should they apply to the Family Court *for an order* to resolve this? No.
22. First, there is no legal provision for such an application. Second, and this is related to why there are no legal provisions in the first place – these are family issues that ordinary families work out on their own. If their marital conflicts take a serious turn, they may reach out to counselling services, and get help in problem-solving.
23. When I put this hypothetical to one of our Counselling and Psychological Services (“CAPS”) court family specialist, he said: “In this situation, I would help them to examine their roles – is the Husband making this decision as a filial son to his elderly mother? And how does exercising this role gel with his role as a husband and father?” Such a way of thinking is a start to learning ‘problem-solving’. Similarly, discussing

parenting matters (not just mother-in-law matters), is also part and parcel of family life. A similar approach to resolution, that is, seeking counselling services, is more appropriate. The way forward isn't to litigate, it is to find personal solutions to personal issues.

24. Our workplans from 2020 aim to support families to manage conflicts and know how to problem-solve when they encounter humps in their family life in their new tomorrow.
25. Of course, the Court will be there for the families, accessible to parties who seek remedies in accordance with legal provisions. In particular, the Court protects vulnerable family members from abuse and in obtaining financial provision.
26. I hope that the mindset change also occurs in this way: may parties see that the family justice system is *one that enables*, instead of seeing only barriers ahead. An open heart opens a wide path to a new tomorrow.
27. The three groups of workplans I have mentioned are in fact from my Workplan Address 2020 – this is a slide from last year's Workplan Address:



28. Workplan 2020 was quite massive – they were plans that will require a few years to implement. Workplan 2020 involved a huge amount of mindset change, and we know that a mindset change does not come overnight, or even in a year. So, this year is a time for consolidation, reviewing, strengthening, and capacity building. You will see that last year's three broad groups of plans remain this year's plans too.

## 1. Furthering Therapeutic Justice (“TJ”) within a Multi-disciplinary Environment

### On-going:

- Developing a common TJ language:
  - ✓ An advisory research council (“ARC”) has been appointed and work is in progress – draft article sets out the TJ narrative
- Developing and disseminating a clear TJ narrative, Best Practice Guides
  - ✓ Work in progress to circulate TJ materials
- Developing training/learning curriculum
  - ✓ Judges will be trained in TJ methods by ARC in the upcoming Family Judges’ Learning Week

### On-going:

- Piloting a MDT approach for high needs cases
  - ✓ A total of 17 cases (out of target of 20) assigned to the MDT pilot as at 3 February 2021

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29. In this slide, I set out in point form, in blue ink, updates of our work that stem from Workplan 2020.
30. In developing a common TJ language, an Advisory Research Council (“ARC”) has been appointed, and work on a draft article setting out the TJ narrative has been ongoing. Work on developing and disseminating a clear TJ narrative and Best Practice Guide is in progress. These TJ materials are intended to be circulated to law schools and those involved in TJ work.
31. We continue to develop our training curriculum for the family judges. Our judges will be trained in TJ methods by the ARC experts in the upcoming Family Judges’ Learning Week later this month.
32. We have also started on our Multi-Disciplinary team (“MDT”) Pilot for high needs cases, including adopting a TJ approach in court administration, case management and early interventions. A total of 17 cases (out of a target of 20) have been assigned to the MDT pilot as of yesterday, 3<sup>rd</sup> of February.



[Furthering Therapeutic Justice within a Multi-disciplinary Environment]

**On-going:**

- Strengthening coordination and integration of services- coordination with Community Services; collaborating, and building Referral Channels
  - ✓ TJ Eco-system Building Team – review landscape and map out action plans in 3 areas: (a) outreach and engagement of stakeholders on TJ; (b) setting up of a panel of financial experts; and (c) setting up of a panel of medical/mental health experts
  - ✓ 3 outreach sessions conducted with the Family Bar – discuss training and development of resources on TJ

**New:**

- Family Neutral Evaluation (pilot), “FNE” – an additional tool

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33. Work is ongoing for the strengthening of coordination and integration of services, fortifying working relationships with community services, and building referral channels.
34. The TJ Eco-system Building Team was formed to review the landscape and map out action plans with three key areas being identified: first, outreach and engagement of stakeholders on TJ; second, setting up of a panel of financial experts; and third, setting up of a panel of medical/mental health experts. The team has conducted three outreach sessions with the Family Bar to discuss training and development of resources on TJ.
35. A new initiative being explored is the Family Neutral Evaluation or FNE. Whilst mediation in FJC has been effective in reducing acrimony and helping with settlements, early neutral evaluation may further reduce the number of cases requiring full adjudication. FNE is another tool which may be helpful *in addition* to mediation. This initiative looks at piloting FNE for suitable cases in financial ancillary matters, in line with FJC’s renewed vision of delivering TJ.

## 2. Facilitating Court Processes, Settlement, and Enforcement

### On-going:

- Enhance access to justice by greater empowerment to litigants such as:
  - ✓ Providing information – developing Navigation Pack and Video Bites to enable users to navigate court proceedings
  - ✓ Developing an electronic Litigation Assist system
  - ✓ Enhancing communications through mobile notification services and other digital services

(The Navigation Pack, Video Bites and Mobile Notifications are targeted to be launched by 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter of 2021)

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36. As for Facilitating Court Processes, Settlement, and Enforcement, FJC has been working on enhancing access to justice by greater empowerment to litigants, such as the following work:
- Providing information by developing Navigation Packs and Video Bites that enable users to navigate court proceedings more comfortably.
  - Developing an electronic Litigation Assist system, which increases the ease of filing divorces.
  - Enhancing communications through mobile notification services and other digital services.
37. The Navigation Pack, Video Bites and Mobile Notifications are targeted to be launched by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter of 2021.

[Facilitating Court Processes, Settlement, and Enforcement]

**On-going:**

- Revamping the Family Justice Rules – streamline and simplify processes and forms
  - ✓ The draft FJR has been provided to AGC for comments and the team is working on the forms
- New Bills/Amendments to Acts to provide – enhanced powers for judge-led approach, review of probate processes, compliance of child access orders, simplify enforcement
  - ✓ FJC is working with MSF and Minlaw on the amendments to the Women’s Charter; amendments are expected to be operationalised in 2022.

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38. We have been working hard on Revamping the Family Justice Rules, to streamline and simplify processes and forms. The draft Rules have been provided to the Attorney-General’s Chambers for comments and the team is working on the forms.
39. Work carries on in respect of New Bills and Amendments to Acts to provide for enhancing the Court’s powers for the judge-led approach, the review of probate processes, enhancing compliance with child access orders and simplifying enforcement of such orders. FJC is also in discussions with the Ministry of Social and Family Development (“MSF”) and the Ministry of Law on the amendments to the Women’s Charter. These amendments are expected to be operationalised in 2022.

[Facilitating Court Processes, Settlement, and Enforcement]

**New:**

- Improvements to Maintenance Enforcement Process
- Family Justice Without ‘Walls’ (pilot)
- Simplifying and Redesigning Court Correspondences
- Panel of Financial Experts
- Operational Risk Review

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40. Some new initiatives that facilitate court processes and resolutions are set out here.
- FJC is working with MSF to strengthen the maintenance enforcement regime, including facilitating the service of summonses.
  - “Family Justice Without ‘Walls’” is an initiative aimed at developing a comprehensive strategic programme to enhance access to justice by making family justice available in the community. We will work with agencies to point and triage vulnerable court users to the appropriate resources and services. We will aim to make information available to court users who may not have access to technology and explore the co-location of community resources.
  - Existing court correspondences may have an imposing ‘look and feel’. “Simplifying and Redesigning Court Correspondences” is an endeavour to redesign court correspondences to make them friendlier and enable efficiency. This initiative also includes the study of the remote hearing experience and accessibility of information to the layperson. It will complement the current simplification efforts of the Family Justice Rules, Practice Directions and Forms.
  - FJC is setting up the “POFE” – POFE stands for Panel of Financial Experts. Parties and the Court can use the assistance of Financial experts from this panel. This can assist in aspects of financial planning which will in turn assist in negotiations at the mediation stage, and at the ancillary matters stage in divorce proceedings. These financial experts will provide parties with practical financial advice and assist the court and parties in arriving at objective valuations of matrimonial assets. It is hoped that this will enable a more amicable resolution of financial issues encountered in a divorce. A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between FJC and the Institute of Singapore Chartered Accountants for the commencement of the POFE Pilot. A review within this pilot will be conducted to consider the way forward.
  - A two-tier Operational Risk Committee, comprising a steering committee and a working committee, will be established to review operational risks for FJC, recommend appropriate measures and improve service delivery to court users. A concurrent review process under FJC’s Chief Mentor will also be in place – the Chief Mentor assists the Presiding Judge in the continuing work to review and enhance reforms in the family justice system (including our adoption of TJ), the development of family law and practice, and the professional development of all family judges.

### 3. Fortifying Judges' and Lawyers' Capacity and Capability

#### a) Training of Family Judges

- Training resources from the Singapore Judicial College in addition to our customised programmes for family judges
- Family Judges' Learning Week in Feb 2021 – focus on multi-disciplinary work, therapeutic jurisprudence and skills for judge-led approach

#### b) Training of Family Lawyers

- Family Lawyer's Certification: Working Group set up. Targeted to be offered in second half of 2021.
- Family Specialist Accreditation Scheme: experts in handling more complex family proceedings involving divorce and children. Targeted for 2022.

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41. The importance of Fortifying the Judges' and Lawyers' Capacity and Capability has been emphasised over the last few years.
42. Family judges should be specialists in order to carry out judge-led case management and the delivery of TJ. FJC has been working with the Singapore Judicial College for the training of judges, as well as working on building its own customised programmes for family judges. Our second Family Judges' Learning Week will be held later this month which will have a strong focus on multi-disciplinary work, therapeutic jurisprudence, protecting children, and skills on using the judge-led approach.
43. The Family Lawyer's Certification programme is intended to equip lawyers assisting in family disputes. The Family Lawyer's Certification Working Group has been appointed. They comprise experienced lawyers from the family bar and our FJC colleagues, who work with the Singapore Academy of Law's Legal Education Cluster Secretariat. Equipping all family lawyers with the necessary skills is crucial in our plan to deliver TJ. We aim to offer the programme in the second half of 2021.
44. The Family Specialist Accreditation Scheme is offered to highly experienced family practitioners who are experts in handling more complex family proceedings involving divorce and children, including cases with complex cross-border dimensions. We hope to offer this in 2022.
45. These three groups of workplans began last year at Workplan 2020. This year, we continue to implement and build on them. Between the last Workplan and this Workplan, a lot happened – after Workplan 2020 held on 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2020, we went through huge changes in our way of working and living. COVID changed our lives in various ways. We were grouped into split teams, we worked from home, our hearings were largely conducted remotely through Zoom, and we saved many trees by going paperless.

- LawLink (NUS Alumni magazine) asked me for:
  - Most important lessons you learnt from 2020
  - Something unexpected you learnt about yourself in 2020
  - What you were most thankful for in 2020
  - What you are most looking forward to in 2021

“Important lessons in 2020: **1(a)** “The best-laid plans of mice and men often go awry” in 2020. **1(b)** Nothing can be taken for granted – so appreciate, appreciate! **2(a)** More things are possible than we thought. **2(b)** I can conduct hearings *paperlessly*. **3.** “Let it go!” (“it”: that fixed way of doing things). **4.** Continue to care for those who matter in our life. **5.** Hope is vital. **6.** Take charge and make it happen. **7.** Gratitude for blessings. **8.** *Certainty* was never so precious before (looking forward to that next year/s!)”



*A new tomorrow for FJC!*

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46. Late last year, I was invited to share some thoughts to be published in the NUS Law Faculty alumni magazine “LawLink”. I thought I would share the thoughts which have been published there:

“Important lessons in 2020: **1(a)** “The best -laid plans of mice and men often go awry” in 2020. **1(b)** Nothing can be taken for granted – so appreciate, appreciate! **2(a)** More things are possible than we thought. **2(b)** I can conduct hearings *paperlessly*! **3.** “Let it go!” (“it”: that fixed way of doing things). **4.** Continue to care for those who matter in our life. **5.** Hope is vital. **6.** Take charge and make it happen. **7.** Gratitude for blessings. **8.** *Certainty* was never so precious before (looking forward to that next year/s!)”

The pandemic has shown us new ways of thinking, of appreciating, and reminds us to have gratitude and hope always.

47. So, last year, in 2020, we had workplans on adopting TJ, such as building our TJ narrative, our MDT project, making processes simpler. But we also had to come up very suddenly with plans to manage challenges arising from the pandemic. Our Workplan this year involves implementing and strengthening *all* these plans. Let me sum up in the next slide our work that came about due to COVID:

✓ **What have we done due to COVID which works well for FJC?**

• **Redesign of Court Processes and Procedures in view of COVID-19**

- ✓ Simplifying and adapting our processes to meet needs of court users
- ✓ Educating court users on use of virtual tools and providing onsite 'Zoom rooms'
- ✓ "Zoom by default" → Move to remote mentions, case conferences, mediation, counselling, hearings and online show payments for maintenance enforcement cases

• **Continuous Quest for Improvement**

- ✓ Most processes requiring physical contact between staff/personnel and court users moved online/remote
- ✓ Online registry counters / duty registrar to replace walk-ins
- ✓ Provision of 28 'Zoom rooms' and Zoom training for litigants-in-person to bridge justice gap
- ✓ Imposing strict rules against submission of hardcopies and physical bundles in building by requiring e-submission or via drop-box placed outside building entrance

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48. It has been said, jokingly or seriously, that the top driver of change in 2020 was COVID. COVID pushed us to adopt things we used to talk about for years but never fully implemented – like remote hearings, like more IT-enabled solutions or operations.
49. With physical restrictions imposed due to COVID, we had to redesign our court processes. The Zoom hearing was the default mode of hearing. We moved to conducting remote hearings, mentions, case conferences, mediation, counselling, trials and online show payments for maintenance.
50. We provided 'Zoom rooms' and provided training to court users on virtual tools. We had to ensure things were not more difficult, that things were simple enough not to interfere with the access to justice. We had to have new processes, but we had to ensure they were understandable and navigable.
51. We had 14 'Zoom rooms' when we first started remote hearings, now we have 28 'Zoom rooms'. We will continue to build on what we had to come up with quickly, for the new normal will be here to stay for some time. Some of the new ways of operating remain desirable even when COVID issues no longer affect us – we will keep these, and build even stronger processes.
52. We will continue to work as One Judiciary, together with the Supreme Court and State Courts in developing our laws, processes and structures to support delivering justice physically and remotely in expeditious ways.

### Updates

- **World Congress on Family Law and Child Rights 2020**  
**(scheduled for 11 to 14 July 2021)**
- **International Hague Network Judges Meeting**  
**(rescheduled to 2022)**
- **Refurbishment works at the Octagon**

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53. I have a few updates to share before I conclude. The World Congress on Family Law and Child Rights earlier scheduled for July 2020 has been re-scheduled to the 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> of July 2021. The Hague Convention's International Hague Network Judges Meeting has been postponed to 2022. You have also received through my email a "Ground-Breaking" video in December last year that marked the start of our refurbishment works at the Octagon. Despite the challenges brought on by COVID, we are so glad that we can get on with these works.

Thank you so much, colleagues, for your priceless work in FJC, for your drive and commitment, your patience, resilience and can-do spirit especially in the very many challenging situations that arise particularly in FJC work!



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54. Finally, I have one more thing to do – a most important thing – to thank you, my colleagues, for the priceless part you have played in family justice. Thank you for your



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drive and commitment, your amazing patience, your resilience and ‘can-do’ spirit especially in the very many challenging situations that arise particularly in FJC work. I know that you have worked very hard the past year. We are deeply appreciative of our Chief Justice for showing the way in what it means to have ‘hardware’ and ‘heartware’, and for always encouraging us in carrying out our mission.

55. May “A New Tomorrow” for us in FJC be one filled with hope and fulfilling work, joy and good health.
56. Thank you very much.

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